



**Positive Attitude Change to School – Narrative Inquiry
into Adolescent Students’ Lived Experiences**

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Abstract

This thesis reports on a qualitative research study that investigated adolescent students' experiences of positive attitude change to school.

The literature review situates the research of students' attitude changes to school within the affective component of the multidimensional construct of student engagement and identifies this field and the phenomenon of positive attitude change to school as under-researched and under-theorised.

Narrative inquiry methodology was applied in order to provide a detailed description of students' lived experiences and generate knowledge to fill the existing gap of how such an experience manifests itself. Eight students, who self-reported to have experienced positive attitude change to school, shared stories through in-depth semi-structured interviews of how the attitude change came about, who or what influenced it, and what meaning they attached to it in relation to its impact on their engagement and wellbeing.

Students' attitudes to school are predominantly examined through quantitative research, whereas this study provided a unique and nuanced insight into attitude change based on the qualitative paradigm and a social constructionist view of the experience from the students' vantage point. Students' narrative accounts are compared and contrasted with each other to identify five resonant threads associated with the experience of positive attitude change to school.

Data analysis suggests that positive attitude change to school has a significant impact on student engagement in learning and student wellbeing through its embodiment of perceived positive emotions associated with being at school. It consequently illustrates the relevance of broadening the understanding of such an experience to address the critical issue of disengagement in adolescent students. Key findings indicate that students develop a negative attitude to school when personal problems remain unresolved or have been insufficiently addressed within the school environment; no "helping hand" was there to assist these ambitious students who were struggling to engage in learning due to their experience of negative emotions at school. This research study has revealed that a negative attitude to school does not necessarily equate to a negative attitude to learning. Students' perception of the available support, both from the teachers and the services offered at school, is a critical factor in the transformation of their attitudes to school. Further, the students who participated

in this study did not themselves feel that they were equipped with the required knowledge and skills to manage their personal problems effectively in order to maintain their engagement in learning. Only after having “hit rock bottom” and having sought help from outside the school environment were the students able to apply a different perspective to their circumstances that was associated with positive attitude change to school.

From this research study it can be concluded that a student’s positive attitude to school is a requirement for successful social and academic outcomes, and it is an educational goal in itself regarding the notion of developing lifelong learners. Personal problems and their impact on student engagement and wellbeing need to be acknowledged and catered for within the school environment. School support services must proactively extend a helping hand to students who have a negative attitude to school. Further, students need to develop self-efficacy regarding their personal wellbeing so that they become confident to act autonomously in solving their situations at school that are characterised by the difficult negative emotions that they are experiencing.

Students’ attitudes to school and the complexity of the multidimensional construct of student engagement need to be considered in the development of initiatives to address adolescent student disengagement and in the development of student wellbeing frameworks.

Statement of Authorship and Originality

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and the list of references of the thesis. No editorial assistance has been received in the production of the thesis without due acknowledgement. Except where duly referred to, the thesis does not include material with copyright provisions or requiring copyright approvals.

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Date: 20 January 2020

Signed:

Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg

Principal Supervisor

Date: 20 January 2020

Statement of Ethics Approval

Ethics approval to conduct research on human participants for this study was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Federation University Australia (A16-070; see Appendix A) and Department of Education and Training Victoria (2016_003099; see Appendix B).

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Chapter 1

Situating the Research Study

Overview

In this chapter I provide an introduction to my research where I introduce the research context and the research aim and questions. I discuss the relevance of positive attitudes to school, and the relevance of examining the experience of positive attitude change to school in adolescent students. I further outline the knowledge gap and research approach and discuss this research study's contribution to literature and its general significance. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

Introduction

This research study focuses on adolescents' experiences of positive attitude change to school. My desire to examine the development of positive attitude change to school had its genesis in my own experiences as an adolescent student and then as a teacher in a secondary school. Attitudes, both positive and negative, have a significant impact on academic outcomes and personal wellbeing.

The following excerpt is my story of developing positive attitude change to school. This thesis consists of eight such stories; stories of students who had experienced positive attitude change.

I developed a negative attitude to school as an adolescent and lost interest in learning. I do not know why I became a disengaged student; I cannot pinpoint a reason for it as such. It seemed like the disengagement slowly started creeping up on me, unfortunately, at the crucial senior secondary level. I used to be an ambitious student, and I still wanted to be successful at school, but somehow my approach to learning and my actions did not reflect that. Like so many disengaged adolescents, I, too, started to skip classes, neglect my homework and generally disconnect with my school and peers. As a consequence, I felt lost and unhappy.

I spent several years as a disengaged student, both at school and at university, until I decided to do a second degree abroad. I was desperate

for “a change in scenery” and a new beginning, driven by the desire to change the negative feelings I had regarding myself and my social and academic achievements.

Once I commenced my studies overseas, the negative attitude I had to school did not continue into the tertiary education setting as I felt content at my new university and my life turned around as well for the better. From that point, I once again developed a love of learning and knowledge, and ever since I have continuously explored opportunities for personal and professional development. I want to become a better learner and gain more knowledge in my fields of interests for personal satisfaction as well as career opportunities. Ultimately, my re-found passion for learning led me to become a secondary school teacher and researcher.

Reflecting on the past, I can’t help but feel like I needed a “helping hand” at school that was never offered. I don’t think I needed any material things or time or special intervention. I believe I would have benefited from some emotional support regarding my negative attitude to school. I needed someone to show me a way out of my negative situation at school. I needed to be exposed to a different perspective on my circumstances; instead, I was left with just my own tunnel vision, which was counterproductive, and at times made me a miserable young adult.

The purpose of my research study was to learn from students who had managed to overcome their negative attitudes and had re-engaged in learning. Ultimately, I wanted to explore what I refer to as “success stories” of positive attitude change and examine how teachers can assist students to develop a positive attitude to school and increase their engagement.

Teachers have anecdotes of students changing their attitudes for the better, including the positive impact that can have on educational outcomes, but the area of adolescent students’ attitudes to school is under-researched and under-theorised. Hence, I conducted my research to capture and share these stories in the belief that “good stories should never be left untold” – especially the ones affecting young people’s education.

This thesis details a qualitative research study that was undertaken to explore the experience of positive attitude change to school by eight adolescent students and examines its impact on student engagement in learning. The aim of the research was to examine how the experience had been lived out by the students, what were the factors that had influenced the change as well as the meaning that the students had attached to it.

As a secondary school teacher, my motivation for conducting this research was quite pragmatic: to address disengagement in adolescent students in order that they might have the best possible educational outcome from their schooling journey. My strong belief in the power of attitudes to drive personal success in life shaped my research study. This research was undertaken in a regional Victorian Department of Education secondary school in Australia over a period of four years.

Research Aim and Questions

The research aim was to gain an understanding of the experience of positive attitude change to school as lived out by adolescent students. The following primary research question was developed to address the research aim:

How is the experience of positive attitude change to school lived out by adolescent students?

While addressing this research question, two subsidiary research questions were developed to frame my research:

- 1. What or who can influence and or trigger positive attitude change?*
- 2. What is the meaning attached by adolescents to the experience of positive attitude change?*

This study used the narrative inquiry methodology. In line with narrative inquiry tradition, as outlined by Clandinin (2006), I addressed my inquiry with a “research puzzle” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 42). Combining the research question with its two sub-questions, the narrative inquiry’s research puzzle addresses how positive attitude change can occur in adolescent students. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to gain greater insight into those students who had experienced positive attitude change in order to explore what might have led to such a change in terms of success criteria for positive attitude change among adolescent students. The eight narrative accounts of positive

attitude change are considered to be success stories from which the criteria of positive attitude change can be identified.

Relevance of Positive Attitudes to School

Developing positive attitudes to school in students is a key educational goal that correlates with a range of positive educational outcomes (Akey, 2006; Fullarton, 2002; Siek-Toon Khoo & Ainley, 2005). Attitude is commonly defined as being an evaluation or a disposition (Bohner & Dickel, 2011, p. 392), varying from “favourable to unfavourable” and or “like to dislike”. Broadly speaking, a general understanding in relation to attitudes is that a positive attitude to school can be defined as a favourable evaluation of school as a whole. As schools are the fundamental institutions for learning, this study is based on the assumption that a positive attitude to school equals a positive attitude to learning. A negative attitude to school, therefore, may present itself as a lack of motivation and engagement and/or the occurrence of disruptive behaviour in class and outside of the school environment, and it may contribute to dropping out early from school (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009).

Anecdotal results indicate that teachers have usually known at least one student who had changed their attitude to school, from having a negative attitude and disliking everything about school, and consequently being disengaged from learning, to developing a positive attitude that led to increased academic success through greater engagement in learning. A positive attitude to school has been defined for this study in accordance with Bohner and Dickel’s (2011) definition, as “a favourable evaluation of school as a whole, whereby students understand the value of education and its purpose as well as the need to be engaged in learning”.

Positive attitude change, therefore, is the change from an unfavourable to a more favourable evaluation of school. Positive attitudes encompass positive emotions to school within the affective component of student engagement. Student engagement is defined as a multifaceted construct that consists of affective, cognitive and behavioural components (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). A student’s feelings and beliefs, as well as their investment in terms of effort and their behaviour at school and to schoolwork, all contribute to a student’s engagement level in their own way and are thus individually significant when researching student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004).

A common desire of teachers and educators is for all students to reach their full potential, to be engaged in learning to the best of their abilities, and to complete Year 12 or equivalent. Furthermore, they want students to have positive experiences at school. However, inevitably as it would seem, not all students enjoy their schooling journey, and some develop a negative attitude to school and disengage from learning for a variety of reasons – some personal, and some in relation to the school environment and/or the curriculum structure.

The following factors have been identified by the Victorian Government as influencing student engagement: teacher interaction style and expectations; approaches to student support and disciplinary measures; curriculum and resource aspects; students' family and community relations; and a student's "physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural state" (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2018, p. 1). In addition, a positive attitude to school is associated with the overarching educational goal of developing lifelong learners (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1996).

Knowledge Gap

The knowledge gap addressed by my research study is within the area of student engagement in secondary-school settings. Attitudes play an integral part in a student's behaviour and learning process as they affect intentions regarding engagement in learning as well as behaviour inside and outside the classroom (Ajzen, 2001). Little is known as to what influences and or initiates positive attitude change to school in adolescent students and what impact such change can have on student engagement.

Much of the research on students' attitudes to school has focused on studies applying the quantitative paradigm (Akey, 2006; Brodie, 1964; Majoribanks, 1976, 1992; G. Marks, 1998; McCoach & Siegle, 2001), and the findings were often limited to statistical representations of attitudes based largely on surveys and questionnaires. Whilst some inferences can be made from such studies, it is important to understand why and how a certain attitude to school develops and what factors can influence the development of a positive attitude to school.

In summary, this research focuses on the experience of positive attitude change in adolescent students and its role within the affective component of student engagement. It

explores how students' engagement in learning and student wellbeing are affected by the development of positive attitudes to school. In the following section, I outline the research approach that was adopted for this study.

Research Approach

I examined the experience of positive attitude change to school by interviewing eight Year 10 students who self-reported to have had such an experience in secondary school. I chose to interview Year 10 students regarding their experience as Year 10 students' reflections provide a unique insight into the phenomenon under study. This complements, and yet extends, the existing findings developed from attitude-to-school research studies and student engagement with its complexity, breadth and depth as Year 10 students have a certain level of maturity to reflect on such an experience independently as senior secondary school students.

This research study adopted the qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry because this methodology enables human experience to be scientifically researched, and I drew on Clandinin's (2006) interpretation as follows:

An exploration of the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted – but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual's experiences in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (p. 42)

This research project was based on a qualitative paradigm as my intention was to study the experience of positive attitude change to school within a “natural setting” and attempted to “make sense” of it through capturing the students' stories of that experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). This qualitative research study was framed by constructionist theory through which I viewed “everyday realities” as socially constructed (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 341) and thus knowledge as a creation of social interaction (Schwandt, 2003).

Through the creation of student narratives of positive attitude change, I gained detailed insight into the lives and contexts of the students involved in this research

project. In line with the narrative inquiry methodology, the students' experiences were collected and collated, the stories regarding their positive attitude changes to school were re-told and represented in research texts as co-constructed narratives between the researcher and participants (Clandinin, 2006a). Through the development of the research texts, I examined the experience of positive attitude change and investigated what experiences students had, what positive attitude change meant for each individual, and what specific actions and factors affected their positive attitude change. The chosen research approach enabled me as a narrative inquirer to address the research puzzle of how positive attitude change can occur.

The theoretical lens for this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which describes the interactions between the individual and the individual's environment and their impact on personal development. The experiences of the adolescent students were examined using the Process-Person-Context-Time Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) to explain the phenomenon of positive attitude change and theorise it further.

Research Contribution

This research project has contributed to further understanding of the adolescent learner and the construct of attitudes to school in relation to student engagement and wellbeing. It will ultimately inform teachers, educators, and other stakeholders alike, about ways to increase student engagement and enhance the development of positive attitudes to school. While much has been reported regarding students' relationships to a range of school aspects, such as school involvement and identification with school (Libbey, 2004), little research has focused on the experience of positive attitude change to school in itself. In order to enable positive school experiences to strengthen a student's relationship with their school, the understanding of how such an experience is being lived out is vital to the development of intervention approaches for students who display a negative attitude to school and disengage from learning.

This research project has also contributed to the literature that is relevant to the adolescent learner and their needs in relation to student engagement. It has highlighted new perspectives on students' attitudes to school and the associated impact on learning, based on the experience of positive attitude change, as narrated by the students

themselves. It will further expand and challenge the knowledge and perceptions of adolescent students and the factors that impact on their engagement in learning and their schooling experiences. My examination of the research questions has contributed further to the literature and professional debate relating to the development of positive attitudes to school in adolescent students as an educational goal in itself and address disengagement in secondary school settings.

Significance of the Study

The major significance of this study has been to give depth to the understanding of adolescent students' attitudes to school and the experience of positive attitude change, and its impact on engagement in learning and student wellbeing through the application of a qualitative paradigm.

This study has also been significant in that it was timely given the continued efforts to target the problem of disengagement from learning in secondary schools, as indicated in a number of initiatives, including the School-Focused Youth Service (SFYS; Family Life, 2018) initiative as well as the re-engagement programs. For example, 34 SFYS agencies are funded in Victoria to work with schools to support adolescent students who are showing signs of disengagement from learning and to help build the capacity of schools to "better respond to the often complex needs of these students" (Family Life, 2018). It is significant to identify the factors that influence positive attitude change – its so-called success criteria – in order to help teachers and educators provide appropriate support and guidance when dealing with disengaged students who display a negative attitude to school.

The beneficial nature of the outcomes that have resulted from this research lie in the capturing of students' voices and the retelling of their lived experiences as well as the subsequent detailed and nuanced representation of adolescents' points of view on attitudes to school and engagement in learning in the context of a regional government secondary school, one that is statistically representative of many schools in the country.

From the applied theoretical framework, insights into students' lived experiences are provided through their rich descriptions. The analysis produced insight into the potency of student attitudes and the value for teaching and learning by describing the

impact attitudes can have on student engagement and wellbeing as well as identifying the success criteria for a positive attitude to school change.

The research study was designed to expose student experiences to public view, to inform stakeholders, and to re-evaluate the importance of developing positive attitudes to school as a fundamental premise for current policymaking, for teaching pedagogies and whole-school approaches to increase student engagement levels for adolescent students, and to ensure student wellbeing within the school environment.

Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter 1, I have introduced the research study and provided the outline of the context of my research. The chapter has also presented the research aim and research questions as well as the relevance of positive attitudes to school. It has further outlined the knowledge gap and the research approach and research contribution, as well as highlighting the significance of the research study.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the current knowledge and understanding of adolescent students, the concept of attitudes and attitudes to school research, and student engagement. The review reflects the positioning of the research study within the literature on the affective component of student engagement.

The theoretical framework chapter, Chapter 3, presents the rationale for and description of the qualitative paradigm and the epistemology of social constructionism that was used in this study as well as outlining the theoretical lens that guided the research design.

In Chapter 4, I present the narrative inquiry methodology, together with the particular philosophical commitments for narrative inquirers, and discuss why it is an appropriate methodology for this study as well as the ways I have addressed the given methodological design considerations for it.

Chapter 5 presents the research design, including descriptions of the research site and participants, the data generation and the analysis approach. This is followed by the outline of the limitations of this research study as well as a discussion related to ensuring there is rigour in the research process.

The presentation of my data is presented in Chapter 6, which consists of eight participants' narratives of their experiences of positive attitude change to school. In this chapter, the students' responses to the two subsidiary research questions of the thesis are offered: what or who can influence and or trigger positive attitude change to school, and what meaning is attached by adolescents to that experience.

Chapter 7 analyses and discusses the research findings in relation to the identified resonant threads and in light of the theoretical lens applied to this research study.

Conclusions are drawn in Chapter 8, based on the discussion in Chapter 7, and the implications of these conclusions and recommendations for future research are provided.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview

In Chapter 1, that situates the research study, I introduced the research aim, questions and purpose of my research study. I discussed the significance of the study in light of the current literature and knowledge gaps and provided a rationale for it, together with the outline of the thesis.

In this chapter, I review the literature that is germane to this thesis. It encompasses the fields of literature that relate to adolescent development and adolescent students, attitudes and attitude change, as well as attitude to school research and student engagement with the focus on the affective component of engagement. This chapter identifies and discusses the research relevant to the study and conceptually positions the experience under study and the positive attitude change to school within the research area of the affective component of engagement in adolescent students. It clarifies existing consensus and disagreement in the field of student engagement and provides examples of approaches from major contributors to the field to understand more comprehensively the impact of emotions and attitudes that relate to student engagement.

First, the literature review focuses on identifying personal and contextual factors that affect adolescents in their development and their educational outcomes. The first two sections of the review focus on personal factors and the developmental stage of adolescence and the adolescent student. They are followed by a section that elaborates on the contextual factors, which includes the adolescent “lifelong learning” environment. Second, an overview of the concept of attitude, together with an overview of research on attitudes to school, follows. Finally, I address the literature that focuses on student engagement and the affective component of engagement.

The Adolescent

*While societies affect adolescents,
adolescents also affect societies.
Thus, the futures of the diverse nations of the world*

depend on how well these nations support, enable, and prepare adolescents to grow into full adulthood. (Larson, 2002, p. 26)

The developmental stage of adolescence. This section of the literature review explores the nature of the developmental stage of adolescence and argues the notion of storm and stress in adolescents (Hall, 1904); it also provides a profile of the current Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) to which my research participants belong.

The period of adolescence is traditionally described with negative annotations. The French philosopher, Rousseau, labels adolescents as “somewhat incomplete, not yet whole, not yet adult”, and “at best, an unfinished work”, and Socrates refers to them as “inclined to contradict their parents and tyrannise their teachers” (Bahr & Pendergast, 2007, p. 7). Aristotle describes them as “passionate, irascible, and apt to be carried away by their impulses” (Knipe, 2007, p. 106). Adolescents were, and are still today, often viewed as “slaves to hormonal tidal waves and catastrophic physical growth changes” (Bahr & Pendergast, 2007, p. 9) or “passive victims” (p. 16). Hall (1904), also known as the father of adolescence due to his pioneering work on young people, brought adolescence into scientific and popular awareness, defining adolescence as a time characterised by behavioural difficulties and emotional instability, and consequently assigned it with the label of storm and stress (Foster & Spender, 2011).

Negative depictions of adolescents can be further found in English literature (Heaven, 2001), where adolescents are described as people who do not have a personality and are instead governed by indiscretion and recklessness – for example, by Shakespeare and Chaucer and Dickens (Violato & Wiley, 1990).

Adolescence, defined as a time between childhood and adulthood, is then associated with a deficit in maturity (Bahr & Pendergast, 2007) that consists of a lack of independence from parents (regarding finances as well as sanctions; Shaffer, 2001), lack of complete cognitive development (Giedd, 1999; Giedd et al., 1999), lack of experience with mature interpersonal relationships (Holmbeck, Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Petersen, 1996), and lack of complete development of identity (Erikson, 1994; Marcia, 1980). Consequently, adolescents can be described as “in-betweeners” or “unfinished as adults” (Bahr & Pendergast, 2007, p. 67). This deficit view, applied by Hall (1904) in his seminal works in the field of scientific psychology, persisted in the work of followers in the field (Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1969; Steinberg & Lerner, 2004).

Interestingly, Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) point out that economic conditions affect the perception of adolescents significantly. During a depression, adolescents were considered as lacking maturity and psychological stability and that their participation in the education system should be prolonged, but during wartime adolescents' psychological competence was emphasised and the need for extensive education was undermined (Enright, Levy, Harris, & Lapsley, 1987).

Bandura (1964) examined adolescence from the perspective of whether or not it was a “stormy decade” and found that for the majority of adolescents, it was not a turbulent time; in fact, it is a minority of adolescents who experience extreme turmoil (Graber, Brooks-Gunn & Peterson, 2018). Further, Bandura (1964) found that individuals who had experienced turmoil during adolescence had also experienced childhood in a similar way, and therefore concludes that adolescence does not necessarily cause the turbulence.

Some contemporary researchers argue in support of Bandura (1964), positing that little evidence exists to support the notion of storm and stress in adolescence (Arnett, 1999; Gecas & Steff, 1990; Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992; Petersen, 1988). According to Gecas and Steff (1990), the notion of storm and stress has been significantly challenged by research findings and is considered to be exaggerated as adolescent relations “reflect more harmony than conflict ... self-esteem does not decline ... most [adolescents] identify with and like their parents” (p. 942). In entering the 21st century, the image of youth underwent a change as more researchers began to question the negative image of adolescents (Heaven, 2001). However, the stereotype of adolescents being “difficult, oppositional, and moody” pervades popular culture and remains in existence, although it is deemed faulty (Steinberg & Silk, 2002, p. 103).

The study of the family has been the most prevailing field of inquiry in adolescent development research (Steinberg, 2001). Regarding the relationship between adolescents and their parents, Steinberg and Silk (2002) argue that “there are changes in autonomy, harmony, and conflict between parents and children as the family moves into and through the adolescent years” (p. 116), but point out that the rebellious adolescent as a universal concept is overstated. Research indicates that significant conflicts between parents and adolescents are experienced by “only a modest per cent of youths” (Eisenberg et al., 2008, p. vii). Steinberg (2001) argues that adolescents generally have a positive

relationship with their parents, although research has found that there has been an increase in mild conflicts, such as “bickering and squabbling” (Steinberg & Morris, 2001, p. 88), without a clear consensus as to why this has occurred (Collins & Laursen, 2004).

Despite efforts to “debunk the myths of adolescence” – as presented by Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) – the debate regarding a notion of storm and stress framing adolescence (Hall, 1904), with behavioural difficulties and emotional storminess constituting its core features, remains contentious. Steinberg and Silk (2002) provide a good explanatory example for the contentiousness by stating that “the parenting sections of bookstores are stocked with books advising parents on how to enjoy and promote the development of their cuddly infants alongside volumes on how to discipline their spiteful and problem-ridden teenagers” (p. 103). Despite opposing the described stereotype of adolescents, Gecas and Steff (1990) also warn to “be wary of now exaggerating the degree of harmony during adolescence” (p. 942), which leads to the unchallenged description of adolescence being a challenging developmental period due to its many significant biological and physical changes for the individual, but also due to the changes in the school setting from primary to secondary school (Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Petersen, 2018).

Generational characteristics. Sociocultural constructions of adolescence allow for the identification of contemporary generational characteristics (Pendergast & Bahr, 2005) and are thus useful for the educational discourse to address adolescent students’ needs and wants, as well as the contextual factors the students are embedded in, in order to address student engagement in learning.

For example, adolescents born after 1982, who are labelled as “Millennials” (Pendergast & Bahr, 2005), were the first to limit the deficit view of adolescents. They were described to have great potential as a youth generation that will focus more on actions than words and who are motivated to generate positive collective deeds as well as valuing being smart (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They were defined as the first unique generation in that they experienced the digital world as a contextual norm for daily life (Howe & Strauss, 2000) and were thus labelled “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001; for a debate around the term see, for example, Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008) and

consequently new innovative approaches were developed to engage these adolescent learners (Prensky, 2005a, 2005b).

The participants who were involved in this research study were adolescents who had been born almost a decade later than the Millennials and are referred to as Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The following is a teacher's description of Generation Z, which represents how this generation is commonly depicted by educators:

I have to admit that with this new generation, it is sometimes frustrating to compete with their cell phones in class, be Google fact-checked during lectures, or get very impersonal e-mails in text language the night before an assignment is due saying something like, "Am sick, sorry have to turn in paper L8." But I have to check myself and think, "How can I capture this energy they have for learning?" (Seemiller & Grace, 2016, p. xviii)

Seemiller and Grace (2016) highlight a crucial understanding for teaching adolescents; namely, to identify each cohort's possibly unique "energy for learning" so as to increase student engagement (whether at university or secondary school level).

It is important to understand how the current adolescent generation thinks and processes information in order to identify how they "prefer" to be engaged in learning (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, it is also important to understand the current generation's worries and fears within the school environment, as well as their emotional state, in order to address student engagement as outlined in the following section.

Statistics on adolescents' mental health. Some statistics regarding Australian youth are truly worrying. The national youth beyondblue website and the beyondblue website provide insight into adolescents' mental health and point out, among other facts, that "The number of deaths by suicide in young Australians is the highest it has been in 10 years" (Youth Beyond Blue, 2019, para. 4) with more suicide deaths than car accident deaths.

Further, "One in seven young Australians experience a mental health condition" (Youth Beyond Blue, 2019, para. 2), but "Young people are less likely than any other age group to seek professional help" (Beyond Blue, 2019, Children/Youth Section, Message 6). The top three issues of personal concern were school or study problems, coping with stress and body image (Mission Australia, 2011). This brief snapshot of statistics emphasises how a relatively high number of adolescents perceive their daily lives to be

stressful, challenging and/or overwhelming. School can also be a main cause of concern for adolescents, which highlights the importance of creating supportive learning environments that suit adolescent needs in order to increase student engagement in secondary school. Adolescent student engagement in learning is discussed in the section “Student engagement” in this chapter.

Who is the adolescent learner?

The paradox of adolescence is that it can be at once a time of storm and stress and a time of exuberant growth. (Arnett, 1999, p. 324)

This section of the review of the literature explores the adolescent individual as a student within a learning environment at school; it provides current research and relevant statistics to deepen the understanding of adolescent learners in Australia and provides an insight into the role that stress and positive emotions play in learning.

Current statistics on adolescent students in Australia are presented to facilitate the depiction of the generation of my research participants with information from the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (OECD, 2017). “Over 30 per cent of adolescent students are very satisfied with life and over 10 per cent are not satisfied, with the average student stating a 7 out of 10” (OECD, 2017, p. 9). “Seventy per cent of students reported to feel like they belong to school” (p. 16); however, “one-quarter of students reported to experience some sort of bullying at least a few times a month” (OECD, 2017, p. 17). “Parental support has been reported by over 94 per cent of students” (OECD, 2017, p. 19), which indicates the majority of students talk to their parents about their school work and receive support when facing difficulties with it. “Almost 75 per cent want to be one of the best students in class” (OECD, 2017, p. 12), but this achievement motivation is linked to schoolwork-related anxiety. “Almost 70 per cent agree that they feel very anxious despite being well prepared for tests, and approximately every second student feels very tense when studying for school” (OECD, 2017, p. 11). “Only 54 per cent of students expect to complete a university degree (OECD, 2017, p. 20). “Thirty-five per cent of adolescent students work during secondary school, and the average amount of time spent per week day on the internet amounts to 164 minutes, almost three hours” (OECD, 2017, p. 25).

Adolescent students, like adults, can be “proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68) when faced with schoolwork. Most individuals can be described as showing effort, agency and commitment to their personal lives; however, due to a range of reasons, some individuals struggle to do so; these individuals may be defined by a “diminished or crushed human spirit” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). In other words, “humans have an inclination toward activity and integration, but also have a vulnerability to passivity” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 76). Such “non-optimal human functioning” is observable in psychological clinics but also in secondary school classrooms (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68), where it is commonly referred to as student disengagement. Most students engage with school and complete school, but a significant number of students (30 per cent) leave school before Year 12 (Gray & Hackling, 2009; Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, & Huo, 2015).

According to research guided by self-determination theory, social-contextual factors facilitate or forestall positive psychological development and with that a student’s self-motivation, self-regulation and wellbeing. Ryan and Deci (2000) found such factors to be the three innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness.

The self-determination theory assumes that:

inherent in human nature is the propensity to be curious about one’s environment and interested in learning and developing one’s knowledge ... however, educators introduce external controls into learning climates, which can undermine the sense of relatedness between teachers and students, and stifle the natural, volitional processes involved in high-quality learning. (Niemic & Ryan, 2009, p. 133)

External controls limit students’ enthusiasm for learning and enhance disengagement because they enhance anxiety and alienation. Consequently, external controls create a vicious circle whereby further control is required by teachers for learning to happen (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). To avoid the need for significant external control, the focus of teaching and learning approaches needs to be on developing and maintaining students’ sense of competency (for example, giving effectance-relevant feedback), autonomy (for example, providing choices and acknowledging students’ feelings towards those choices) and relatedness by “conveying warmth, caring, and respect to students” (Niemic & Ryan, 2009, p. 141).

An essentialist deficit view of adolescents can have “material consequences that ripple across classrooms, schools and communities. From the tight control of time and space in the classroom, to a preoccupation with behaviour management, the resultant effect of this discourse is one of control, management and containment” (Stevens et al., 2007, p. 108), which is the opposite of the above described need for autonomy, relatedness and competency to increase students’ motivation to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Over the past decades, the number of adolescents completing secondary education in Australia has increased, but only marginally. In the 1970s, one-third of secondary students completed Year 12; that number rose to 75 per cent in the late 1990s (Weston, Qu, & Soriano, 2006). In the recently published document *Educational Opportunity in Australia 2015 – Who Succeeds and Who Misses Out* (Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, & Huo, 2015), the statistics highlight that 74 per cent of secondary students reach the “third milestone” of finishing Year 12 by attaining a certificate or equivalent; 26 per cent do not, and only about 70 per cent of that group of school leavers reaches the “fourth milestone” by being engaged in full-time employment, education or training, which leaves fewer than 10,000 young adults with little in educational terms. As suggested by Lamb et al. (2015), “one of the best ways to improve student success in school and their likelihood of completing and not dropping out is by supporting the development of academic mindsets or dispositions”, or “the psychological and social beliefs one has about oneself in relation to academic work” (p. 61).

Research indicates that positive dispositions enable students to work harder, engage more productively on school tasks and have higher perseverance levels, whereas negative dispositions are linked to lack of academic behaviours required to overcome learning difficulties (Lamb et al., 2015). Academic mindsets (Dweck, 1986, 2015) are “beliefs, attitudes, or ways of perceiving oneself in relation to learning and intellectual work that support academic performance” (Farrington et al., 2012, p. 28). This is closely linked to the idea of students’ positive attitudes to school. According to Lamb et al. (2015), “academic mindsets or dispositions” are measured through the analysis of the four elements: sense of belonging at school (I belong here); self-confidence (I can succeed); purpose (I value what I do); and perseverance (I can overcome obstacles; p. 61). These elements align with the way “attitude to school” is being measured.

The adolescent “lifelong learning” environment. Today’s adolescent students are embedded in a learning environment that is framed by positive psychology, with the goal being to develop lifelong learners, and the focus being on student wellbeing. The central tenet of this research, examining positive attitude change to school, is to consider personal and contextual factors simultaneously, following Bronfenbrenner’s developmental theory (2005). Thus one objective of this research study was to identify positive learning environments and positive attitudes to school and examine the impact both have on one another through interactions of the individual with the environment.

In the mid-1990s, the notion of *lifelong learning* emerged through the OECD, with the goal being to view education more comprehensively from “cradle to grave” (OECD, 1996, p. 2). The OECD committed to it by developing a policy framework entitled “Lifelong Learning for All” (1996), which states that “Motivation must be at the centre. This requires fundamental changes in curriculum and pedagogy, emphasising willingness to learn as much as content mastery” (p. 1). For a student to be and stay motivated to learn and consequently become a lifelong learner, the student’s learner needs must be at the core of applied learning strategies. This approach represents a shift from a focus on formal institutional arrangements for teaching and learning onto the student – a shift from the “supply side to the demand side” (OECD, 1996, p. 3). Focusing on adolescent students developing a positive attitude to school is thus in accordance with the comprehensive view of education to develop lifelong learners.

Lifelong learning is yet to be an integral part of adolescents’ learning journey. When asked in an Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) snapshot of family relationships what they valued most, the adolescent girls responded that education was their priority; whilst the boys responded keeping fit, which was then followed by education. However, when asked what they perceived would be important to them at the age of 35, both had education as their lowest priorities (Qu & Weston, 2008).

Positive psychology in education. The broader context for my research was the field of positive psychology, which at the time was experiencing significant growth in research for schools and education systems, as well as for everyday life, healthcare, organizations and work life (Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2011, p. xxiii).

Positive psychology is defined as something “over and above” the absence of mental illness. Next to the absence of an illness, it is characterised by “the presence of

positive emotion, presence of flow, engagement, meaning, virtue and strength, and positive relationships” (Seligman, 2011, as cited in Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2011, p. xxiv). The field aims to advance knowledge about “optimal human functioning and improving the quality of life in modern societies” (Donaldson, 2011, p. 3).

In education, positive psychology aims to develop the endeavour of positive education, whereby schools teach the standard curriculum and workplace skills required, but at the same time “build engagement, meaning, positive emotion, and good relations at school” (Seligman, 2011, as cited in Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2011, p. xxiv). Positive emotions broaden people’s attention and thinking, and influence people’s cognitive, psychological, social, and physical abilities (Fredrickson, 2009). Experiencing positive emotions enhances an “upward spiral” to grow and flourish as a person, whereby “negative affect and narrow pessimistic thinking” enhance a “downward spiral”, which can lead to depression (Fredrickson & Kurtz, 2011, p. 36). Positive attitude change to school has the potential to contribute to such an “upward spiral” and enhance positive experiences at school as well as increase student engagement in learning and student wellbeing.

Gilman, Huebner, and Furlong (2009) speak of positive psychology as being a lens to identify what enhances a student’s sense of agency and engagement in learning, and to identify how positive emotions promote academic achievement and student wellbeing. The focus is on “positive personal traits and dispositions that are thought to contribute to subjective wellbeing and psychological health” (Pajares, 2001, p. 27). Positive psychology enables the analysis of positive experiences and is in contrast to the traditional study of factors preventing optimal functioning, such as stress or pathology (Pajares, 2001, 2009). In the research field of education, positive psychology is believed to help identify the difference between disengaged students and students who feel fulfilled in their learning journey and experience academic success (Pajares, 2001, 2009) by focusing on aspects such as optimism and perseverance instead of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1991; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Pajares (2001) states that:

students who value school, who view learning as an end in itself and believe that the purpose of learning is to master ideas and seek personal challenge, and who accompany these beliefs with confidence, positive self-feelings, and confidence

in their self-regulatory practices also engage the world with optimism and view their accomplishments as merited and deserved. Such students also are more likely to regard themselves and to show regard for others. Those are attitudes and dispositions well worth nurturing in school. (p. 34)

Positive psychology deals with aspects such as pleasure, happiness, positive thinking, character strength, and positive interpersonal relationships (Peterson, 2006). It is described as a field with a short history compared to a “very long past” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). Criticism that the field of positive psychology is “old wine in new bottles” may be valid in that positive psychology does not solely consist of new psychological constructs (Cowen & Kilmer, 2002; Kristjánsson, 2012; Lazarus 2003); however, positive psychologists are “merely saying that the psychology of the past 60 years is incomplete” and that the field “brings a sea change in perspective” on human functioning (Peterson, 2006, p. 5). The emphasis of their research relates to “what makes life worth living”, which is an umbrella term for “what is good” for human functioning (Peterson, 2006, p. 6). My research study’s focus on positive attitudes aligned with the core concept of “what is good” for adolescent students.

According to Peterson (2006), positive psychology has three pillars: (a) positive subjective experiences (happiness, gratification and fulfilment); (b) positive individual traits (strengths of character and, for example, interests and values); and (c) positive institutions (such as families, schools and workplaces – and holistically speaking – societies) (p. 20). The three pillars are predicated on the fundamental assumption that “positive institutions facilitate the development and display of positive traits, which in turn facilitates positive subjective experiences” (Peterson, 2006, p. 20), which resonates with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The conceptual framework for positive psychology, which has been described as still evolving (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Gilman, Hubner, & Furlong, 2009), is based partly on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological view on human development in order to be able to identify determinants of individuals’ wellbeing as well as individual and contextual factors (Gilman, Huebner, & Furlong, 2009). In that way, positive psychology aligns with the application of Bronfenbrenner’s developmental approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) as a lens to examine the experience of positive attitude change in adolescent students.

Student wellbeing. Next to the educational framework of lifelong learning and the implementation of positive psychology into educational research, student wellbeing has increasingly played a role in school policy development internationally and in Australia. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) introduced the concept of student wellbeing in 2015 (NSSF, 2017, p. 35). It includes cognitive, psychological and social wellbeing. Cognitive wellbeing refers to students becoming lifelong learners who become effective participants in society; psychological and social wellbeing refers to student engagement levels at school and ambitions for the future as well as the quality of students' social lives – for example, their relationships with peers and teachers (NSSF, 2017, p. 35). The World Health Organization (WHO) also emphasises emotional and social wellbeing in its work to promote health through schools (NSSF, 2017, p. 36).

The Australian Government developed the online Student Wellbeing Hub, together with a framework for student wellbeing (Education Council, 2018) and advocates for student wellbeing with slogans such as “Wellbeing and learning are inseparable” and “A positive mindset builds resilience” (DET, 2018). Resources for upper secondary students cover areas such as bullying, positive relationships and online safety. The Victorian Government has a school policy entitled *Student Wellbeing and Learning* (DET, 2019b) which is designed to ensure schools promote student wellbeing and “provide an integrated and comprehensive curriculum approach that incorporates equitable opportunities for all students to enhance their own and others' wellbeing through their daily learning experiences” and that “supports students to develop knowledge, understanding and skills that enable them to engage critically with a range of health and wellbeing areas and issues” (DET, 2019b, p. 1). The objective of the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support framework (DET, 2019a) is to achieve academic *and* social success for all students – for example, by focusing on secondary school students' mindsets to school. This aligns closely with the concept of positive attitudes to school as discussed in the following section of the literature review. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) also emphasises in its work the importance of student wellbeing (Fraillon, 2004; Masters, 2004).

Student wellbeing is a well-established construct and its association with student retention is important. Gray and Hackling (2009) state in their study on Australian secondary students' perspectives on school experiences that “data confirm the capacity to

identify students ‘of concern’ in terms of their sense of wellbeing. It is clear that the level of social and academic engagement of senior students impacts on the quality of their participation and retention” (p. 142). Student wellbeing is thus a crucial factor for student engagement in learning. According to the PISA 2015 study on students’ wellbeing (OECD, 2015), supportive teachers, positive peer relationships, a disciplined learning environment and caring parents can improve the wellbeing of adolescent students. The study found that students’ perceptions of teacher support are linked to higher life satisfaction, their sense of belonging is linked to higher academic achievement and life satisfaction, and they enjoy talking to their parents about their schoolwork. Students who perceive their classroom environment to be disciplined also have a stronger sense of belonging (PISA Infographics, 2015); as a crucial threat to the sense of belonging, the study identified students’ perceptions of negative relationships with their teachers (PISA Overview, 2015), and concluded that “to build better teacher–student relations, teachers should be trained in basic methods of observation, listening and intercultural communication so that they can better take into account individual learners’ needs” (p. 26). Understanding the characteristics of today’s adolescent cohort, as described previously, can help strengthen the teacher–student relationship, at least from the teacher’s vantage point. However, for any relationship to be effective and mutually beneficial, both parties need to have the right attitude to each other – a positive attitude to school can enhance the building of a strong relationship from the student’s vantage point.

A modified view on learning. Research has revealed that students’ academic success in school is not solely determined by the factors of intelligence or ability (Dweck, 2014, 2016). Motivational constructs such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), hope (Snyder, 1994; Snyder et al., 2002), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1992; Seligman, 1991) and goal theory (Covington, 2000) are targeted, among others, to identify what facilitates or inhibits academic achievement and student wellbeing.

According to Snyder et al. (2002), hope, defined as “the process of thinking about one’s goals, along with the motivation to move toward those goals (agency), and the ways to achieve those goals (pathways)” (Snyder, 1995, p. 355), is a “reliable” academic predictor (Snyder et al., 2002, p. 823). Next to academic achievement, findings have indicated that psychological wellbeing, in the form of positive adjustment such as hope, is promoted by student engagement, which is associated with students feeling supported

at school (by peers and teachers) in relation to their needs of autonomy and belongingness (Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009).

Hope has been associated with higher academic achievement (Snyder et al., 2002), and thus “teaching hopeful thinking has the potential to improve the students’ goal pursuits in all areas of their lives, thereby leading to more positive emotions, greater psychological adjustment, and more social support” (p. 824). Optimism is found to also enhance student wellbeing, next to academic achievement, as “compared to pessimists, optimists manage difficult and stressful events with less subjective distress and less adverse impact on their physical well-being” (Scheier & Carver, 1992, p. 224). The construct is associated with positive educational and wellbeing outcomes such as perseverance and effective problem-solving, positive mood and good morale and it has become “a more respectable stance, even among the sophisticated” (Peterson, 2000, p. 44).

Regarding academic achievement and student wellbeing, constructs such as hope and optimism align with positive psychology research in the field of education and the overarching goal to develop lifelong learners. Positive psychology emphasises the importance of creating school climates and learning environments that enhance positive adjustments, such as hope or optimism (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Next to positive psychology, the field of positive youth development also emphasises the importance of positive adjustment for adolescents (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Lerner et al. (2005) emphasise the relevance of strength-based and developmental approaches to youth to enhance “the fit between the capacities of young people and the assets for positive development that exist in their communities” (p. 15). From that point of view, adolescents are not viewed as “broken” or inevitably involved in “risky or destructive” behaviour, but through a “new and positive strength-based lens” (p. 10).

My research study’s focus was on positive experiences that would have enhanced learning in adolescent students and my intention was to add to the “new and strength-based lens” on adolescent students by sharing their success stories of positive attitude changes to school.

Attitudes and Attitude Change

Attitudes matter as “they express our evaluations, influence our perceptions, and guide our behaviour” (Crano, Cooper, & Forgas, 2010, p. 10), and it is thus “a matter of great concern” (p. 10) how to understand and alter attitudes. Attitudes and attitude change are central topics in the field of contemporary (social) psychology and have a long-standing history (Allport, 1935). Allport (1935), one of the first psychologists to study personality traits, went so far as to state that “though attitudes are inferred rather than observed, they must be admitted as real and substantial ingredients in human nature, for without them it is impossible to account satisfactorily either for the consistency of any individual’s behavior or for the stability of any society” (p. 798). This research study fundamentally aligned with the stated significance of attitudes, and adopted this perspective in conducting the research on adolescent students and their attitudes to school.

With the common Likert-scale to measure attitudes, which was developed in 1932 (Crano et al., 2010), an “explosion of literature” followed (Bohner & Dickel, 2011, p. 392) that was focused on the structure of attitudes (Ajzen, 2001; Fabrigar, MacDonald, & Wegener, 2005) and the processes involved in attitude change (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). On a regular basis, the *Annual Review of Psychology* publishes reviews of research that has been undertaken on attitudes and attitude change (Olson & Zanna, 1993; Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997; Tesser & Shaffer, 1990); Eagly and Chaiken (1992) have also conducted comprehensive reviews and analysis of the attitudes-related literature. This section of the literature review on attitudes and attitude change is primarily based on the review undertaken by Bohner and Dickel (2011).

I now provide a brief overview of the psychological concept of attitudes and attitude change that enabled my research in the field of education to address fundamental questions such as “How do experiences give rise to attitudes, and how do such attitudes in turn influence subsequent behaviors?” (Crano et al., 2010, p. 13).

Definition of attitude. A core definition of attitudes is formed on attitudes being “an evaluation of an object of thought” (Bohner & Dickel, 2011, p. 392). Attitudes are tools to guide actions and interactions “by providing efficient, valenced summaries of information that would simply be too overwhelming and complex to consider piece by piece before each behaviour we undertake in everyday life” (Crano et al., 2010, p. 40).

More elaborate concepts exist as well – for example, focusing on attitudes being either stable entities (Fazio, 2007) or temporary judgements (Schwarz, 2007); Stable entities are assumed to be stored in long-term memory and accessed by an associative link, whereas temporary judgements refer to attitudes being constructed spontaneously when needed, based on the information available for the evaluation (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Both of these elaborate psychological conceptualisations of attitude go beyond the scale and scope of my research in the field of education. A more intermediate approach to the attitude concept is given by Eagly and Chaiken (2007), who provide a so-called umbrella definition, where they define an attitude as being a “psychological tendency, expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour” (Bohner & Dickel, 2011, p. 393).

Despite positioning myself along the intermediate approach, I acknowledge the described “context-sensitivity” of attitudes in Schwarz’s (2007) view, as well as the “high stability” of many attitudes within Fazio’s (2007) view. As a result, I acknowledge that attitudes are influenced by social factors and, more generally, the ecology of an individual. Despite assuming attitudes are context sensitive, I also acknowledge that certain attitudes can be rather insensitive to changes of contextual factors, and can be described as being of a more static nature.

To measure attitudes, the most popular tool has been the self-reporting scale in questionnaires whereby a participant directly evaluates an attitude object, such as a school environment; such attitude research provides explicit attitudes (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). As attitude may not always be receptive to introspective access, implicit measures use, for example, association tests, which also prevent social desirability effects and enable the “true” attitude of the respondent to be revealed (Bohner & Dickel, 2011, p. 395).

Attitudes have content. The content of an attitude can be divided into three components: affective (A), behavioural (B), and cognitive (C). As Maio and Haddock

(2009) express it metaphorically, these components act like a *cab*, a *taxi*, implying that an attitude gets a person to where they want to be. This tripartite view of attitudes has been well established (McGuire, 1985); however, the assumption is that attitudes do not consist of all three components, but, rather, that the components are correlates of attitudes. This framework is useful in identifying antecedents and consequences of attitudes, according to Olson and Zanna (1993):

Attitudes can be based upon, or develop from, affective information (as in the case of conditioning), cognitive information (as in the case of knowledge-based evaluations), and behavioural information (as in the case of self-perception inferences from prior actions). (p. 120).

As the metaphorical cab implies, attitudes guide behaviour (Ajzen, 2001). Attitude research that addresses predictions of behaviour provides “the greatest number” (p. 42) of publications within the field, and further research is needed to create consensus on the matter, as “many questions remain” (Ajzen, 2001, p. 48). Relevant to this research study was the assumption that attitudes “follow spontaneously and consistently from beliefs accessible in memory and then guide corresponding behaviour” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000, p. 1).

Attitude change. In relation to attitude change, considering the different views on attitudes along a continuum (as memory-based summary evaluations or evaluative judgements on the spot), Bohnet and Dickel (2011) present the view that attitude change occurs “whenever people process information with the result of forming an evaluation of an object of thought” (p. 397). They discuss the aspect of attitude change further regarding the differences between explicit and implicit attitude changes, and discuss whether or not old attitudes are replaced by new attitudes, using a file-draw replacement metaphor, and whether old attitudes stay but are tagged invalid. The factor of persuasion is also discussed in detail (Bohner & Dickel, 2011); however, these discussions of attitude-change research were beyond the scope of my study and have been consequently not included in the literature review.

What is relevant to my research is the view that attitude change is mainly explained by either persuasive messaging or cognitive dissonance (Crano et al., 2010; Maio & Haddock, 2009; Maio, Haddock, & Verplanken, 2019), but findings are far from a concrete answer as to what initiates a change, and consequently how that change may influence behaviour despite decades of research (Bohner & Dickel, 2010; Crano et. al,

2010). For example, Crano et al. (2010) detail the first attempts of attitude change research, which were undertaken by Yale University psychologist Carl Hovland on his work for the U.S. War Department after World War II. Persuasion can be defined as an attitude change based on a message about the attitude object (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). For example, such a message, which leads to an attitude change to school in adolescent students, can be created by anyone in a student's ecological environment in conversation between the student and a trusted person, or as a message from institutions such as universities or workplaces. However, not all messages are successful in changing attitudes. According to Bohner and Dickel (2011), "people cannot process in depth the details of every persuasive message they receive. Generally, the amount of processing effort expended is determined by an individual's motivation and ability to process a given message" (p. 404).

A message of low complexity is more successful in influencing attitudes when the processing effort is low, whereas complex messages require more effort to influence an attitude (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, Erb, & Chun, 2007). Persuasive communication attempts to change the cognitive component of an attitude, which is then in turn assumed to impact positively or negatively on the affective component (Petty & Wegener, 1998; Wood, 2000). Persuasion is a complex psychological matter, and therefore it is not surprising that not every well-intentioned persuasive message by educators or parents leads to attitude changes in adolescent students.

Cognitive dissonance has had the most widespread effect in social psychology research (Crano et al., 2010). It is defined as "the lack of fit between competing cognitions [read, attitudes] and between cognitions and behaviors" (Crano et al., 2010, p. 7). According to Petty et al. (1997), four versions of cognitive dissonance phenomena can be identified as driving attitude-change research; however, relevant to this research study is Crano et al.'s (2010) definition. In the case of a person holding two or more incompatible beliefs, a state of psychological discomfort occurs, which is referred to as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

Festinger (1957) posits two basic hypotheses regarding cognitive dissonance: (1) due to the discomfort, the person is motivated to act to reduce the dissonance in order to reach consonance; and (2) next to efforts to reduce the discomfort, the person does not want to encounter situations which would increase the dissonance (p. 4). Attitude change

is assumed to be a suitable tool to reduce the perceived dissonance. Dissonance or consonance describes the relationship between so-called *elements* – for example, knowledge “about oneself; what one does, what one feels, what one wants or desires, what one is, and ... what leads to what, what things are satisfying or painful or inconsequential or important” (Festinger, 1957, p. 9) that are relevant to each other (and either fit or do not fit together or are irrelevant to each other).

The content of elements is responsive to reality in that individuals’ cognitions “more or less” map the physical, psychological or social reality of a person (Festinger, 1957, p. 10). The strength of the relationship is a function of how important the elements are to the person. For example, if education is highly valued by an individual, but they cannot bring themselves to do the given homework, the discomfort experienced will be greater than for a person who does not have the element of believing education is relevant to their lives.

Research conducted on attitudes to school. The term *attitude to school* in itself can be viewed as an umbrella term, referring to students’ feelings towards school as a whole as well as perceptions of a combination of a range of factors, such as student–teacher relationships, student–school relationships and/or peer–peer relationships; motivation to learn; student safety; teaching instructions; teacher enthusiasm; and expectations and feedback (see, for example, the “Attitude to School Survey” instrument; DET, 2016a). Libbey (2004) outlines terms such as *attachment*, *bonding*, *connectedness* and *engagement* as representative of the overarching term *student relationships to school*, which are based on student self-perceived evaluations. In addition, Libbey (2004) identifies the terms’ positive orientation to school, school climate, school context, school involvement, as well as student satisfaction and identification with school, as aspects that can be used to measure student and school relationships.

This broad range of terms, with varying measurement items for students to evaluate – for example, in the form of questionnaires – makes it difficult at times to compare research findings, as different aspects were measured despite the same terminology being applied (Libbey, 2004). Relevant to my study is the term *attitudes to school*, as defined in the introductory chapter, which enables students’ overall evaluation of schooling and learning experiences and student behaviour to be captured. I focused on studies that had been conducted using this term and thus focused specifically on student

attitudes (in comparison to, for example, students' feelings of belonging to their school) to enable a comparison of findings. I applied the definition of attitudes from the field of psychology to the field of education; related and or similar terms, as described by Libbey (2004), were taken into consideration, but the focus was on actual attitudes – favourable or unfavourable evaluations of school as a whole (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007).

The attitudes to school term is included in the examination of student engagement studies (next to terms such as *interest*, *identification* and *belonging*) within the affective component of engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). As Appleton, Christenson and Furlong (2008) suggest, the term “positive attitude about learning”, which forms part of my definition of attitude to school for this study, is also commonly included in the measurement of the affective component (p. 370).

I examined in the literature review studies that had focused on attitudes to school, and student engagement studies that had been centred around the affective component and its impact on engagement and learning. Despite attitude research “exploding” in quantity in social psychology (Bohner & Dickel, 2011, p. 392), the same cannot be said regarding attitude to school research in education. Few studies were relevant for inclusion in this review.

Research has been conducted on cohort differences in attitudes to school (G. Marks, 1998), but not on students changing their attitude to school and the factors involved in that process of change. For example, Woloschuk, Harasym, and Temple (2004) conducted a study on attitude change during medical school, but this study referred to social issues, and indicated that there had been a decline in attitudes during the course of the study. Berg (2005) examined attitudes towards learning chemistry with university students in a qualitative study and found that positive attitude change is associated with evidence of motivated behaviour.

While numerous research studies have focused on young people in relation to attitude change – for example, consumer behaviour (Ward & Wackman, 1971), substance abuse (J. Andrews & Duncan, 1998), anti-bullying attitudes (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004), and sexual attitudes (Werner-Wilson, 1998), the experience of positive attitude change to school, its antecedents and consequences, and the individual or contextual factors involved in such a change, are under-researched and under-theorised.

The link between attitudes to school and academic achievement. Why some students experience academic success and others do not appears to be a continuous educational research focus of great complexity. Understanding the factors that influence academic achievement is a common goal for educators, policymakers, parents and caregivers. Student attitudes to school impact learning and engagement and therefore understanding this field is important to scholarship and educators.

Students who display a positive attitude to school report higher engagement levels in extracurricular activities (Fullarton, 2002). Student cooperativeness is also related to positive attitudes to school (Johnson & Ahlgren, 1976). Siek-Toon Khoo and Ainley (2005) found in a study with Australian adolescents that their attitudes to school influenced their intentions for continuing with school; the association was moderately strong, but it was more strongly related to their educational intentions than to their particular backgrounds, and “therefore, the nurturing of favourable attitudes to school provides an important avenue for influencing participation through school and into education beyond secondary school” (p. 18). This supposition aligns with the educational goal of developing lifelong learners and emphasises the strong influence of positive attitudes to school by adolescent students.

Many students have a favourable perception of school (Ainley, 1995). Secondary school students’ perceptions are less favourable than primary school students’ (Ainley, 1995) and those more negative attitudes develop over the course of secondary schooling, not necessarily at the point of transition. It is particularly important, therefore, to address secondary school students’ attitudes to school. According to the extant literature, there is a positive relationship between adolescent students’ attitudes to school and their academic performance (Akey, 2006; Brodie, 1964; G. Marks, 1998; Majoribanks, 1976, 1992; McCoach & Siegle, 2001).

Akey’s (2006) study examined the influence of student engagement and perceived academic competence, which could be defined as “positive feelings about one’s ability to be successful academically” (p. 1). Adolescent attitudes to school constituted part of the psychological variable of student engagement, which was defined as “motivation, positive learning values, enthusiasm, interest, pride in success” (p. 3), together with student behaviour, defined as “persistence, effort, attention” (p. 3). Results indicate that student engagement and one’s perceived ability are positively linked to

academic achievement; however, “the influence of perceived academic competence was three times larger than that of engagement” (p. 16). Also, both variables were enhanced by supportive teachers and high expectations about behaviour (p. 31). McCoach and Siegle (2001) compared adolescent attitudes to school and teachers of high- and low-achieving students and found that the high-achieving students reported a more positive attitude to school and the teachers. Despite the difference being large, factors such as academic self-perceptions and self-regulation proved to be greater predictors of achievement in comparison.

Brodie (1964) compared “satisfied” and “dissatisfied” students in Year 11, based on their attitude to school, and found that the satisfied students outperformed the dissatisfied students at a statistically significant level. G. Marks (1998), who states that positive attitudes to school are in themselves “a measure of educational outcomes” (p. v), conducted a study with Australian adolescent students and measured attitudes as being four dimensional – the dimensions being general satisfaction with school; attitude to teachers; perceived opportunities offered by the school; and sense of achievement. In relation to academic achievement, the results did indicate that the two dimensions of general satisfaction and sense of achievement positively influenced self-perceived achievement.

Majoribanks (1976), who also conducted research on Australian students, proposes that increases in attitude scores are linked to higher academic achievement; however, the results also indicate that the relationship between ability measures and achievement scores is greater than with attitude measures and achievement scores. In a later study by Majoribanks (1992), attitude to school is constituted by affective (evaluating school as such – for example, “going to school is a waste of time”) and cognitive components (evaluating themselves as students – for example, “I would like to be one of the cleverest students in my school”; p. 946). The results indicate that the cognitive component had a moderate significant association with achievement, whereas the affective component only had a modest significant association with the girls’ achievement; it did not relate to the boys’ achievement scores. In contrast to Majoribanks’ (1976) research findings, his following studies (1978, 1987) found no support for the link between attitudes to school and academic achievement for the affective components of attitudes. In addition, no such support was found by Jackson and Lahaderne (1967), Jackson and Getzels (1959) and Tenenbaum (1944).

In Australia, the state government of Victoria provides schools with the opportunity to conduct an Attitudes to School Survey on a yearly basis (Department of Education and Training, 2016a), as a school improvement measure, and “In 2004, almost 90 per cent of Victorian Government schools participated in the Attitudes to School survey” (DET, 2016b, p. 1). It consists of a range of variables regarding student perceptions about school in general and student experiences. Students are asked to indicate whether they agree with statements such as, “My teachers listen to what I have to say”, “I look forward to going to school” and “I try very hard in school”. The Australian Council for Educational Research also provides a survey to measure student attitudes to school using the ACER School Life questionnaire (ACER, 2016a). The survey is intended for school reviews and evaluations and complements measures such as academic achievement. It enables “an examination of important outcomes such as attitudes to school in general, to learning, to teachers and to other students. Information on these kinds of ‘affective’ variables can complement the more usual measures of outcomes and be useful in a variety of contexts” (ACER, 2016b, p. 1).

Far more research has been conducted on attitudes towards specific subjects, such as mathematics (Hannula, 2002) or science (Osborne, Simon, & Collins, 2003), than to school in general. In a review focused on research into attitudes and their relationship to achievement in mathematics, Aiken (1976) states that a “low but significant” (p. 295) correlation is found when students’ attitudes are used as predictors in primary and secondary school. The attitude to maths is considered “secondary to ability as a forecaster of achievement” (p. 296) and an important tool for treatment of “mathophobia” (p. 303). However, Aiken (1976) argues that “there are too many ‘homegrown’, unstandardized attitude scales” (p. 302) and research on this topic struggles with methodological clarity and consistency. The same is evident when considering research on students’ relationship to school – for example, in the forming of attitudes to school, as outlined by Libbey (2004) – and further research is needed to identify the relationship between attitudes to school and academic achievement in more breadth and depth.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a significant predictor of educational outcomes as it is “generally associated positively with academic, social, and emotional learning outcomes” (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012, p. v). Engaged students “put forth effort, persist,

self-regulate their behaviour toward goals, challenge themselves to exceed, and enjoy challenges and learning” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. v). Student engagement has also been described as a protective factor against delinquency, substance abuse and depression (Li & Lerner, 2011; M. Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Due to it being significantly associated with students’ experiences at school (M. Wang & Holcombe, 2010), academic success (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, & Paris, 2005; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; M. Wang & Degol, 2014; M. Wang & Fredricks, 2014) and lower drop-out rates (Archambault et al., 2009; Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Godber, 2001; Klem & Connell, 2004; M. Wang & Fredricks, 2014), student engagement is a widely studied research field, and to understand the fundamental challenges of high school reform, research on student engagement is essential (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004).

Student engagement is not an attribute of the student but “an alterable state of being that is highly influenced by the capacity of school, family, and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning. ... in short, both the individual and context matter” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. v). It is thus considered malleable (Appleton et al., 2008) and holds great potential for intervention programs (M. Wang & Degol, 2014; M. Wang & Eccles, 2013; M. Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Context shapes engagement – for example, supportive relationships with peers and adults, structural features such as class size, and classroom processes such as task types (M. Wang & Degol, 2014). Student engagement is responsive to changes in a teacher’s approach to teaching as well as to a whole school’s pedagogical approach to learning (Fredricks, Filsecker, & Lawson, 2016). Higher student engagement is prevalent in learning environments, where students experience strong relationships with their teachers and peers, teachers hold high expectations of the students and provide them with quality feedback, and students have a sense of autonomy and are exposed to meaningful and challenging tasks (Fredricks, 2011). In addition, M. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) found that “parent involvement in education predicted student academic success and mental health [depression] both directly and indirectly through behavioral and emotional engagement” (p. 620).

The construct of student engagement has established itself as a useful data-driven variable for decision-making processes at schools, and has been described as the “cornerstone” of secondary school reform efforts (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, &

Reschly, 2006), addressing aspects such as low academic achievement and early school dropout (Appleton et al., 2008; H. Marks, 2000). Active research on student engagement began almost three decades ago, with research related to the assessment of student engagement in secondary school (Mosher & McGowan, 1985), and it has led to the development of a multidisciplinary research field. Scholars from educational psychology, developmental psychology, and teacher education began asking questions regarding the antecedents and outcomes of student engagement in the school context as well as the relationship between engaged students and long-term academic and social success at school (Christenson et al., 2012, p. v).

In the past two decades, there has been growing interest in the field of student engagement (Appleton et al., 2008; Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003; M. Wang & Holcombe, 2010). M. Wang and Degol (2014) describe research on student engagement as “prominent” in psychology and education over the past three decades, and Fredricks et al. (2016) call it an “explosion of research” in the field over the past two decades. However, despite a wide range of research into what scholars commonly refer to as the active investment and or involvement in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992;), disengagement from learning remains a problem, particularly at the secondary school level (Klem & Connell, 2004; M. Wang & Eccles, 2012b). For teachers, student disengagement is often the greatest challenge in their teaching (Fredricks, 2014). Archambault et al.’s (2009) findings indicate that:

One-third of adolescents experienced disengagement during high school. For many of these youth, the most remarkable change concerns their behaviors. At ages 12 and 13, they show up in class and complied with rules but afterward, their commitment dropped significantly. (p. 413)

For student engagement to be the engine for better educational and social outcomes, it is important to define, examine and understand the factors that influence student engagement. However, research that explores student engagement is based on a range of different theoretical traditions (Fredricks et al., 2016), such as motivational theories (self-determination, flow, goal theory), or school identification and life course theories; the former examine the relationship between contextual factors and engagement and adjustment, whereas the latter focus on engagement in relation to school dropout and school completion (Fredricks, 2014). The different conceptions of student engagement

can make the construct difficult to understand (Reschly & Christenson, 2012) as “this endemic diversity and complexity challenge researchers to identify and then make sense of the literature’s similarities, commonalities, and uniqueness” (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 435). Findings from student engagement research are thus difficult to compare and interpret (Christenson et al., 2012).

Defining student engagement. As stated previously, definitions of engagement vary between studies (Christenson et al., 2001; Fredricks et al., 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; M. Wang & Degol, 2014). For example, student engagement is defined as “the student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 12).

Student engagement goes beyond task completion and the willingness to comply with school routines. It is described as an “inner quality of concentration and effort to learn” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 13), which encompasses more than good grades or social approval, and is “in contrast to superficial participation, apathy, or lack of interest” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 11). H. Marks (2000) defines engagement as “the attention, interest, investment, and effort students expend in the work of learning” (p. 155). Student engagement is distinct from motivation, but related to it (Christenson et al., 2012; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Fredricks et al., 2016; Martin, 2012). Appleton et al. (2008) define student engagement as “the effort directed toward completing a task, or the *action* or *energy* component of motivation” (p. 138). They further explain “when motivation to pursue a goal or succeed at an academic task is put into action deliberately, the energized result is engagement” (p. 138). Student engagement has also been defined as “*energy in action*, the connection between person and activity” (Russell, Ainley, & Frydenberg, 2005, p. 1).

The construct of student engagement suffers from inconsistencies. Student engagement can include *agentic* engagement (a student’s intentional and positive contribution to learning; Reeve & Tseng, 2011) as well as the psychological component of engagement (addressing aspects such as belonging, identification with school, school membership), the academic component (addressing aspects such as time on task, credit hours towards graduation, homework completion; Appleton et al., 2008; Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006;), a social-behavioural component for collaborative

group work (Linnenbrink-Garcia, Rogat, & Koskey, 2011), and *volitional* engagement (addressing learning with games; Filsecker & Kerres, 2014; Fredricks et al., 2016).

The number of definitions is “large and increasing” (Finn & Kasza, 2009, p. 5): “we have a two-factor model of engagement, some three-factor models, at least one four-factor model, a nine-factor model and several ‘kitchen sink models’ with umpteen components that change with students’ grade levels” (Finn & Kasza, 2009, p. 5). Due to the “considerable variability in definitions both within and across different types of engagement” (Fredricks et al., 2016, p. 2), the clarity of the unique contribution of the construct becomes limited.

Next to the variability in definitions, the construct of student engagement presents challenges regarding its measurement as well (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Self-reporting surveys are the most common method of assessing student engagement; however, few valid measures are found in studies of the multidimensional engagement construct, and instruments for the affective, behavioural and cognitive components are not always consistent, which does not allow for a sound comparison of findings (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). In addition, the focus of most research is quantitative in nature, which represents the “average student” (Fredricks et al., 2016, p. 4) and the engagement levels, based on variable-oriented techniques that can hinder the development of insight into different subpopulations of students (Lawson & Lawson, 2013).

The definition of student engagement that underpinned this research study adopted Fredricks et al.’s (2004) “most prevalent” (Fredricks et al., 2016, p. 2) definition, which presents engagement as a combination of how a student feels in the school context; how a student’s thinking pattern evolves concerning themselves and the academic work at school; and how a student behaves at school. The three components are defined as follows:

- *Behavioural engagement* draws on the idea of participation; it includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out.

- *Emotional engagement* encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work.
 - *Cognitive engagement* draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.
- (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60, *italics used in the original text*)

Reasonably, M. Wang and Degol (2014) advise that “given the variety of definitions of engagement throughout the field, researchers must specify their dimensions and ensure that their measures align properly with these descriptions of engagement” (p. 138).

Most research views disengagement as the direct opposite of engagement, as most studies apply a single continuum, with lower levels of engagement indicating disengagement (Fredricks et al., 2016). However, it is important to mention that disengagement is not equal to a lack of engagement for some researchers who view disengagement as a separate process (Jimerson et al., 2003; M. Wang, Chow, Hofkens, & Salmela-Aro, 2015; M. Wang & Degol, 2015;). Disengagement does not always equate to a lack of engagement but can be defined among others as “school burnout” (M. Wang et al., 2015, p. 58). The position can be taken that positive and negative emotions are distinct by nature and therefore may have differential impacts on students (M. Wang et al., 2015). For the purpose of this study with adolescent students and the examination of the experience of positive attitude change to school, I have used the terms *lack of engagement* interchangeably with *disengagement* in line with the dominant approach in the literature, and it is also the common parlance of my research participants and teachers.

The affective component of student engagement.

It's good to feel good.

(Fredrickson, 2003, p. 330)

The emotions experienced within the school environment are particularly important to adolescent students as they come to rely less on their parents and family for the individuation process and more on the relationships established at school – for

example, with teachers and peers (Goodenow, 1993a). Emotional engagement is under-researched, as most student engagement studies do not include the affective component. For example, according to Fredricks et al. (2004), only 14 out of 44 student engagement studies have examined the affective component explicitly. Despite there being a wide range of research on student engagement, the potential of the three components of engagement on student experience is yet to be realised (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The research on the affective component refers to a range of factors, such as being bored, interested, happy or angry (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Lee & Smith, 1993; H. Marks, 2000; Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1998); identification with school and sense of belonging (Finn, 1989); students' perceived value, importance, and level of enjoyment with school (Wang et al., 2015); negative attitudes (Natriello, 1984); and persistence, pride in schoolwork, orientation towards school regarding effort and value, and concentration and attention (Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996).

However, the impact of students' emotions and attitudes to school and the learning process needs to be further investigated. The research field will benefit from "richer characterizations of how students behave, *feel* [emphasis added], and think" (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 59) in the quest to further understand the affective component's link to academic and social success, and consequently guide the future development of effective interventions. This knowledge gap is evident from the student engagement literature as "The way in which the quality of students' emotional involvement in school influences academic and psychological outcomes is complex and not completely understood" (M. Wang et al., 2015, p. 59). Low emotional engagement – for example, in the form of negative attitudes to school – is a relevant area to study as it is linked to poor academic outcomes and poor wellbeing (M. Wang et al., 2015).

As mentioned previously, the affective component addresses students' emotions that are associated with the school in general, teachers, peers and the learning process. Emotional engagement impacts on students' willingness to do well at school, and thus students' emotions need to be considered in the learning process, as well as in relation to student wellbeing (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Attitudes to school represent a favourable or not favourable evaluation of a student's holistic school experience (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007), and earlier research on

student attitudes to school applied similar concepts to those of student engagement, and therefore the construct is embedded in the component of emotional engagement. In line with Fredricks et al. (2004), who acknowledge that “research on emotional engagement is related to that on student attitudes (Epstein & McPartland, 1976; Yamamoto, Thomas, & Karns, 1969) and student interest and values (Eccles et al., 1993)” (p. 60), I examined positive attitude change within the affective component of student engagement.

Students’ emotional satisfaction with school is an important educational outcome in itself, and not solely in relation to academic success, and therefore a positive attitude to school is a desirable educational outcome. Epstein and McPartland (1976) – who developed the Quality of School Life (QSL), which measures student satisfaction in general – argue that the concept of self-perceived satisfaction needs to be at the forefront of educational research:

Student reactions to school are indicators of the quality of school life. Positive reactions to school may increase the likelihood that students will stay in school, develop lasting commitment to learning, and use the institution to advantage. At least, higher satisfaction with school, greater commitment, and more positive student–teacher relationships mean more enjoyable and stimulating hours spent in the compulsory school setting. In many respects, school satisfaction for youngsters is analogous to job satisfaction for adults. The school, like the job, provides the single out-of-family environment where a major proportion of time is spent. General satisfaction, commitment to tasks, relations with authority figures are important for children in school – as they are for adults at work – or “production”, continued motivation, “promotions”, as well as daily mental health. The quality of school life is one part of a total concept of the quality of life of youngsters. (p. 27)

I could not agree more with this representation of the importance of students having positive perceptions of their school experiences, and consequently I chose to research adolescent students’ emotional engagement in order to address the problem of disengagement in secondary schools.

Emotional engagement and educational outcomes. Previous research indicates that emotional engagement in the form of “students’ social, emotional, and psychological attachments to school” (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 435) is relevant for producing positive educational outcomes.

Two groups of studies have been identified for emotional engagement research. One group has focused on the link between the affective component of engagement and

the pursuit of academic achievement and/or on the assessment of levels of student interest and positive emotions during learning activities (Ainley, 2012; Appleton et al., 2008). The other group consists of studies that have focused on “students’ feelings of belonging, identification, and relatedness to their school peers, teachers, and the school overall” (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 436).

Emotional engagement is required for academic success. In comparison to the behavioural and cognitive components, M. Wang and Holcombe (2010) found the affective component of engagement to be particularly influential on students’ academic achievement. Emotional engagement is also linked to educational aspirations. M. Wang and Eccles (2012a) examined adolescent student engagement trajectories from years 7 to 11 and their relationship to academic outcomes. Emotional engagement was measured by assessing the students’ sense of school belonging from their responses to statements such as “In general, I like school a lot”, “I feel like a real part in this school”, and “I feel close to people in this school”. The behavioural component was measured with the construct “school participation” – for example, “Have you had trouble getting homework done?”. The cognitive component used the construct “self-regulated learning” – for example, “How often do you try to decide what you are supposed to learn, rather than just read the material when you are doing schoolwork?”. They found that all three components of engagement were positively related to the academic achievement as well as to educational aspirations. Students who expressed higher aspirations – for example, wanting to obtain a master’s degree or a PhD after completing Year 12 – had higher levels of school engagement.

However, the affective component did not significantly contribute to academic achievement in comparison to the behavioural and cognitive components. It is suggested that “although students may feel emotionally connected to school if they are not actively participating in school or do not use self-regulation learning strategies, they are less likely to get very good grades” (M. Wang & Eccles, 2012a, p. 37). In providing an explanation, M. Wang and Eccles (2012a) state that, in accordance with Archambault et al. (2009), “it is plausible that school belonging has no direct association with academic achievement, and that its association operates indirectly through the effects of behavioural or cognitive engagement” (p. 37). Furthermore, M. Wang and Eccles (2012a) suggest that the results may vary due to the construct used to measure emotional engagement.

M. Wang and Eccles (2012a) only focused on the aspect of connectedness to school, and pointed out that students may feel like they belong to the school as they have friends and like seeing them at school, but if they do not appreciate the importance of learning and the curriculum, then “a sense of belonging may not motivate them to study hard and enhance their academic performance” (p. 37). Consequently, it is important to distinguish between the aspects of school belonging and the valuing of school. I included this consideration in my examination of positive attitude change by asking the participating students in their interviews whether they thought school was important, and whether they felt they had a close relationship to their school.

With respect to adjustment to secondary school and school completion, emotional engagement is pivotal. Archambault et al. (2009) examined the three engagement components in adolescents in relation to dropping out of school, and used the responses to questions related to student enjoyment and interest in school-related tasks to measure the affective component – for example, “Do you like school?” Their findings led them to view “socio-emotional wellbeing as the primary dimension that ought to be targeted by practitioners” (p. 414) when designing interventions intended to promote successful academic adjustment in secondary schools and school completion. In addition, their findings indicate that all three engagement components are relevant and “prevention efforts that foster school engagement will thus need to integrate distinct strategies that address student emotions, cognitions, and behaviors” (p. 414). However, only behavioural engagement can be considered a predictor of dropping out of school, and adolescent students who report low overall engagement are at the highest risk of dropping out.

In Osterman’s (2000) view, little attention is given to the emotional needs of students, in particular to the aspect of student belonging:

Shaping the school culture are beliefs and practices that nurture individualism and competition, rather than community and collaboration. Integral to this culture are organizational policies and practices that systematically prevent and preclude the development of community among students and directly contribute to students’ experience of isolation, alienation, and polarization. (p. 324)

Kunc (1992, as cited in Osterman, 2000) blames an “institutionalized set of beliefs about schooling” (p. 324) for (a) prioritising academic achievement over sense of belonging; (b) viewing belonging not as a requisite for engagement in learning, but as a

“reward for compliance and achievement” (p. 324); and (c) assuming that a student’s emotional needs can and should be met outside of the school environment. Osterman (2000) summarises what research has found to be the effects of the affective component:

The experience of belongingness is associated with important psychological processes. Children who experience a sense of relatedness have a stronger supply of inner resources. They perceive themselves to be more competent and autonomous and have higher levels of intrinsic motivation. They have a stronger sense of identity but are also willing to conform to and adopt established norms and values. These inner resources in turn predict engagement and performance. Those students who experience a sense of relatedness behave differently from those who do not. They have more positive attitudes toward school, classwork, teachers, and their peers. They are more likely to like school, and they are also more engaged. They participate more in school activities, and they invest more of themselves in the learning process. They have a stronger sense of their own social competence, and they are more likely to interact with peers and adults in pro-social ways. (p. 343)

The decline of student engagement in secondary school. Emotional engagement, together with behavioural and cognitive engagement, declines in secondary school students. This general decline “could reflect an increasing misfit between the youth’s stage of development and the opportunities provided in their school environment” (M. Wang & Eccles, 2012a, p. 37). Students’ motivation and their wellbeing are at their peak when the school context can meet the students’ social-emotional needs (Eccles et al., 1993). In secondary school, a decrease in the personal and positive relationships with teachers, the increase in ability grouping, comparison of results and the public evaluation of them, as well as the whole-class task organisation, have a negative impact on the student’s motivation and academic self-concept. They represent “developmentally inappropriate” (Eccles et al. 1993, p. 99) environmental changes for adolescent students, and have led to the conclusion that the environment in secondary schools is not compatible with the adolescent students’ needs (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roser, & Davis-Kean, 2006).

According to M. Wang and Eccles (2012a), when student engagement declines, emotional engagement is particularly affected despite it being the least predictive of academic achievement. In addition, M. Wang and Eccles (2012b) found:

If, on average, students are provided with fewer opportunities to feel competent in their academic subjects, then the subjective valuing of learning is likely to drop. Similarly, if, on average, students have fewer opportunities to have strong,

positive relationships with teachers, then their identification with school and school compliance will decline. (p. 889)

Archambault et al. (2009) found that one-third of over 13,000 French Canadian students from 69 high schools reported decreases in all three components of student engagement, and consequently argue that “creating a positive social-emotional learning environment promises better adolescent achievement and, in turn, will contribute to a healthier lifestyle” (p. 408).

What affects emotional engagement? Supportive relationships with teachers, peers and parents have a positive effect on the affective component of student engagement, and social support protects against the normative decline in emotional engagement, which occurs for the average student between Year 7 and Year 11 (M. Wang & Eccles, 2012b). There is a large body of literature that discusses and evaluates factors that positively impact on students’ emotions to school (Anderman, 2003; Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002; Furlong et al., 2003; Ma, 2003; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000).

The relationship to teachers is particularly relevant to emotional engagement (as well as behavioural engagement) in the secondary school years (M. Wang & Eccles, 2012b). Teachers need to make students feel cared for and that the teachers are willing to help them with their academic work (Wentzel, 1998). Wentzel (1998) found that perceived teacher social and academic support is positively associated with students showing interest in classwork; however, all social support sources are relevant:

Parents, peers, and teachers seem to play relatively independent roles in young adolescents’ lives, and the effects of having multiple sources of support on motivational and academic outcomes are primarily additive rather than compensatory. For example, perceived support from parents was the only type of support that predicted students’ academic goal orientations. (p. 207)

To some, these results might appear surprising given the common stereotype that peer influence is significantly stronger than any adult influence during adolescence (M. Wang & Eccles, 2012b); however, caution should be exercised when considering the effects of the different sources of social support (teachers, peers, and parents) have on the three dimensions of student engagement.

In M. Wang and Eccles' 2013 study, where emotional engagement represented "positive affective reactions to, interest in, and valuing of school activities" (p. 13), they found that the affective component was higher in the following situation:

When students experience school as optimal in structure, have opportunities to make choices, experience what they learn as having personal relevance, and feel emotionally supported in learning by both their teachers and peers, they are more likely to feel interested and to value learning activities in school. (p. 19)

M. Wang and Holcombe (2010) argue that "positive and improvement-based praise and emphasizing effort while avoiding pressuring students for correct answers or higher grades (mastery goal structure)" (p. 653) positively influences the affective engagement component, whereas comparing students' relative ability has detrimental effects on both the affective and behavioural components of engagement (M. Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

Findings disproving the relevance of emotional engagement. In contrast to the research that indicates emotional engagement is linked to positive educational outcomes, as described previously, the following findings reveal an interesting contrary insight: emotional engagement is also found to not be linked to academic success. M. Wang and Peck (2013) found relatively equal academic achievement in low and high emotionally engaged students. However, they also found that the "emotionally distressed" students suffered more depressive symptoms and presented lower academic aspirations. In their study, two interesting groupings of students emerged: the emotionally disengaged; and the cognitively disengaged. The emotionally disengaged students were behaviourally and cognitively highly engaged and thus likely to be academically successful:

They have the cognitive skills to do well in school and apparently feel they should attend school but do not like being there. This places emotionally disengaged youths at the greatest risk for mental health problems and dissuades them from entering college. (M. Wang & Peck, 2013, p. 1271)

The cognitively disengaged students had lower academic achievement levels than the emotionally disengaged students, but were behaviourally and emotionally highly engaged and had better mental health levels.

In addition, a decline in emotional engagement has been found not to be linked to a decline in academic success. In M. Wang et al.'s (2015) study of Finnish adolescents, the results indicate that the students' emotional engagement was not associated with a

decline in their academic achievement between Year 9 and Year 11, and “behavioral and cognitive engagement may matter more for academic performance than emotional engagement” (p. 62). School burnout, a measure that refers to being overwhelmed and lacking enjoyment and valuing in learning, was also not associated with a decline in academic achievement. This indicates that students can be behaviourally and cognitively highly engaged, and maintain high levels of academic success, despite having low levels of emotional engagement and high levels of burnout. However, the latter two aspects were associated with an increase in depression symptoms. This fact is also supported by M. Wang and Peck (2013), who found the highest level of depression symptoms was present in the emotionally disengaged group of students who had high levels of behavioural and cognitive engagement, and the lowest level of depression symptoms was present in the students who reported high levels of all three engagement components.

Surprisingly, 15-year-old Finnish students were at the lower end of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranking for how much they liked school and Korean students occupied the last place of that ranking. This is despite the fact that both cohorts had reached the highest levels of academic achievement (OECD, 2013). The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study, conducted by the World Health Organization, identified that Finnish students had reported an overall low satisfaction with school, and that the students who had achieved high academic success had the highest risk of experiencing stress and depression (M. Wang et al., 2015); in contrast, the average achievers reported an overall high level of student wellbeing. These findings from the HBSC study challenge the notion that emotional engagement is important to engagement in learning and academic achievement.

M. Wang et al. (2015) argue that countless features of secondary schools are real obstacles to adolescent developmental needs for competency, relatedness and autonomy, and can therefore lead to a lack of emotional engagement with school (Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles & Roeser, 2009, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and that despite the effort in Finland to exclude those obstacles from the schooling system, emotional engagement remains an unresolved issue. M. Wang et al. (2015) refer to the Finnish culture of valuing education from a young age and the exam-oriented learning environment for entry into tertiary studies as possible factors in the erosion of emotional engagement over time, with high academic achievement remaining stable; in addition, the idea is stated that a

decline in emotional engagement may be “a developmentally normative response to secondary school education and social environments” (p. 63).

These various findings from relevant research studies led to the development of my fundamental belief that schools need to connect students to the holistic ideas “that define their lives and the wider world they live in” (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010, p. 4) in order to increase engagement levels and enable a better fit between adolescents’ developmental needs and the structure of secondary schools. From the students’ perspective, I believe the connectedness to the big ideas can be enhanced through the development of positive attitudes to school as attitudes are belief systems that develop evaluations and produce responses to daily encounters and thus affect attitudes from one encounter to another.

Results such as those relating to the Finnish students further confirm the need for more research into the affective component of engagement so as to gain deeper insights into this component’s impact on learning and student wellbeing. These results, however, also make discussions regarding the importance of academic achievement versus the importance of student wellbeing rather difficult for some educators and or policymakers who have set priority structures and designated agendas.

It is clear from the literature review that the impact of emotional engagement on academic success and psychological outcomes is “complex and not completely understood” (M. Wang et al., 2015, p. 59). The research in the field of student engagement and the affective component of engagement is almost entirely quantitative and this naturally sets certain limitations to our understanding of the findings in the form of statistical representations of engagement.

Concluding Comments

The aim of the research study that is the subject of this thesis was to contribute knowledge to the field of student engagement through researching the experience of positive attitude change to school within the affective component of engagement. The study contributes to the understanding of adolescents’ emotional engagement in school through its examination of the course and consequences of positive attitude change to school and its impact on the multidimensional construct of engagement. The study adopted a qualitative research paradigm that enabled unique insights to be gained into

adolescent students' experiences of school through the capture and analysis of the students' words and descriptions of their time at secondary school and the experience of positive attitude change to school.

In this chapter I have examined the current issues and research that has been undertaken in the field of student engagement, attitudes to school, and adolescent students. I presented the existing gaps in literature and outlined the ways in which I believe my research study has contributed to the field of student engagement in adolescent learners and in particular to the construct of attitudes to school within the affective component of student engagement.

In Chapter 3, I present the theoretical framework that was used for my research study. Following on from that I provide a description and discussion of my application of the narrative inquiry methodology to guide my research design and address my research questions in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

Overview

In the previous chapter, I discussed the background to my research study, and situated it contextually within the educational research field of student engagement. I have examined the literature on adolescent students, attitudes and attitude change, and engagement with a focus on emotional engagement, exploring gaps in existing research, and discussing ways in which my study has contributed to the field.

In this chapter, I introduce the theoretical framework that underpinned my research, drawing on the qualitative paradigm and the epistemological positioning of social constructionism for this purpose. I further provide details of the theoretical lens that was used to inform the research design for the phenomenon examined in this study and to assist in the understanding and interpretation of the research findings. The chapter begins with an introduction to the meaning and value of a theoretical framework for this research study.

Introduction

The purpose of a theoretical framework is to “better conceptualize, describe, and explain a phenomena” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 211), and this theoretical framework provides the base for a researcher’s philosophical, epistemological, methodological and analytical approaches to the research (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). It gives a certain operational logic that informs the researcher’s actions and develops a lens with which they view the world (Merriam, 2009) and the phenomenon under study: the experience of positive attitude change to school.

This research study was underpinned by a qualitative research paradigm and was further framed by social constructionism, which provided the philosophical basis for assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge. To explore the research puzzle and its questions and guide the analysis process, Bronfenbrenner’s Theory of Human Development (2005) was adopted as the theoretical lens to examine the experience of positive attitude change in adolescent students. The methodology applied was the narrative inquiry methodology, based on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) definition of

it, and incorporates Clandinin’s (2016) design considerations and the traditions of the narrative inquiry research community. The study used the research method of interviews to collect the data.

The world I live in is confronted and constituted by my social constructionist perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and constructionism is also dictating my research design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 368) because it is the way I view my reality and consider what knowledge is to me. This research study adopted a qualitative inquiry since it assumed that reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study (Creswell, 2007). The constructionist approach of this study assumed a relative ontology as it acknowledged the existence of multiple realities, not just a single one, as well as a subjectivist epistemology as the knowledge was created by the collaboration of knower and respondent. The methodological procedures applied were naturalistic as the data collection processes and methods were within the natural world of the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Table 1 details the elements of the research design.

Table 1
Research Design

Research design	Qualitative research paradigm
Ontology	Reality, as seen by the student, with the premise that multiple realities exist at once
Epistemology	Social constructionism, whereby knowledge is believed to be created via social interactions, and the researcher becomes an “insider” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17)
Methodology	Naturalistic methodology: Narrative inquiry, which seeks to answer the research questions through the retelling of lived experiences
Methods	Interviews with students who experienced positive attitude change were conducted on school grounds

Qualitative Paradigm

Based on the nature of my research to examine the experience of positive attitude change to school, I chose a qualitative research “track” (Creswell, 2014, p. 11), or paradigm, for my study. There are several theories as to what constitutes a research paradigm, and research paradigms may overlap regarding the conceptualisation of the researcher’s values, assumptions and orientations for a qualitative research inquiry (Hays

& Singh, 2012). A paradigm is “a model or frame of reference through which to observe and understand” (Babbie, 2015, p. 31). Babbie (2015) presents a paradigm as a point of view, and from different points of view, different reasoning and understanding emerge as different paradigms can have (to a varying degree) different explanations or theories for the same phenomenon. A complementary representation of a paradigm can also be described as a “basic belief system or worldview” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105) that acts as a guide regarding the researcher’s ontology, epistemology and methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) add that a paradigm also encompasses ethics (axiology), whereby the researcher deals with the question “How will I be as a moral person in the world?” (p. 245) and thus as a researcher in any given study.

Research paradigms are commonly divided into quantitative and qualitative groups. The quantitative paradigm measures and assigns number values according to logically accepted rules, whereas the qualitative paradigm does not relate to the traditional scientific methods of measurements (Opie & Sikes, 2004). While the quantitative approach frequently tests a hypothesis (deductive inquiry), the qualitative paradigm recurrently generates hypothesis and ground theory (inductive inquiry). Opie and Sikes (2004) state that:

In the recent past, the two main paradigms that have influenced educational research are the scientific, positivist, objective, quantitative paradigm and the interpretative, naturalistic, subjective, qualitative paradigm (although it is important to remember that all research is interpretative in that it can only offer an interpretation, not an actual replica, of the world). (p. 18)

I chose a qualitative paradigm for this study which applied “an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). In the following section, I articulate the reasons for why I believed the qualitative paradigm was the most suitable methodology for my research study.

The unearthing of meaning. Qualitative research facilitates learning in relation to the meaning that people ascribe to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This learning-oriented process is receptive to changes, and no predetermined findings are anticipated (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Moreover, a qualitative approach is essential when the research questions require exploration (Stake, 1995). While quantitative research is based on standardised measures, where experiences are labelled with pre-determined variables into pre-determined categories, qualitative research enables a “free” exploration to study experiences in depth and in great detail (Patton, 1990). Given the existing knowledge gap in relation to the experience of positive attitude change, I have no pre-determined variables or categories with which to measure positive attitude change, and therefore applying a qualitative approach was necessary for me to address my research questions.

Qualitative research commonly seeks to answer “how” or “what” questions in order for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the matter under exploration (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2019). For the current study, I explored participants’ experiences of positive change by asking two research questions: “What meaning is attached by the students to the experience of positive attitude change?” and “Who or what influences the experience of positive attitude change?”

The phenomena of lived experiences and perceptions. A study that adopts a qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore phenomena such as feelings or thought processes through the analysis of lived experiences and the personal perceptions of these experiences (S. Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013) that are difficult to capture using quantitative approaches (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In my study, I explored adolescent students’ feelings, fears, desires, thoughts and reflections that related to their experience of positive attitude change, as well as their perceptions of its impact on engagement in learning, and their personal development and wellbeing at school.

Connections between the individual experiences and the social and cultural structures were examined, and the result is an interpretation of the empirical materials gained from this inquiry. I examined the research questions with a focus on individual and contextual/social factors, where I applied the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to identify and analyse students’ experiences and the social processes involved. I learnt how the experience of positive attitude change unfolded as I listened to the participants’ stories of their experiences and questioned them on aspects for elaboration and clarification purposes. Whatever was being told and studied by me was allowed to happen “naturally”, as “in naturalistic inquiry, the investigator does not control or manipulate

what is being studied” (Merriam, 2009, p. 7). In qualitative research, participants’ social experiences cannot be understood in isolation from the context. I did not solely look at the individual under study; I also reflected on the “who” the individual is in the given context (Hays & Singh, 2012). Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory (2005) guided this process of identifying the “big picture” of the students’ lives and the influences on their development. The qualitative research assumption is that “participants are best understood holistically versus as a sum of their parts” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 7), and thus my research methods captured the holistic story of each student’s experience of positive attitude change.

The natural setting. When studying a phenomenon in its natural setting, qualitative research methods are suitable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) because they enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the context for the social processes involved in the phenomenon (Esterberg, 2002). Each student’s individual circumstances and contexts were inquired about, acknowledged, considered and included in the analysis. My participants’ stories were captured in a natural setting as the interviews were conducted on school grounds. I met with each participant during a normal school day and conducted the interview in a section of the Year 10 area, where students and staff have access to tables, couches and kitchen facilities. To ensure confidentiality, the area was reserved solely for the student and me for the duration of the interview.

The role of the researcher. Qualitative methods emphasise the researcher’s role as an active participant in the study (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is based on the fundamental belief that “there is no such things as value-free inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 367) and thus a researcher’s values need to be made transparent to the reader. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) state that when conducting research on human beings:

there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of, and between, the observer and the observed. (p. 29)

Thus, qualitative researchers think reflectively, historically and biographically because they incorporate personal experiences into their inquiries. The study’s results are based on my interpretations of the participants’ narratives of positive attitude change. My paradigm commitment framed the interpretation process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and therefore the results are not value free. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that

my research is not objective; however, the research texts are not fiction, but the co-constructed representation of one truth of the experience of positive attitude change.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) state, “objective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representations” (p. 7). For this study, I, the researcher, represent the eight stories that were captured and analysed, being aware that my experiences would impact on the processes involved. I verified my representations in the form of research texts by providing nuanced insight and detail of the process of capturing each narrative within my value-laden inquiry. This approach aligned with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2008) definition of the qualitative approach to research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. (p. 4)

It also aligned with the chosen narrative inquiry methodology described in Chapter 4. The epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions I made in my research study were represented in the interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) that aligned with a poststructuralist and postmodern view that states that:

Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they have done and why. No single method can grasp all the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. Consequently, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience they have studied. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 29)

As the qualitative researcher, I was intrinsically part of the research, and therefore I had to display empathetic neutrality, which meant communicating understanding and care, and being non-judgemental regarding the adolescent participants’ opinions and experiences. The “humanness” of this research study required me to be a reflective researcher throughout the process, whereby I had to make decisions immediately as to the benefits and challenges of my subjectivity and of sharing my opinions and perspectives with the participants during the interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012). My aim was to establish a relationship that promoted egalitarianism, cultural sensitivity, collaboration and respect, while addressing issues of accuracy and completeness of their story.

Following the key characteristics of the qualitative paradigm, I approached my research study using inductive analysis, a “bottom-up” approach (Hays & Singh, 2012) to the experience of positive attitude change. I chose a qualitative approach because it aligned with the nature of my research questions. Further, I did not have the knowledge to develop a hypothesis to be tested by the literature review relating to positive attitude change; instead, I generated data that was analysed into patterns and themes to address the research questions. The analysis included recursive phases as I was learning and verifying new insights (Patton, 2002) when I was re-reading the interview transcripts.

Social Constructionism Epistemology

This research inquiry is framed philosophically by social constructionism, which is an epistemology that views knowledge as a creation, not a discovery (Schwandt, 2003). This research study examined the experiences of positive attitude change based on social constructions that the research participants developed and lived out. The participants attached an individualised and experience-based meaning to their positive attitude change, and through my research, I created one representation of the meaning in the form of an actively co-constructed research text displaying the narrative of each participant’s positive attitude change.

Why social constructionism? Over the past half century, qualitative inquiry has increasingly considered realities as socially constructed and aligned with the principle that the world we live in is not simply “there” but is being “brought into being” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 341). As Schwandt (2003) suggests, social interactions construct our everyday realities:

Most of us would agree that knowing is not passive—a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind—but active; that is, mind does something with these impressions, at the very least forming abstractions or concepts. In this sense, constructionism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth. (p. 305)

Social constructionism, next to interpretivism and hermeneutics, is one of the three major philosophies of qualitative inquiry (Schwandt, 2003). In pursuing

interpretivism, I would have to objectify, and therefore stay unaffected and external to any given interpretation process. Applying the hermeneutics philosophy, I would want to grasp the process of understanding itself (Schwandt, 2003); both did not apply to my research approach despite them aligning with the assumption that “knowledge of what others are doing and saying always depends upon some background or context of other meanings, beliefs, values, practices, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 312).

Merriam (2009) presents four categories of epistemological perspectives: the positivist and post-positivist; the critical; the postmodern and post-structural; and the interpretive constructivist. These four perspectives intersect and “in true qualitative fashion, each writer makes sense of the underlying philosophical influences in his or her own way” (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). The critical researcher investigates socio-economic, political and cultural causes of a given research problem, wanting to drive collective action. A study based on success stories of positive attitude change does not belong to this category, which is focused on socio-political change, emancipation and empowerment. A postmodern or post-structural researcher might focus on dichotomies and question and “disrupt” (Merriam, 2009, p. 12) them. With this approach, multiple perspectives and voices are important, and the results include multiple interpretations, often in the form of narratives. I did not focus on dichotomies, nor did I test a theory or conduct an experiment, or quantify and measure the experience of positive attitude change in any way. My research was not driven by critical analysis of economic, political and social factors, as much as it was focused on students’ voices and social interactions, which could intertwine with the economic and political forces in the students’ environment.

Since its inception, social constructionism has been controversial (Miller & Holstein, 2017) and there is not one clear definition of social constructionism (Burr, 1995). The terms *constructionism* and *constructivism* are used interchangeably at times – for example, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe themselves as “social constructivists/constructionists” (p. 259), and Schwandt (2003) refers to constructivists under the heading “Social Constructionism” (p. 305), when suggesting that everyone who believes in knowledge being constructed actively in the mind could be called a constructivist. In *The SAGE Handbook for Qualitative Research* (2011) the term *social constructionism* is not to be found in the content index, but the used term of “Social Constructivism” aligns with Schwandt’s (2003) description of social constructionism;

however, constructionism is included in Holstein and Gubrium's (2011) chapter in the SAGE handbook. Creswell (2013) follows the SAGE handbook's description of social constructivism, but in the explanation of what it stands for, references Schwandt (2007), who refers to both social constructionism (2003) and constructivism (2007).

The confusion of the terms is evident, according to Holstein and Gubrium (2011): "With its growing popularity, however, the constructionist approach has become particularly expansive and amorphous. Often it seems that the term 'constructionism' can be applied to virtually every research approach imaginable" (p. 341). Over three decades ago, Gergen (1985) indicated that the term constructivism is also often used when referring to the social constructionist movement in psychology, as well to Piagetian theory and a 20th-century art movement; hence, the introduction of the term constructionism to avoid confusion with the term constructivism that is used in psychology and in the arts (Gergen, 1985). From the 1966 seminal publication of Berger and Luckmann's, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, the term constructionism might be best known (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011).

Holstein and Gubrium (2008) present constructionism as a "mosaic", whereby a diverse range of philosophical, theoretical and methodological and empirical underpinnings can be applied. Despite a lack of uniform definition to follow, I consider myself a social constructionist researcher because I believe in the following key assumptions of social constructionism according to Gergen (1985), whereby "social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the process by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Further, while knowledge is individually actively constructed, it is socially mediated, which is reflected in the term social constructionism.

Key assumptions of social constructionism. The reality of one's world is not revealed when it is passively observed but is, instead, reached through a process of construction. A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge must be assumed (Burr, 1995).

Social constructionism asks for a critical approach to the belief that conventional knowledge can be based on objective truths, and "cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be" (Burr, 1995, p. 3) – for example,

critically approach the “real” divisions that exist in one’s understanding of the world. Just because a category exists, it does not necessarily mean that there is, by nature, a real division of the subject under consideration. Social constructionist arguments have the strength to make one aware of different possibilities (Elder-Vass, 2012) – for example, by arguing that “the ways in which we collectively think and communicate about the world affect the way the world is” (Burr, 1995, p. 4) and, therefore, a social construct can be formed differently and consequently rebuilt.

People’s understanding of the world is specific at any given historical and cultural time and place; one understands the world, depending on the time and place one lives in (Burr, 1995). The categories and concepts used to make sense of the world are thus “historically and culturally relative” (Burr, 1995, p. 4) and they are social artefacts (Gergen, 1985). As a constructionist “the process of understanding is not automatically driven by forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationships” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). One should not assume that the understanding of a concept from a specific time and place is better or worse from that of another time and place, as “the particular forms of knowledge that abound in any culture are therefore artefacts of it, and we should not assume that our ways of understanding are necessarily any better (in terms of being any nearer the truth) than other ways” (Burr, 1995, p. 4).

Knowledge of the world is not derived from the nature of the world; however, it is sustained by social processes (Burr, 1995). People construct their knowledge of the world between themselves through daily interactions, thus the commonly accepted truths about one’s world are the products of social processes and interactions: “The goings-on between people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices during which our shared versions of knowledge are constructed.” (Burr, 1995, p. 4) and “the rules for ‘what counts as what’ are inherently ambiguous, continuously evolving, and free to vary with the predilections of those who use them” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267).

The “social constructions” of the world can be numerous and in the “negotiations” of those constructs certain actions are being included and excluded; knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 1995). Burr (1995) cites the example of the historically and culturally relative perception of drunkenness as a crime, which would result in imprisonment. When the social construct of drunkenness changed, and it was considered a sickness, another action was attached to that new knowledge: the inebriated

person became the victim, who was entitled to medical treatment and general support. Thus, “forms of negotiated understanding are of critical significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people engage” (Gergen, 1985, p. 268).

Gergen (1985) describes constructionism as relativistic in the sense that it does not provide rules of warrant:

Because of the inherent dependency of knowledge systems on communities of shared intelligibility, scientific activity will always be governed in large measure by normative rules. However, constructionism does invite practitioners to view these rules as historically and culturally situated – thus subject to critique and transformation. (p. 273)

Research conducted from a social constructionist position is research that invites the reader to challenge and or recognise stated assumptions and welcomes judgement based on perspectives not included in the research.

My approach does not fall into the weak or strong category of social constructionism, according to Schwandt’s (2003) representation. A weak position could reject definitions of “knowledge, justification, objectivity and evidence” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 308) as emerging from the “representationalist-empiricist-foundationalist nexus” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 308). A strong position could be linked to “a more radically sceptical and even nihilistic stance” (Schwandt, 2003, p. 308). I see my perspective intertwined with both the weak and strong categories, regarding the theoretical framework for this study as a “mosaic” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008), through which I follow the belief that:

knowledge is not disinterested, apolitical, and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience, but it is in some sense ideological, political, and permeated with values (Rouse, 1996). This assumption is amenable to both weak and strong interpretations. (Schwandt, 2003, p. 308)

Theoretical Lens

The theoretical framework brings together the researcher’s assumptions regarding the research topic and presents and explains how the assumptions are enacted in practice (Graue & Karabon, 2013). Encompassed further in the theoretical framework is a particular “lens” through which the phenomenon under study – the experience of positive attitude change to school – is being “looked at” (Graue & Karabon, 2013, p. 13). Moen

(2006) discusses the interpretive role of the researcher in narrative inquiry and states that familiarity with the experience under study or the situation of the experience can be an obstacle to interpretation processes. The application of a theory enables the familiar to become unfamiliar – for example, when former teachers become researchers in the school. Moen refers to Gudmundsdottir's (2001) view of theoretical perspectives when describing how “researchers using a narrative approach employ theory in systematic ways” (p. 63), both for data collection and interpretation, and argues that “it is the constant interaction between theory and empirical data that makes it possible to understand and gain new insight” (p. 63) of the experience under study. In line with Moen's argument, I applied a theoretical lens to receive the participants' narrative of the experience that was studied and interpreted it.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development. For this study, the theoretical lens was based on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and its Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Researchers from a range of topic areas have applied Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development to their data analysis to help understand human experiences – for example, in relation to bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012), adolescent aggression (Benson & Buehler, 2012), and early vocabulary development (Farrant & Zubrick, 2012). I used these studies to guide my application of the theoretical lens to my research question.

The application of the lens is in line with the cornerstones of the theoretical framework described. In summary, qualitative research emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality, as well as the “intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10). It represents efforts to describe and understand, and further to always challenge by “looking closely at something and learning through particularity” (Graue & Karabon, 2013, p. 33). The social constructionist epistemology, which describes the applied theory of knowledge – the “how I know” – emphasises the purposeful production of knowledge through the active interaction of the individual with the environment, thus, the social life (Graue & Karabon, 2013).

Encompassed by social constructionism is Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The theory is built on the

understanding that dynamic relationships exist between a person and the multilevel ecology in which the person is integrated. The focus is on “temporally (historically) embedded person–context relational processes” (Lerner, 2005, p. ix) with the idea that the person influences his or her ecology as much as the ecology is influencing the person’s development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Lerner, 2005). Consequently, the model helps to explain how changes in the engagement of the person with their context may improve the person’s development as well as the person’s context (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Lerner, 2002).

Considering the research question “How is the experience of positive attitude change to school being lived out by adolescent students?” the bioecological model is a suitable “lens” to apply to my research for the following reasons: (1) as stated in the literature review, the adolescent student’s development is shaped by interactions between the individual and the environment – these interactions are central to the bioecological model; (2) the concept of student attitudes is used to represent a holistic evaluation of students’ school experiences, which include factors specific to the individual student and the school environment; and (3) student engagement is influenced by learner-centred characteristics as well as contextual aspects such as the school, family support for learning, and peer relationships. As mentioned before by Christenson et al. (2012), “both the individual and the context matter” (p. v) for student engagement to occur and be maintained. Bronfenbrenner’s theory is complex and elaborative, and presenting it in its entirety would be beyond the scope of this thesis; however, relevant to my research question and approach are the following aspects.

The Process-Person-Context-Time model. The bioecological model has four principal components. The components are the developing person (Person) within the environmental context of the development (Context), with the consideration of time (Time) and the so called proximal processes (Process) a person engages in on their developmental journey.

The Process component refers to “forms of interaction between organism and environment, called *proximal processes*, that operate over time and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795). The relationships of the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model are

dynamic and interactive, and they form the essence of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 795).

Highly relevant to my research question is the defining property of the bioecological model "experience" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797). Experience is a critical element, based on the belief that the environment cannot be solely captured objectively, but needs to consider the developing person's subjective experience of the properties of the environment (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The bioecological model puts an equal emphasis on a person's objective and experiential view of the environment, as "driving the course of human development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797), which is referred to as "dynamic forces" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797). A person's experiential qualities are emotionally and motivationally loaded – for example, through "love and hate, joy and sorrow, curiosity and boredom, desire and revulsion, often with both polarities existing at the same time but usually in differing degrees" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) acknowledge that there are "more object" forces, next to the experiential forces, and emphasise that both are interdependent and affect each other (p. 797).

Environment – a set of Russian dolls. In relation to the Person component, a person's characteristics are twofold: they are one of the four components influencing proximal processes, and they are a developmental outcome – a producer and a product (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798).

Further, a person is developing within a series of complex and interactive systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The systems are the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems in which the person's environment and their interactions with the environment are conceptualised. The theory emphasises the many levels of influence on a person, and thus how human development is inseparable from the environmental context in which it occurs. A person's ecological environment is regarded as "a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22).

Microsystem. The microsystem, also referred to as the “center of gravity” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1013) has the most immediate influence on the individual. It includes the family, friends and peers, the school community, and other factors such as neighbourhoods, and groups the individual might belong to – for example, social groups like sport clubs.

During adolescence, the peer influences increase as they provide relevant rewards to the adolescent in the form of “acceptance, popularity, friendship and status” (Rice & Dolgin, 2005, p. 41). From within this microsystem, aspects such as the sense of belonging to a school community emerge, as well as a range of personal beliefs and values linked to the person’s search for identity. In comparison to Bronfenbrenner’s earlier work, published in the book *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979), the bioecological model represents the “mature” (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009, p. 198) form of the model in that it incorporates parents’, relatives’, friends’ and teachers’ characteristics and their impact on the microsystem, linking it closer to the biopsychosocial person at the centre of the theory.

Bronfenbrenner rejects any deterministic perspective on a person’s development as he produced a model in which the person and the environment change as a result of each changing over time. Consequently, a person is not viewed as an individual who is a passive recipient of external factors. Applying Bronfenbrenner’s model as a lens, I considered the participating adolescent students not as being “propelled along the life course by external forces” (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 509) but as having an “active, purposeful role of the individual in helping to shape his or her developmental trajectory” (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 509). It follows the same thinking that student engagement is believed to not be an attribute but “an alterable state of being” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. v) that is malleable (Appleton et al., 2008; M. Wang & Degol, 2014; M. Wang & Eccles, 2013; M. Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

Mesosystem. The people and objects in a person's immediate environment, the microsystem, are connected to create the mesosystem. It is defined as "the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). Examples would be the relations at home and school settings for students, and the relations at work and at home for adults.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) state that a mesosystem consists of two or more microsystems and represents the reciprocal relationships between the interactions of the individual – for example, the "frequency, quality and influence of interactions" (Rice & Dolgin, 2005, p. 41) between family members, peers, teachers and other members of the microsystem. In examining the influences on a young individual, it is crucial to not only look at the quantity of factors involved, but at the quality of the relationships between the factors.

Exosystem. The exosystem includes factors that influence the person's development without the person being actively involved:

The exosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives. (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 24)

The workplace of the students' parents and or their friendship groups, or the school classes of an older sibling are examples of the exosystem, as well as decisions made by the school board that the student may not experience firsthand, but that nevertheless influence the student. As Kail and Cavanaugh (2016) put it, "although the influence of the exosystem is no more than secondhand, its effects on human development can be quite strong" (p. 13). For example, media is an exosystem factor that can influence students' attitudes to school by the way it is portraying academic achievement and engagement in learning.

Macrosystem. The macrosystem consists of “the ideologies, attitudes, morés, customs, and laws of a particular culture that influence the individual.” (Rice & Dolgin, 2005, p. 41). It is said to be the “blueprint” that influences the interactions occurring in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). It includes the core values of a nation in relation to educational, economic, religious and social aspects. For example, regarding the developmental stage of adolescence, “the macrosystem determines who is an adult and who is an adolescent” (Rice & Dolgin, 2005, p. 42) and forms the foundation for stereotypes and norms regarding, for example, socially accepted standards of attractiveness and youthfulness.

Chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner’s original ecological model (1979) did not separately define as such the temporality in human development, but his later work did with the inclusion of the chronosystem.

The chronosystem is the contextual level that includes the consistencies and changes in a person’s life – for example, personal and or historical aspects such as changes in the family home or society more broadly (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). The Time component is prominent at three ecological levels – the micro-, meso-, and macro-level, with the following definitions:

Microtime refers to continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal processes. *Mesotime* is the periodicity of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks [...] *Macrotime* focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796).

The bioecological model enriches the theoretical framework on which my research approach is based, as it emphasises the importance of the dynamic relationship between the person and the context and stresses the reciprocal nature of that relationship- the person affects the context, and the context affects the person. Applying the discussed aspects of the model to act as my theoretical lens allows me to identify the relevant environments and encounters within the students’ lived experiences of positive attitude change that enabled positive attitude change and the re-engagement in learning, and thus increased the chances for better educational and personal outcomes.

The dimensions of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), the dimensions of the applied narrative inquiry

methodology, and the social constructionist epistemology aligned with each other, and with the aim of this research, to examine how the experience of positive attitude change to school is lived out by adolescent students.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter I have represented my theoretical framework by outlining the applied qualitative paradigm for this study, and by positioning myself as the researcher within a social constructionist approach to knowledge creation. As the theoretical lens to examine the phenomenon under study, positive attitude change, I have discussed Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

In Chapter 4, I discuss the suitability of the narrative inquiry methodology to address the research aim and the research questions of the study.

Chapter 4

The Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Overview

Having outlined the theoretical framework for this research study in the previous chapter, I introduce in this chapter the narrative inquiry methodology on which my research approach is based. I explore the narrative inquiry methodology as being best suited to my research questions and objectives, with primary consideration being given to the work of Clandinin and her colleagues, who were pioneers in using narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016), and I discuss how I draw on this work to examine positive attitude change to school in adolescent students. All aspects of my research were related to the narrative inquiry methodology and aligned with its research traditions.

In the first section of this chapter, I identify narrative inquiry as a particular methodological framework within narrative research. I then outline what narrative inquiry is and how it is being used to study the experience of positive attitude change, stating the ontological and epistemological commitments of narrative inquirers. In examining narrative inquiry in relation to my research, I further discuss ways in which I addressed the given design considerations for this methodology.

What Is the Narrative Inquiry Methodology?

Narrative inquiry is the applied methodology that was used for this research study. Methodology can be described as the “strategy or plan of action” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7), which directs the choice and application of methods, and links the chosen procedures to the desired outcome. The qualitative paradigm presents “the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The two research questions addressed factors that influence the experience of positive attitude change and the meaning attached to such an experience in adolescent students, and in order to investigate that experience, I selected the narrative inquiry methodology, as it honours lived experiences and views them as a source of knowledge (Clandinin, 2016, p. 17; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42).

Narrative research methodologies have been developed partly on the work of J. Bruner (1985), according to Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk (2017). J. Bruner (1985) made the distinction between paradigmatic knowledge and narrative knowledge, with the former applying a “logico-scientific reasoning process” with the end goal being generalisability, and the latter emphasising the temporality of knowledge that was derived from studying human experiences. Social researchers caused a “narrative revolution” (Clandinin et al., 2017, p. 90) in the 1980s when they rapidly adopted narrative research to understand human experiences

The popularity of the narrative research approach resulted in ambiguous meanings of the term *narrative* and the concept of narrative research (Clandinin et al., 2017). Clandinin et al. (2017) present the differing scholars’ definitions of narrative – for example, the terms *story* and *narrative* are used interchangeably; research approaches are grouped into “small stories” (for example, ongoing or upcoming events) and “big stories” (for example, autobiographies), and “narratives are viewed as both ‘an interior based phenomenon’ and as ‘social actions’ as well as embodied experiences” (p. 90). To address this definitional issue, I have outlined the ontological and epistemological stance on which the chosen narrative inquiry approach is based, as one approach to narrative research (Clandinin et al., 2017), together with the key design considerations that significantly shape this research study as a narrative inquiry.

I adopted the following definition of narrative inquiry for the research study:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people’s lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Narrative inquiry methodology encompasses both the view of the phenomena of experiences and the methodology for narratively inquiring into experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This methodology enables an “intimate and in-depth” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 166) study of the experience of positive attitude change and distinguishes itself within the field of qualitative research through its specific focus on the studied experiences as narrative phenomena, as well as the relational engagement between

researcher and participant and, consequently, the relational ethics of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. The entire research process has been guided by this definition of narrative inquiry, commencing with the formulation of the research question, or “research puzzle” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 42), and the identification of potential participants. Data collection and analysis then follow, with the presentation of the students’ narratives of their experiences of positive attitude change the final phase.

The definition has at its core the relational aspect of narrative inquiry:

The relational between the person and his/her world; a temporal understanding of the relational between past, present, and future, including the relational in intergenerational; the relational between person and place; the relational between events and feelings; the relational between us as people; the relational between physical world and people; the relational in our cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives; and so on. (Clandinin, 2016, p. 23)

Narrative inquiry, as a relational research methodology, shifts thinking about stories, to thinking with stories (Clandinin et al., 2017).

As a researcher applying the narrative inquiry methodology, one is collecting stories about an individual’s experience of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013), and “these lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 35). A collected story is considered to be co-constructed by the participant and the researcher as the story emerges through a collaboration between the speaker and the listener; it evolves through further questions or prompts from the listener – in this case, the researcher – and through original input from the storyteller, the participant (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell, 2013).

As mentioned previously, narrative inquiry does not only focus on individual experience:

It is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Narrative inquirers study the individual’s experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, and writing and interpreting texts. (Clandinin, 2016, p. 18)

Who a person is and how they see themselves is connected to the different narratives simultaneously happening around the person (Creswell, 2013). For example, social narratives give insight into the interactions an individual had and has with the environment, and the cultural narratives provide a framework as to how that environment is defined/constructed; personal familial narratives shape the inner environment of a person and can come in waves of generational change; the linguistic narrative connects with the way (the “how”) stories are told and the use of language in interactions between people. Thus, different individuals can have different narratives in their lives, and narrative inquirers capturing stories “need to inquire into all these kinds of stories, stories that have become intertwined, interwoven into who we are and are becoming” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 22).

Examining a person’s narrative of a specific experience, such as the examination of positive attitude change in this study, the relationships between time, place and social interactions need to be identified and analysed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both the participant and researcher develop relationships with these aspects of narratives. As mentioned previously, narrative inquiry is a relational methodology, whereby the researcher is applying a *metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space* of temporality, place and sociality (see Table 2); in other words, narrative inquiry represents “people in relation studying people in relation” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 23). The inquiry space helps the researcher to engage with the experience under investigation and defines what it means to be “thinking narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 47):

Temporality draws attention to the past, present and future of events and people, with a focus on them as always in process. Place draws attention to the particularities of where inquiry and life events take place. Sociality refers to the inward and outward focus on a person’s desires, aesthetics and moral reactions, as well as on the existential conditions, that is, the environment and contextual factors. (Clandinin et al., 2017, p. 90)

The inquiry space evolved from the need to view the participant’s life holistically (Clandinin & Huber, 2002) and aligned with Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) emphasis on the different ecological systems that impact on an individual at any given time and place; the resulting theoretical lens is thus compatible with the methodological approach. The three narrative inquiry dimensions are explained in Table 2.

Table 2

The Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space Modified from Clandinin and Connelly (2000)

Dimension	Features
Temporality	Past, present and future: Events and people always have a past, present and future, and a narrative inquirer aims to understand them not as a status quo, but as “always in transition” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 44).
Place	Situational context: Specific boundaries (physical and topological) of the inquiry landscape. “Place directs attention to places where lives were lived as well as to the places where inquiry events occur” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 544).
Sociality	Personal and social interactions: A person’s internal conditions – for example, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. Existential conditions, the environment and surrounding factors and forces, and people, that form the individual’s context (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) include other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view (Creswell, 2014)

Despite me following Clandinin’s (2016) conceptualisation of engagement in narrative inquiry, Riessman and Speedy (2007) point out that “narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a twentieth-century development; the field has ‘realist’, ‘postmodern’, and constructionist strands, and scholars and practitioners disagree on origin and precise definition” (p. 429). Narrative inquiry has similarities with other qualitative inquiries – for example, the focus on the social aspect within ethnography and the capturing of stories in phenomenology (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In addition, a range of analytic methods of narrative analysis exist (Creswell, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008a). However, the narrative inquiry methodology is distinct. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define the three dimensions of the narrative inquiry space as so-called commonplaces for narrative inquiry. In qualitative inquiry, an investigation into one or two of these commonplaces may take place, but what is particular to narrative inquiry is that it investigates all three commonplaces simultaneously (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The commonplace of temporality implies that a person or event or object is not being described as such, but is being described, dependent on time with its components of the past, present, and future (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The aim is not to state that

a person is “such and such a way, but rather, say that a particular person had a certain kind of history, associated with particular present behaviors or actions that might be seen to be projecting in particular ways into the future” (p. 479). Many other forms of qualitative research ask of the researcher to state accounts independent of time, which is not applicable to narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Regarding sociality, personal conditions and social conditions are attended to by narrative inquirers. Another dimension of sociality that is addressed within narrative inquiry is the relationship between the researcher and the participant given that narratives are co-constructed. Distinctive to narrative inquiry is the aspect of relationship:

Narrative inquirers, particularly in living studies, are in relationship: negotiating purposes, next steps, outcomes, texts, and all manner of things that go into an inquiry relationship. Inquiry questions and texts are ones in which inquirers give an account of who they are in the inquiry and who they are in relation to participants. In contrast to the common qualitative strategy of bracketing inquirers out, narrative inquirers bracket themselves in to an inquiry. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480)

Identifying the place is crucial to narrative inquiry. It is also vital that the narrative inquirer not generalise; Connelly and Clandinin (2006) argue that generalising implies freeing oneself of the particular and special place. A place can be a school, home, community, or a social service agency; it can be one or a multiple of places, and a narrative inquirer needs to acknowledge and consider the impact of the place on the inquiry and with that on the “happening” (p. 481) of the phenomenon under investigation. Relevant to this inquiry in particular is the place of the school to examine the “happening” of attitude change. The social dimension primarily focuses on the participant’s relationships with significant others who are considered to be influential in the attitude change. Temporality emphasises that the phenomenon under study has a past, present and future and in the case of my research study that involved participants reflecting on their experiences before and after the attitude change. The inquiry space allows the researcher to “travel *inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place*” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49, emphasis in original).

Stories and experiences. The analysis of a story or narrative can be undertaken in various ways (Creswell, 2013). The narrative inquiry methodology often emphasises a part of the story (Creswell, 2013), depending on the research questions. It may be a crucial moment of an experience – for example, factors leading up to it, or the consequences of it. Focusing on the experience of positive attitude change, I emphasised the individual and contextual factors of the attitude change, in that I stressed the personal, chronological and situational aspects that led up to the change. I examined what may have influenced or triggered such an attitude change in the adolescent student and identified the individual and contextual factors that were relevant to facilitate and enhance a change in attitude. Consequently, a thematic analysis was appropriate. A structural or dialogic analysis would not have been suitable for my research questions, as I was not investigating *how* the participating students told their story of positive attitude change, nor was I examining the story from the perspective of its audience or purpose (Creswell, 2013). The data analysis approach is described in Chapter 4.

At any given point in time, a person is engaged in interactions with the world they live in and has dialogic interactions with others as well as themselves, and experiences are formed out of these interactions. Experiences can be very complex, and in order to better grasp their complexity, a strategy of breaking down the experiences lived into “meaningful units” (Moen, 2006, p. 58) can be applied. The creation of meaningful units facilitates the analysis of parts of the event by organising components into a personally meaningful order and hierarchy of importance that enables a more effective meaning-making process to be developed of the lived event/experience. A meaningful unit can be a story, as storytelling comes naturally to people, and everyone is engaged in listening and telling stories on a daily basis. As Moen (2006) puts it, “for most people, storytelling is a natural way of recounting experience, a practical solution to a fundamental problem in life, creating reasonable order out of experience” (p. 58).

Adolescents experience an increased complexity when it comes to school in Year 10 as they have to make choices for their Year 11 and 12 directions, as was previously described in the literature review. When they undertake work experience and part-time work, they are experiencing significant developmental changes and their schoolwork is set within a stricter structure – for example, the requirement of passing exams to advance. The students’ narratives of their positive attitude change highlight narratives that intertwine with one another and thus represent a bigger picture of the adolescent

student than just their attitude to school. This enriches the results and puts them into a more holistic context of positive attitude change. A questionnaire cannot do that and neither can observations made in the classroom.

Narrative research is about capturing narratives of individual experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as “lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other’s help in building our lives and communities” (Clandinin, 2006b, p. 44). As Clandinin (2006b) states, “there is hope in narrative inquiry methodology to change the stories people live by, for the better, by creating appropriate conditions for people to (re-) compose other stories of themselves” (p. 52). Examples of that are stories that include more optimism, identify available opportunities, or have a greater sense of community.

Clandinin’s (2006b) work focuses on enabling a change, together with the participants, by conducting a narrative inquiry where conditions for the re-composition of stories are present (2006). This links to my approach of viewing the students’ stories of positive attitude change as personal success stories, and making sure that they knew I considered their stories that way. I created conditions for re-composition during the interviews when I opened up space/time for reflections; I did so when I prompted the students to address my opinions and or comments from my vantage point as well as by sharing something of my personal experiences of positive attitude change with them.

The Ontological and Epistemological Commitments of Narrative Inquirers

The research aim was to explore ways in which adolescent students lived out their attitude change to school and to explore the impact of that attitude change on student engagement from the vantage point of the adolescent student. In considering the methodology and method drawn upon for my research, I needed to consider the kind of knowledge that would likely be generated and ways in which to consider that knowledge production. It is that concept that led to the exploration of the ontological and epistemological positioning of myself as the researcher.

Narrative inquiry has at its core the exploration of experience, and the “thinking of experience as a story” (Clandinin et al., 2017, p. 90). The applied inquiry approach is based on the pragmatist scholar John Dewey’s (1938/1997) philosophy that people’s

experiences are at the centre of efforts to understand people as presented in Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) study. According to Dewey (1938/1997), experience has two criteria – “interaction and continuity enacted in situations” – and, based on these criteria, the concept for narrative inquiry has been developed with its three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.

Narrative inquirers attempt to understand past experiences in order to understand present and future experiences, as Dewey (1938/1997) states that experiences are continuous, whereby one experience leads to another (Creswell, 2014). Dewey (1938/1997) also states that experiences are interactional, whereby the situation influences a person's experience. These two principles of experience “provide the grounding for attending to a narrative conception of experience through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, place, and sociality” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 12).

Narrative inquiry is predicated on the belief that humans lead, individually and socially, “storied lives”:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

In response to a growing interest in narrative as a methodology, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) worked on distinguishing between the philosophical stance and the terminology of narrative inquiry: “Narrative has ... come to refer to almost anything that uses ... stories as data, narrative or story as representational form, narrative as content analysis ... as structure, and so forth” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 11). Working with the narrative inquiry methodology implies that the researcher has adopted a “particular” ontological and epistemological stance, which describes the way experience is being understood and inquired into (Clandinin, 2016, p. 13).

As a narrative inquirer, I focused on a narrative way of thinking of experience; in applying the narrative inquiry methodology, I viewed the experience of positive attitude change as a phenomenon under study through a particular lens. In line with Connelly and Clandinin (2006), I viewed my participants as “[shaping] their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories”; the

students were leading “storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). My philosophical view of experience aligns with Clandinin and Rosiek’s (2007) Dewey-inspired conception of experience in that it “does not refer to some precognitive, precultural ground on which our conceptions of the world rest. Instead, it is a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (p. 39).

Narrative inquiry is “the study of experience as story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375) and thus provides a “particular” way of thinking about experiences. As argued by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), what grounds the work of narrative inquirers and distinguishes it, for example, from terms such as *narrative research* and *narrative analysis*, are the Dewey-inspired features of their “particular” view of experience, in that it is “relational, continuous and social” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 17).

This ontology focuses on the temporality of knowledge generation, viewing experience as “more than we can know and represent in a single statement, paragraph or book” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Narrative inquiry views experience “as composed and lived over time, as studied and understood as a narrative phenomenon and as represented through narrative forms of representation” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 15). The narrative inquiry methodology consists of the collaboration between participant and researcher, and it is thus a relational approach. Continuity depicts that:

Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to future experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum – the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future – each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

As a narrative inquirer, one is consequently “within a stream of experience that generates new relations that then becomes a part of future experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). The social dimension represents “a confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41).

In summary, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) argue that Dewey’s conception of experience represents a transactional ontology, as it “does not refer to some precognitive, precultural ground on which our conceptions of the world rest. Instead, it is a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our

personal, social, and material environment” (p. 39). As outlined by Clandinin and Caine (2012), the following also adds to the philosophical underpinnings of narrative inquiry:

Bruner’s (1986) ideas (psychology) about paradigmatic and narrative knowing, Carr’s (1986) ideas (philosophy) about the narrative structure and coherence of lives, Bateson’s (1989, 1994) ideas (anthropology) about continuity and improvisation as a response to the uncertainties in life contexts, and Coles’s (1989) ideas (medicine) about narrative in life and teaching practice. (p. 168)

The narrative inquiry methodology is in line with social constructionism, where knowledge is viewed as a creation, not a discovery (Schwandt, 2003), and the applied theoretical lens to this study, through which the individual and contextual factors of human experience are viewed in relation to the individual’s ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Applying this methodology specifies that “the focus ... is not only on individuals’ experience but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 12). It is a relational methodology: “in all the ways that [the] Dewey-inspired view of experience makes visible; that is, it is relational across time, place, and relationships” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 19).

The identified knowledge gap revealed by the literature review implies that the area of adolescent students’ attitudes to school and the process of an attitude change is under-researched and under-theorised. I began this inquiry with the stories of positive attitude change and not with preconceived notions of how those experiences may have come to be. This starting point, following the ontological and epistemological commitments described previously, was particularly appropriate in addressing the identified knowledge gap.

The narrative inquiry methodology begins with a participant’s stories of their experience, and not the theoretical understanding of the experience under study. As exemplified by Clandinin et al. (2017), the narrative inquirer’s starting point lies in the experience of participants and “not in theoretical understandings” (p. 94). This argument concludes that a theoretical understanding “would have allowed us to create a questionnaire or semi-structured interview protocol” (p. 94). Despite also starting with the participants’ experiences, I was, however, able to identify meaningful questions for the semi-structured interview process that was applied as part of this study’s research method, which is outlined in Chapter 4. As described later, the questions were only used

as a helping tool to learn about the experience under study, and were not a requirement for the data generation process.

Narrative Inquiry Design Considerations

Due to narrative inquiry being a relational methodology, the inquiry process can be described as being rather “fluid”, instead of being “structured into defined process steps” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 33) or having a “lockstep approach” (Creswell, 2013, p. 73) because the methodology is “open to where the stories of participants’ experience take each researcher” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 33). The field of narrative inquiry is complex and diverse, and the narrative inquiry approach is not confined to one definition or one specific approach (M. Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Riessman, 2008b), but is primarily limited to the developed research question(s), or the “research puzzle(s)” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 42). Consequently, there is “no one way of engaging in narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 168).

In this narrative inquiry, positive attitude change was the investigated phenomenon, which is a “storied” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 34) phenomenon, consisting of the “living, telling, retelling and reliving” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) of the participating adolescent students’ “live” stories that shaped them, and that are happening at the point of the inquiry. The participants “told” their stories of their experiences of positive attitude change to school, and I applied the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space in order to understand their stories and the meaning the participants attached to their experiences (Clandinin, 2016). As presented by Clandinin (2016), my inquiry into the students’ lived and told stories, led me to “retelling” those stories, and by doing so, new and/or modified stories were created with new and/or modified social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives. As a consequence, change did occur in both the participants’ lives and my life, and thus there was a “reliving” of the adolescent students’ stories about the experience of positive attitude change they had to school.

Despite there not being a singular approach to narrative inquiry, design considerations need to be acknowledged and implemented to ensure that the core ideas and requirements of narrative inquiry are being addressed and followed through. The design considerations, as stated by Clandinin (2016), were implemented for the narrative inquiry undertaken for this research study. The inquiry included seven aspects that served

as the guiding tools for the narrative inquiry, defined at the beginning of this chapter, and were pivotal in the reflexive and reflective practice of narrative thinking that was undertaken for this study (Clandinin, 2016; Creswell, 2013). The design considerations were as follows: (1) Research puzzle; (2) The “midst”; (3) Field texts; (4) Interim research texts; (5) Research texts; (6) The Relational (including the ethical considerations for this research study); and (7) The positioning of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016, p. 42).

As I applied the definition of narrative inquiry developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I found the design considerations were applicable and suitable for my research. The next section outlines how I carefully attended to these seven design considerations and the methods I used to implement them into my research.

1. Research puzzle. Clandinin (2016) puts forward the notion that narrative inquiry is “composed around a particular wonder” (p. 42) and argues that this wonder cannot, or should not be, limited to a precise definition within a research question but be framed as a *research puzzle*.

In my study, as evident from the literature review, I do not have expectations of an answer to the “wonder” of how positive attitude change may be lived out by adolescent students, and thus I am staying open minded to the wonder of the experience under study despite having developed a guiding research question with two subsidiary questions as stated in Chapter 1. The research questions are not focusing on a defined research aspect but are open in that they focus on capturing the experience and its impact on student engagement levels and student wellbeing. I have no preconceived ideas as to what may influence such an experience, and what meaning students may attach to it. I believe the research questions are in line with representing narrative inquiry as “markedly different from other methodologies” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 43) and describe a research puzzle as the questions fit the definition of the research puzzle to have “a sense of a search, a re-search, a searching again” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124).

The research puzzle in my study, framed by the research question and its two subsidiary questions, highlights the personal, practical, social, and theoretical justifications of this study, as it is expected to do (Clandinin, 2016). As already suggested, the research area of Attitudes to School focuses mainly on quantitative research that addresses clearly defined research questions (for example, analysing

correlations or gender differences), and little is known regarding the area of positive attitude change to school in adolescent students, whether in relation to quantitative or qualitative research. Within the current literature, there are no defined variables to examine the phenomenon of positive attitude change in adolescent students, but my research questions were the core of the research puzzle that I was investigating, which was the experience of positive attitude change together with my theoretical framework for this inquiry. My aim was to capture experiential knowledge in order to identify the meaning given to that experience by the participants themselves (Clandinin, 2016).

Practically, this study has provided great insight into adolescent students and has enhanced the teaching and learning approach to adolescents by addressing a clearly identified knowledge gap in the relevant literature. Theoretically, it has shed light onto Bronfenbrenner's (2005) model of human development and its application to attitude changes in adolescent students as positive developments, and has therefore identified further research that should be undertaken in this under-researched and under-theorised field of inquiry. This inquiry is justified through the development of methodological and disciplinary knowledge (Clandinin, 2016) as a starting point for future narrative inquiry research with adolescent students and as a foundation for the topic area of student engagement through attitude change. The justifications stated are not static but are being revisited throughout the inquiry and shared with the participants to further "clarify, substantiate, or shift" them (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 167).

My research questions were framed broadly enough to have allowed for flexibility within the research puzzle. The purpose of this research was to embark on a new search rather than re-search dynamics between already identified and existing variables (Clandinin, 2016). The research questions helped guide that new search by positioning three sign poles onto the phenomenon under study.

2. The "midst". The collaboration of researcher and participant starts in the *midst* of life happening for both, and ends in the *midst* of life continuing for both (Clandinin, 2016), and "We restory earlier experiences as we reflect on later experiences so the stories and their meaning shift and change over time" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 9).

Narrative inquiry starts in the *midst* of the researcher's life, and the participants' lives, and "Their lives and ours are also shaped by attending to past, present, and future

unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 43).

Before the inquiry begins, the researcher’s background needs to be reflected on as an autobiographical inquiry (Cardinal, 2010; Chung, 2008, as cited in Clandinin, 2016), as it relates directly to the research puzzle, and impacts on the inquiry at all of its stages. Narrative inquiry is a methodology that is continuously reflective and reflexive, and it asks the researcher to think about their own experiences to positive attitude change before starting an inquiry, when the research is happening, and after the inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). The autobiographical aspect is a starting point that composes the beginnings of narrative inquiry and impacts on the personal, practical and theoretical justifications of the research and the research puzzle (Clandinin, 2016). As presented in Chapter 1, this research study was driven by the desire to be able to provide a “helping hand” to disengaged students who present a negative attitude to school. My own experiences also shaped this narrative inquiry.

I had imagined my participants in the narrative beginnings, the adolescent students in Year 10, to be a certain way; my understanding of them was shaped by the literature review and my experiences with my former Year 10 students. The research participants were in the midst of their Term 4 when I embarked on the data generation process. They participated in work experience during Term 3 for a duration of one week and were approaching their exam period when the interviews took place. Preparations for their Ball at the end of the year were in progress, and there was general excitement “in the air” towards that, which was also mixed with general stress and anxiety towards the exams. I was considering their and my “personal, social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives” in preparation for meeting my participants in the midst of all of our lives (Clandinin, 2016).

As narrative inquiry always “begins and ends in the midst of ongoing experiences” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 44) for the researcher and participant:

We negotiate relationships, research purposes, transitions, as well as how we are going to be useful in those relationships. These negotiations occur moment by moment, within each encounter, sometimes in ways that we are not aware of (...) [and or] in intentional, wide awake ways as we work with our participants throughout the inquiry. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 47)

Clandinin and Caine (2008) emphasise how important the negotiations of exit and long-term relational responsibilities are, but in my case these two negotiations were out of my control. The circumstance of me conducting research on adolescent students at a public high school, who are a vulnerable group, led to a clearly defined exit and no option for a long-term relationship as that would be seen as inappropriate. My inquiry was limited by time and the institutional ethics; nevertheless, having built a rapport with the students during the inquiry, I farewelled them, stating that I would be back to present the online survey results, as requested by the principal, as well as the findings and recommendation of the narrative inquiry to the staff.

3. Field texts The term *field texts* refers to the collected data; however, it carries with it the intention to emphasise that the collected data is not objective but experiential and intersubjective (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Further, a relational inquiry space is negotiated between participant and researcher, and this is referred to as the relational field, according to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000).

In narrative inquiry, there is a range of ways to collect, compose and develop field texts (Clandinin, 2016). Field texts encompass field notes, interview transcripts, artefacts and photographs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study composed field texts from semi-structured interviews in the form of interview transcripts and field notes. Field texts are, by nature of the narrative inquiry, "co-compositions" (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 167) that have been created from the relationship between the researcher and the participant and "are reflective of the experiences of researcher and participants" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 46). The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space requires both to acknowledge in the co-composition of the field texts that the interpretation process of past experiences is taking place from within the present (Clandinin, 2016).

When composing or creating field texts, the researcher is working within the three-dimensional inquiry space. I have thus created a three-dimensional profile of each student to assist in the identification of the three dimensions. Table 3 is an example of such a profile.

Table 3

Narrative Inquiry – Three-Dimensional Profile of Max

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	
Initial struggles to understand and accept sexual orientation conflict; couldn't be who he wanted to be; feared being himself; did not act on his desire to move schools; accepted the bad situation; didn't challenge it; didn't want to bring down the "good family name" that the older brother was holding at school.	Felt unsafe at school due to bullying; surrounded by "mean people"; concerned with other people's opinions of him and his family; not wanting to disappoint the parents; not wanting to socially interact to protect personal self.	"Hated" being at school; skipped classes; sat in the counsellor's office to avoid interactions with others; preferred isolating himself from peers.	"Loves" being at his new school; gained "maturity" to cope with every day "moods" and developed coping mechanisms to maintain positive attitude to school.	Gained "bigger picture" regarding school and life after school; looks forward to the future now that he can be himself and is respected by peers for who he is; he feels empowered.	Being gay at an all-boys' school; the brother holding a "high name" for himself at the school and thus the pressure to support and/or protect that in Year 7 Max already wanted to move, but it took him three years to move; the older brother had to graduate first for Max to change schools; feeling loved and supported by the family; caring environment at home versus "dangerous environment at school.

The field texts present how the adolescent students made sense of their experience of positive attitude change; they were “independent” of the final research texts, in that they stood alone as stories that had been lived and told. What becomes of them, in the form of final research texts, is the “retelling” of the participants’ stories (Clandinin, 2016). An important aspect of my research was that the *participant’s voice* needed to be heard. Narrative inquiry facilitates the participant to tell their story, and by doing so, provides them with their voice. This does not require the researcher to be silent, but the intention is to give the participant “the time and space to tell her or his story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). In the research relationship, space needs to be mutually created for both voices to be heard as “narrative inquiry is, however, a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4).

My voice needed to be heard when I was requesting that the participants understand “where I was coming from” with the questions I would be asking during the interview. I also wanted to include praise and a “positive vibe” to the experience of discussing the attitude change, and I did so by exclaiming praise and awe, for example, when the participants described the initiatives they had taken towards improving their personal circumstances in relation to their personal wellbeing and/or academic achievement. In line with Clandinin and Caine (2012), who point out that

“conversations”, as data generation methods to compose field texts, should not have “the intention to be therapeutic, resolve issues, or answer problems” (p. 167), I consider my praise was a relational responsibility within this narrative inquiry. This aspect is further discussed in the subsequent section entitled The Relational and Ethical Considerations.

During the interviews I also made field notes. For example, I noted down how students reacted to my praise. After transcribing the interviews, I integrated my field notes into the transcripts as side notes on the page margins of the relevant text segments. In this way I combined both data sources into one field text.

4. Interim research texts. Field texts develop into *interim research texts*, which are intended to be shared with the participants before drafting the final research text (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The intent is for the participant to be able to “check” their story for accurate content, to add more content, and/or to negotiate the multiplicity of possible interpretations (Clandinin, 2016). With regard to the aspect of *co-composing* narratives, such negotiations are crucial to narrative inquiry.

An examination of the interim text by the participant and a dialogue between the researcher and the participant regarding the interim research text enables the authenticity of the text to be scrutinised as well as assess how compelling it is (Clandinin, 2016). In following narrative inquiry tradition, Clandinin (2016) encourages researchers to convey the potential *struggle for coherence* by both parties when writing and reviewing the interim research text:

We must, in composing, co-composing, and negotiation of interim and final research texts, make visible the multiplicity, as well as the narrative coherence and lack of narrative coherence, of our lives, the lives of participants, and the lives we co-compose in the midst of our narrative inquiries. (p. 49)

To address this design consideration, I created interim research texts in the form of brief summaries that focused on the experience that was being studied after the first round of interviews. As I was developing the summaries, questions emerged regarding certain aspects of the participants’ stories, which I then included in the list of questions for the second round of interviews that followed. These questions referred to *points of importance* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10) for the story, which directly addressed the research questions and the coherence of the story.

I also considered the “silences and white spaces”, as described by Clandinin (2016, p. 208), in preparation for the summaries. The silences in relation to this study referred to those times when the participants did not reveal details of something in particular, when questions were not raised regarding unclear statements, and/or when participants did not want to tell certain stories of certain times and places related to the experience under study. Clandinin (2016) points out how important these silences can be for the final research texts and encourages researchers to reflect on how these silences can be included into the texts, and whether or not the “white spaces” in the research texts convey the meaning of the silences and the gaps appropriately. In taking into account this design consideration, the summaries addressed some of these silences in an effort to initiate further elaborations and self-reflections during the round of second interviews.

Due to the time limitations of the research study, and the consideration of the school schedule and exam period for the students, there was not an opportunity to go through an interim research text with each participant as recommended by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). I worked around this by creating brief summaries of each student’s positive attitude change, which I presented to them verbally at the start of their second interview; an excerpt of such a summary with its points of importance and questions for is represented in Figure 1.

<p>Summary of positive attitude change – Kate</p> <p>Friendship fallout in Year 8 → worries and fears of being friendless; “obsessive worrying” resulted in disengagement in learning, and “hating school.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive attitude change was linked to her mother and older friends giving advice on friendship matters; change in perspective on the friendship fallout/ consideration of continuous dwelling on the subject matter to be a “waste of time”.• <u>Questions:</u><ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Why did feelings of “hate” emerge towards school?○ When and how was advice sought from significant others?

Figure 1. Excerpt of points of importance and associated questions.

During the second interviews so-called “consultations” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10) ensued over relevant aspects derived from the field texts; the participants discussed the summaries and gave answers to the questions posed and elaborated on the content, giving more depth and width to the story and providing more nuance and detail. When the second interview occurred, new field texts were created, and with that, new input for the development of the final research texts. Two weeks separated the first and second interview rounds, and the timeframe seemed convenient for the students because they seemed to easily remember details of the conversations and what aspects of positive attitude change had been shared and discussed with me. From my point of view, two weeks were not sufficient to critically analyse the field texts from each student; however, it allowed for a thorough review of the content and the identification of relevant points of importance for the second interview.

Clandinin and Caine (2008) describe it as being well-served, when one, as a narrative inquirer, seeks out a community diverse in perspectives on the research in order to be able to interrogate aspects from the interim field texts so that one’s understanding is broadened and a greater perspective is gained before attempting to create the final research texts. Acknowledging this consideration, I sought out a community, which due to the nature of the research puzzle, more often than not, communicated also through storytelling regarding individuals experiencing attitude changes in secondary or tertiary settings, and thus enriching my understanding of such an experience. Interesting explorations of meanings took place, and fortunately, “sometimes new wonders become visible” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 50).

Stepping out of the close relational field work with participants in order to compose research texts to present the narrative inquiry to a larger audience can be tension filled (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) because the researcher keeps exiting and re-entering the field, and “there is a fluidity and excursiveness as inquirers compose research texts, negotiate them with participants, compose further field texts and recompose research texts.” (p. 48). However, for me the process was shortened given that I was only able to negotiate the summaries once due to time restraints and then work independently on the research texts. Fortunately, the second round of interviews was very helpful in negotiating meanings of interpretations and providing further coherence of the participants’ narratives, which enabled me to feel confident in addressing this design consideration in full.

As Carr (1991) states:

Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unit of self, not as an underlying identity but as life that hangs together, is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeeds totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are. (p. 97)

In summary, despite not having written interim research texts as described by Clandinin (2016), I wrote summaries of each positive attitude change and verbally presented them to the participants, in order to address content and coherence, and chronology and relevance. It worked well as students became more content about their positive attitude change and provided more detail that addressed the two research questions of the study (in relation to influences on the experience and meanings attached to it). The process returning to the participant with an interim text (even in the form of a brief summary of the field texts) was validated by the students feeling respected; their stories were taken seriously and they were carefully listened to. The summaries, brief as they were, included examples of their words, and I saw glimpses of satisfaction when I read quotes out to students or referred to a detail they mentioned. I believed it was due to them feeling empowered by this research in a way to have a voice and to be heard.

5. Research texts. As discussed, the idea of narrative inquiry is based on field texts that are shaped into interim research texts, which are discussed with the participants and then transformed into final research texts. For their composition, the researcher keeps the “public audiences” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 167) in mind. The purpose of the research texts in the narrative inquiry methodology is for the reader “to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 51). Relevant to my study, the purpose of the research texts was to initiate self-reflection for the teachers and educators who worked with the disengaged adolescent students, and who thrived in their support of these students to change their attitude to school for the better and consequently re-engage in learning.

After analysis of the field notes and the interview transcripts from the second round of interviews, the question emerged of how to most effectively tell a story with a

given purpose. When the final research texts were being developed, the personal, practical and theoretical justifications described earlier were reflected upon (Clandinin, 2016) and “[the] hope is to create research texts that allow audiences to engage in resonant remembering as they lay their experiences alongside the inquiry experiences, to wonder alongside participants and researchers who were part of the inquiry” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 51).

As Clandinin (2016) argues, there is no “final story” (p. 206) and no one way to write the research text. However, to enable a deep complexity of attending to lived experiences, “research texts need to reflect the narrative quality of the experiences of both participants and researcher and the ways these stories of experiences are embedded within social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives” (p. 207).

The narrative inquiry methodology is laid out to be three dimensional and represent the connections between the dimensions as well as the relationship between the researcher and the participant at all times, and thus also in the final research texts (Clandinin, 2016). When developing the research texts, the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space continues to guide the reflective and interpretative process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that the inquiry space allows the researcher to “travel inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place” (p. 49), as mentioned earlier, and:

It is only as we attend simultaneously to all three dimensions that we can come to understand in deeper and more complex ways the experiences relevant to our research puzzles. Only through attending to all dimensions can we see the disruptions, interruptions, silences, gaps, and incoherences in participants’ and our shared experiences. (Clandinin, 2016, p. 50)

When developing the research texts, I applied the three-dimensional inquiry space to the field texts to see inward into the personal factors associated with the experience of positive attitude change and outward to examine the social interactions involved; both perspectives were examined over the time sphere of the participants’ past, present and future, and with consideration of the situational factors (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Returning to the notion of research puzzles, Clandinin (2016) argues that “final research texts do not have final answers because narrative inquirers do not come with questions” (p. 51). I argue that for my research study, the research questions helped shape the research puzzle, with the research texts addressing these questions and

providing insight into the eight answers that were based on the eight narratives of the experience of positive attitude change to school. I hope teachers and educators will “wonder” about these answers and the insight they provide. I also hope that the research texts will initiate reflection upon teaching and learning approaches for adolescent students.

Moen (2006) refers to Ricoeur’s (1981) theory to understand the process of research texts, arguing that:

The narrative that is fixed in a text is ... an “open work” where the meaning is addressed to those who read and hear about it. Looking on narrative as an open text makes it possible to engage in a wide range of interpretations. (p. 62)

Consequently, the applied narrative inquiry methodology has an inherent ongoing interpretive process that does not end with the research text itself (Moen, 2006).

Next to the design considerations stated by Clandinin (2016) regarding research texts, the following aspects of the researcher’s subjectivity and *multi-voicedness*, and the invitational quality of the research texts, were addressed in the study design as well.

Subjectivity and the multiple “Is”. In narrative inquiry, researchers need to focus on presenting their subjectivity and be transparent as to how and to what degree it affects the research project and its results as well as the presentation of the results. The researcher’s subjective approach to the experience under study is inherent in the narrative inquiry methodology, which is made visible to the audience through the required reflection process by the researcher upon the experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

It is included in the research as an autobiographical part that composed the beginning of this narrative inquiry as well as the justifications for it (Clandinin, 2016), as described earlier. Peshkin (1988) argues that subjectivity in research is inevitable and should be “sought out” (p. 17) from the beginning of a research project and not retrospectively, “to enable researchers to be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their inquiry and its outcomes” (p. 17). The consideration for subjectivity is in line with the narrative inquiry design considerations stated by Clandinin (2016). Peshkin (1988) identified six “I’s” when searching for his subjectivity, and the I’s related to ethics, community, justice, and the individual itself (The “Nonresearch Human I”) in his work. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that the researcher becomes *plurivocal*

(Barnieh, 1989, as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Relevant to this research was the ‘I’ as a researcher and the ‘I’ as a teacher; however, Peskin (1985) points out that even with a chosen dominant voice, one cannot anticipate fully which ‘I’ will be in charge “because of the unknown and the unexpected aspects of the research field, we do not know which of our dispositions will be engaged” (p. 270). Naturally, the different voices can only partly be restrained from impacting the chosen dominant one as the experiences associated with the different I’s are interwoven.

Writing the field texts and the interim field texts, the researcher is assumed to be plurivocal – for example, as the researcher and/or teacher, parent, policymaker, curriculum developer and/or theory builder (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Complementing this view, Peshkin (1988) clarifies that subjectivity needs to be identified and addressed in research studies, stating “I do not thereby exorcise my subjectivity. I do, rather, enable myself to manage it – to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome – as I progress through collecting, analysing, and writing up my data” (p. 20). In contrast to “taming subjectivity” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20), narrative inquiry, as defined in this study, went further in that it invited subjectivity to the co-composition process of writing narratives of the experience under study (Clandinin, 2016). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasize that:

In narrative inquiry we see that the practices drawn out in the research situation are lodged in our personal knowledge of the world. One of our tasks in writing narrative accounts is to convey a sense of the complexity of all the “I’s” all of the ways each of us have of knowing. (p. 10)

However, considering the complexity of a range of voices involved in the inquiry, according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the researcher has the responsibility to assign a dominant voice to develop the research texts. There is a distinction between the lived story as such (where the participant and the researcher have a collaborative relationship), and the research story (where the researcher steps out of the collaborative relationship to use the dominant researcher “I”). The researcher is required to tell the research story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as a story that goes beyond the lived narrative in order to address the research puzzle.

Invitational quality. One criteria of a research text as a successfully retold narrative is the invitational quality of its text (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), whether or not it invites the reader to participate in the understanding of the participant's story and thus the experience that has been lived. Peshkin (1985) focuses on the idea of inviting the reader to be where the researcher was and hear what the researcher heard and consequently see the final narrative story as a summary of ideas, which are "candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone [the] Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries" (p. 280).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) refer to Crites (1989) and Guba and Lincoln (1989) for the criterion of a "good narrative" (p. 8). Crites (1989) judges a narrative as "good" if it invites the reader to participate instead of staying passive. Guba and Lincoln (1989) share a similar view in that narratives may be read and experienced vicariously by others. In order to make a narrative have a perceived invitational quality, the reader needs to connect with it, and for a connection to be established, particulars of the story need to be present rather than generalities (Tannen, 1988, as cited by Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) because details evoke emotions and associations and allow for told aspects to feel authentic to the reader (H. Rosen, 1988, as cited by Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Inspired by these authors, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) present a "test" for assessing the invitational quality of a text in the form of the following question: "What do you make of it for your teaching (or other) situation?" (p. 8).

This invitational quality of the research texts was particularly relevant to my study and to me as the researcher because it linked directly to the justifications stated in that the purpose was to encourage teachers to reflect upon their practice and adolescent students' engagement in learning.

6. The relational and ethical considerations. Narrative inquirers interrogate knowledge through relational and participatory ways (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Narrative inquiry engages in participants' lives, and the relational ethical responsibilities are at the core of the interactions with the participant (Clandinin, 2016). Clandinin (2016) says that one must "try hard to negotiate ways in which we can be helpful" (p. 51).

Narrative inquiry impacts on participants and researchers, and it needs to be acknowledged that "neither ... walk away from the inquiry unchanged" (p. 51). This

aspect was particularly relevant to my research study as the research participants were under aged and therefore were a vulnerable population group. At the core of narrative inquiry is the relationship between the participants and the researcher, and the fact that relationships are also “a central way of making sense of the temporal and contextual aspects of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 167).

Within the relational process, “negotiations” occur in the form of continuous dialogue between the participants and the researcher to allow for equal engagement and commitment for both in the ongoing relationship. Negotiations require an “attitude of openness” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 169) from both. The relational way of working together with the participant in narrative inquiry is guided by relational ethics and ethics of everyday life (Charron & Montello, 2002), which are founded on ethics of care (Noddings, 1984); key aspects are commitment and respect in order to enable co-composition and negotiation of the living, reliving, telling, and retelling of stories as outlined by Clandinin and Caine (2012).

In the following section, I outline the ethical issues I considered when conducting my qualitative research and focus on the ethical considerations that I took into account for this research study, where relational ethics are at the heart of narrative inquiry.

Key ethical concepts. The following are key ethical concepts in qualitative research as discussed by Hays and Singh (2012), which include the six standard morals: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity and veracity.

In relation to autonomy, the right to choose to participate or withdraw from research without penalty was clearly stated in the parent/guardian and student Plain Language Information Statements (PLIS) for this study, which also included information regarding the purpose and aim of this study (see Appendix C and Appendix D); both aspects were repeatedly emphasised at relevant points throughout the inquiry process.

The principle of “do no harm” (non-maleficence) refers to being alert to participants’ reaction to the research; researchers are “invading their privacy and potentially inducing reactions such as anxiety, stress, or sadness [and] ask much of their time and energy” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 79). The experience of positive attitude change to school, the subject of my research study, also involved the sharing of negative attitudes to school and their impact on students’ wellbeing, and I understood that I

needed to be particularly alert to the emotions the interviews may generate in the students, and allow these emotions to guide the interviews and the application of the interview questions. I was able to follow up on the participants' wellbeing after both rounds of interviews through the mediating role of the Year 10 course coordinators, and I emphasised the available support at school and outside of school to the students if at any time during the interviews they were experiencing distress.

The element of "doing good" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 79) for participants was particularly relevant to me in relation to the underlying message for my research of a positive attitude change being a success story in itself. The intention was that the students would gain something valuable from their participation in this research study, and I worked towards ensuring the participants acknowledged my reflections and praise of the success stories they were sharing with me. When these adolescent students finished participating in this research study, I wanted them to have a success story to tell as well as know that their stories were going to be transformed into a larger research story that would benefit other students who have had similar school experiences.

Relevant to this narrative inquiry, justice is addressed by representing students' voices as perspectives that are being valued and not applying the findings to unsuitable other groups (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Fidelity and veracity both refer to being honest and valuing the relationship. They are interwoven elements: "we cannot build a strong, trusting researcher relationship if we are not truthful with participants" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 80). This statement directly aligns with the narrative methodology being a relational methodology and having the relationship with the participants at its core. My research intentions and my understanding of the experience under study were clearly explained to the students in the PLIS, and in my interactions with them, I would provide time during the interviews for them to ask questions about the research and my position in it. I also encouraged questions by directly asking the participants if they had any issues they would like me to clarify.

Ethics approval. In order to conduct this research inquiry, I required approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of Federation University Australia (see Appendix A), and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (see Appendix B). I placed particular emphasis on the aspect of “informed consent” in that I clearly and in plain language outlined information about myself as the researcher, the study’s purpose, the extent of participation, the limits of confidentiality relevant to this research design as well as the potential risks and benefits to the student participants, which included constant emphasis on the voluntary nature of their participation. I also clearly stated that no remuneration would be provided to the students for their participation as they were under aged, and that they would not be coerced in any way.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out, ethical matters “shift and change as we move through an inquiry” (p. 170), and do not conclude with relevant ethics applications. They draw on the works of Lopez (1989, as cited in Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018) and Coles (1989, as cited in Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018) to help convey the fundamental notion that relational ethics are critical to the narrative inquiry methodology. Lopez (1989) conveys the aspect of caring in the following way: “If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive” (as cited in Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018, p. 1). Coles (1989) further adds the aspect of respect, stating “their story, yours, mine – it’s what we all carry with us ... and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (as cited in Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018, p. 2). In relational ethics, respect for stories is equal to respect for people’s lives. The ethical considerations for qualitative research are implemented in the narrative inquiry approach in the form of relational ethics that reflect the following aspects, as outlined by Clandinin, Caine, and Lessard (2018):

The necessity of engaging with imagination/ improvisation/ playfulness/ world-traveling; the necessity of moving slowly in ways that allow for listening and living; the necessity of ethical understandings as always in process, in the making with wide awakesness to ongoingness of experience; the necessity of always engaging with a sense of uncertainty and not knowing that acknowledges living ethically as living within liminal spaces that position us in places of dis/ease; the necessity of understanding that ethical relations are always lived embodiments, that ask us to be still and to attend carefully to, and with, silence and with contemplation. (p. 14)

These dimensions are fundamental to the ontological and epistemological commitments of narrative inquirers as previously outlined and align with Josselson's (2007) definition of ethical attitudes for narrative inquirers.

Regarding the school where I conducted my research, I have followed the notion of "giving back" in terms of ethical researcher behaviour by presenting my research findings several times to different groups of staff members and teachers to provide them with the knowledge that I had gained from this study. An idea for future research emerged from this study, which indicates a "win-win" situation for the school and myself as the researcher – in other words, a mutually beneficial situation.

7. Positioning of narrative inquiry. As evident in the relational aspect of narrative inquiry previously discussed, it is a specific approach to research. As outlined by Clandinin and Caine (2012), narrative work is linked to traditions of narratology, narrative analysis and life writing, where the focus is on the structure and content of stories, and the data generated in the form of textual units is viewed as independent from the experience under study.

Despite the underlying ontological and epistemological positions of such approaches differing from those of narrative inquiry, they are viewed as informing the work of narrative inquirers. Clandinin and Caine (2012) further emphasise how the works of Josselson (2006), Mishler (1991) and Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) remain important to the development of the narrative inquiry methodology. As Chase (2011) rightly stated in line with Clandinin (2006, 2016), narrative inquiry is "still a field in the making" (p. 421). (For more on the positioning of narrative inquiry and its "borderland spaces and tensions", see Clandinin and Rosiek [2007]).

Regarding the design consideration for the narrative inquiry methodology – the positioning of narrative inquiry – Clandinin (2016) distinguishes this approach further in that she argues that the work of narrative inquirers does not align with some forms of qualitative research that aim to solely identify common themes, or to confirm existing taxonomies or concepts, without the presence of the narrative account of the experience under study. The reason being that the knowledge developed is "textured by particularity and incompleteness – knowledge that leads less to generalizations and certainties ... and more toward wondering about and imagining alternative possibilities" (p. 52). The Deweyan view of experience by which narrative inquiry is inspired also shapes this

research methodology ontologically and epistemologically in particular ways, and thus shapes the borders of narrative inquiry within qualitative research (Clandinin, 2016).

With my applied research design, I have a modified view on the positioning of narrative inquiry. I view the identification of themes as compatible with narrative inquiry as defined in this study and as a preparation tool for the development of the research texts as further described in the section on data analysis in the following chapter. It is one additional layer of reflexive and reflective practice, which provides the researcher with further insight into the participants' narratives and thus provides a better understanding to interpret field texts and develop final research texts. I agree with Clandinin and Murphy (2007) that generalisations and certainties are not the end goal of narrative inquiry and are not the answers to the developed research puzzle; however, the identification of themes had a purpose in my research. As presented by Creswell (2014), themes refer to similarities "aggregated together to form a major idea in the database" (p. 623), and I viewed them as beneficial to the inquiry, and thus embarked on identifying themes in the field texts when the participants' narratives were analysed.

Considering the previously outlined design considerations, together with key aspects of qualitative research, I thus positioned myself as a narrative inquirer adhering to the framework for conducting sound qualitative research and quality narrative inquiry research. I viewed both fields' criteria as compatible and that the combination of both research traditions would enhance the research rather than limit it.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter I have outlined the narrative inquiry methodology, including the ontological and epistemological commitments for narrative inquirers and the methodology-specific design considerations. I have justified that the usage of this methodology was the best suited approach to my research aim and question as well as addressing the research puzzle of how a positive attitude change could occur in adolescent students.

In Chapter 5, I outline and discuss the research design for this study, which was based upon the theoretical framework and choice of methodology detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 5

Research Design

Overview

In the previous chapter, I described the methodological approach I used to examine the phenomenon under study – the experience of positive attitude change to school in adolescent students. This chapter describes the research design including the methods, data collection and analysis, together with a justification for selecting the particular research tools. It further discusses research rigour and the research limitations of this study.

Introduction

The aim of this research was to identify and examine the experience of positive attitude change to school, the factors that influenced the change as well as the meaning that students attached to it. This chapter describes the design of the research and the ways in which the data were generated, collated and analysed. As previously stated in Chapter 1, the key research aim relates to the experience of positive attitude change to school being lived out by adolescent students. The two subsidiary research questions were as follows:

1. What or who can influence and or trigger positive attitude change to school?
2. What is the meaning attached by adolescents to the experience of positive attitude change to school?

Research Context

Following approval from Federation University Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee and the Victorian Department for Education and Training Victoria to embark on this study, I contacted three school principals in the local area to ascertain their interest in participating in the research study and one school accepted the invitation. This research was undertaken in a co-educational secondary government school (years 7–12) that had an enrolment of over 1000 students. The school is situated in a regional area of Victoria. It was important for me as a researcher to develop and maintain a positive, respectful and trusting relationship with the school – the principal, the teachers and the

students – which would enable me to understand the culture of the school and gain a broader and deeper appreciation of the learning environment. The principal was encouraging and supportive of the research. I wanted to work with the school to achieve more than just the data collection. To ensure this happened, I visited the school on many occasions and discussed the progress of the research with the staff.

The research was undertaken with Year 10 students who were completing their fourth year of secondary schooling.

From 140 students in the Year 10 level, 118 students agreed to participate in an initial online survey that had been adapted from the Australian Council for Educational Research in October 2017 (ACER, 2017). Following the collation of the survey results, 39 Year 10 students self-identified as students who had experienced positive attitude change, and using the purposeful sampling method (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002), these students were invited to participate in the follow-up interviews. This was important as it is essential that participants involved in narrative research must have a lived experience of positive attitude change in order to give a detail-rich account of it.

Of the 39 students, eight agreed to be interviewed. Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002) enabled me to identify a sample population for my study, and the online survey became the tool to identify the research participants. All the students present on the days of the online survey being conducted were provided with a PLIS and the informed consent package (see Appendix E) as part of Federation University Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee's protocols and procedures.

As previously stated, the online survey was based on the ACER Attitude to School Survey instrument with the School Life Questionnaire (SLQ) scale (ACER, 2017), together with 15 additional questions specific to this research study's context. The additional questions particularly focused on school-specific aspects – for example, the school's support services. Permission to use the ACER survey was sought and granted via email. The online survey captured the students' attitudes to school and provided an insight into students' experiences at school (see Appendix F). The survey's purpose was therefore twofold: first, it was a sampling method for my narrative inquiry; and, second, it was a data collection method to measure the overall Year 10 cohort's attitude to school and provide insight into the additional questions to enrich understanding. This

quantitative online survey data enabled a numerical representation of the adolescent students' attitudes to school.

Students were identifiable on the survey through their student identification number. The final question on the survey became the immediate tool for purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002) because it asked the students directly whether or not they believe they had experienced positive attitude change to school (see Figure 2).

Read the following text and then proceed to statement number 57 about your approach to school and indicate whether you agree or disagree that the statement is correct in your case, or whether you don't know, by ticking the appropriate box.

Attitude can be described as "liking or disliking" something, and this study plans to examine your attitude to school, learning, and education in general. We all might know someone in high school, who used to have a really negative attitude to school, disliked everything about school, and then managed to change his or her attitude to a positive attitude towards school and consequently did better at school, reached personal goals and understood the value of education for his or her future. This would be called a positive attitude to school change.

* 57. During secondary school, I experienced a positive attitude change. I have changed my attitude to school, from having a negative attitude and disliking most aspects of school, to having a positive attitude and wanting to do well at school.

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

Figure 2. Extract of the online survey for purposeful sampling.

According to this sampling method, the potential sampling population would consist of all the students who answered "agree" to this question, and were thereby identified as individuals who had experienced positive attitude change. The sample size in qualitative research is relative to the research goals and traditions (Creswell, 2013), which in the narrative inquiry methodology varies from having one participant to a number of participants (Clandinin, 2016). In my study, demographic factors were not considered in addressing the research questions, and consequently, it was not the intention to create a diverse sample. I wanted to have a collection of stories to work with given that I was interested in how adolescents' stories of positive attitude change to school were similar to each other and how they differed. My objective was to identify the themes and patterns from these students' experiences.

Table 4 provides an overview of the research study and includes identification of the data source, the type and number of participants, the date/s the data was collected and the rationale for collecting specific data.

Table 4

Data Set, Timeline and Rationale for Data Collection

Data Source	Participants	Date	Time	Rationale
Phase 1 – online survey	118 students in Year 10	27 July to 1 August 2017	15 minutes	Online survey provided a large data set and enabled me to complete purposeful sampling of the cohort.
Phase 2 – Semi-structured interview (1) Field notes	8 students in Year 10	23, 25 and 26 October 2017	One hour	Addressed primary research question (How is the experience of positive attitude change to school and learning being lived out by adolescent students?).
Phase 3 – Development of interim research texts		27 October to 10 November 2017		Development of interim research texts in the form of brief summaries of each student’s positive attitude change; identification of points of importance (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) that required further clarification in Interview 2.
Phase 4 – Semi-structured interview (2) Field notes	8 students in Year 10	14 to 16 November 2017	20 to 25 minutes	Addressed subsidiary research questions (1. What or who can influence and or trigger positive attitude change to school? 2. What is the meaning attached by adolescents to the experience of positive attitude change to school?); “consultation” and discussion of relevant aspects (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).
Phase 5 – Data collation and analysis		November 2017 to February 2018		Transcription of the interview recordings, theme analysis, development of eight research texts and identification of resonant threads (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Survey results – two significant findings. As described in Table 4, the survey was used in this research primarily as a purposive sampling strategy to identify students who had experienced a positive attitude change to school. In addition, the analysis of the survey data revealed interesting results and provided acute insight into the Year 10 cohort's attitudes towards school based on the given survey instrument. However, to incorporate the complete survey results into this study as background information to the Year 10 students' environment of the participating students was beyond the scope of this research.

Therefore, the survey results were planned to be published in the form of an article separate to this thesis. However, due to its direct significance for this study – examining adolescent students' attitudes to school – the following survey results are represented as contextual information for the eight narrative accounts of positive attitude change. The answers of “strongly agree/disagree” and “agree/disagree” were combined into “agree/disagree”:

First, in relation to “General Satisfaction” with school, 62 per cent of the Year 10 cohort could not agree to positively phrased statements regarding general schooling experiences – for example, referring to getting enjoyment from being at school; second, the item “Negative Affect”, which consisted of statements referring to feeling depressed, restless, lonely, or worried, revealed some profound insight. Only 49 per cent disagreed to experiencing such feelings at school, and 16 per cent strongly agreed to school being the place where they felt depressed. Further, from the total of seven survey items (General Satisfaction, Teacher, Relevance, Success, Status, Social integration) the item Negative Affect had the smallest number of students stating that they were “neutral” towards the item's statements, which indicated that the students felt strongly about their emotions at school and were well aware of them.

Semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews, also referred to as in-depth interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012), generated the data, which was audio-taped and transcribed.

I conducted each of the eight interviews, which also included field notes. I initiated each interview by asking questions regarding the student's hobbies and interests, and then asked them to reflect on their school experience in terms of personal highs and lows and other events relevant to them – for example, achievements in sport. I inquired

about the student's attitude before and after the change as well as their level of engagement. I also asked them, with the assistance of guiding questions, about the actual attitude change process itself, and their outlook on their future, taking into account the positive change they had experienced and its anticipated impacts.

Narrative inquiry researchers aim to transform the relationship of the researcher and participant to one between the narrator and listener, which requires a change from asking the participant to generalise (as often done in qualitative research), to asking them to be specific when telling their story (Chase, 2011). Narrative researchers need to have a certain skill set that combines emotional maturity, sensitivity, and life experience (Clandinin and Murphy, 2007), and be able to move from using a set structure for the interview in order to let participants' stories guide the interview process (Chase, 2011). The interviews followed the notion of "conversations" (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 167), whereby the content is shaped by both the researcher and the participant.

Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to speak openly about their experience, to comment on it whenever needed, and to work with and or alongside the interview questions to present different aspects of the experience. The semi-structured interview process was considered the most suitable tool for this narrative inquiry because "the sequence and pace of interview questions can change, and additional interview questions can be included to create a unique interview catered to fully describing the interviewee's experience" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 239). In keeping with narrative inquiry principles, the semi-structured nature of the interviews did not impose on the students' lived experiences but provided a guiding tool for the re-telling of the experience (Maxwell, 2005).

The first interviews with the participants focused on the primary research question (How is the experience of positive attitude change to school being lived out by adolescent students?) and the ancillary questions were formulated to assist in exploring the major question – "What happened in order for positive attitude change to occur?" – and the notion of making sense of the experience. Examples of these ancillary questions were "How would you describe the attitude change?" and "How did that change evolve?" The two subsidiary research questions (1. What or who can influence and or trigger positive attitude change to school? and 2. What is the meaning attached by adolescents to the experience of positive attitude change to school?) were addressed in the second round

of interviews. (Appendix G details the full list of questions for both the first and second round of interviews.)

I asked the students to imagine an awards ceremony and visualise a stage where the awards were being handed out to the recipients as they stood in a line of importance that reflected the impact they had on the experience of positive attitude change. I then directly asked them who they would nominate, and in what order, to receive an award for support and thus be placed on the imaginative stage. The students were further asked to rank events in order of importance in relation to the greatest influence on positive attitude change, including aspects such as professional counselling and/or conversations with trusted others (directly addressing subsidiary question 1).

Audio-taping and transcribing of interview data. All of the semi-structured interviews were audio-taped and transcribed (Metzler, 1997). The rigour of the transcript is determined by the researcher terms of what is being transcribed, what is being omitted, and how it is being presented in text form, and thus “the final transcript is far from a neutral, comprehensive, and directly transferable indicator” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 258) of the actual generated data. Figure 3 is an extract from a transcribed interview.

Question 2: Perceived involvement in positive attitude change

Interviewer: Who would you say was involved in your attitude change?

Participant: Definitely, like my family, and then the friends that I made here, coz they've been like a big help, just forgetting about what happened. (2, 5:01)

Question 3: Award ceremony

Interviewer: If you could give out an award for the best support you received in regard to the attitude change, who would you want to give it to and why?

Participant: Probably my mum, coz like she was the one who kept going like to the school, was kind of just like there to try and help me through it ... she would like go and speak to the head teachers, kind of like see what they were doing about it, and she went to other places to get advice on what to do. (2, 6:27)

Figure 3. Extract from a transcribed interview (second interview, S).

I transcribed the audio recordings, which enabled me to become significantly familiar with the interview data, including the content and tone. The transcription of the interview data allowed for data immersion. I included utterances made by participants,

and transcribed their statements verbatim (including slang and incorrect grammar such as “gonna” for “going to”) in order to capture a faithful representation of the spoken word in written form. Member checking, which underpins narrative inquiry in the form of co-composing interim research texts into narrative accounts, is the process of consultation with the participant to confirm the accuracy of the generated data in the form of field texts (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). When the member checking of the co-constructed research texts was completed, the information was shared with the participants during the second round of interviews. This provided the opportunity to clarify and confirm the transcribed content with each participant.

Development of interim research texts. Following Phase 2, Interview 1, interim research texts were developed in the form of brief summaries of each student’s positive attitude change, based on the audio-recordings and field notes. These interim research texts included points of importance regarding the experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), which needed to be further clarified and discussed in Phase 4, Interview 2. As described in the previous chapter, interim research texts are intended to be shared with participants in order for them to check the developed narrative of their positive attitude change for accurate content and understanding (Clandinin, 2016). Such co-composing of narratives is crucial to narrative inquiry. In the case of my research study, the texts consisted of summary points of each student’s positive attitude change, which were discussed in Interview 2.

Participants were not provided with an actual written document of their narrative of positive attitude change for checking of content due to students’ time restrictions. The opportunity to discuss the interim research text during Interview 2 appeared to be the more effective approach to check my understanding of the students’ experiences of positive attitude change and enable the students to rectify and add content to further clarify their experiences.

Data Analysis

Narrative data analysis and interpretation is a meaning-finding act through which we attempt to elicit implications for a better understanding of human existence. (Kim, 2015, p. 190)

My analytic goals were threefold:

1. To showcase the students' personal expressions and understandings of their experience of positive attitude change to school in order to present how the attitude change has been lived through by each student (addressing the primary research question).
2. To make sense of their perceptions of positive attitude change: to identify who and or what may have influenced the positive attitude change and identify the students' meanings for it (addressing the two subsidiary research questions).
3. To apply the theoretical lens: to compare and contrast the theoretical lens, the PPCT model, to the students' narratives.

Goals 1 and 2:

Goals 1 and 2 were accomplished by re-telling the students' narratives of their positive attitude change and presenting them as each participant's individual research text. In order to identify who and or what may have influenced their experience of positive attitude change, I examined the sections in the narrative pertaining to the imaginary award ceremony as previously described. In order to identify the meaning of positive attitude change for each student, I applied an analytic process to identify the sections in the narratives that addressed the perceived meaning the experience had for each of the students. I systematically organised the sections into the following categories: (a) references to the meaning of the experience of positive attitude change, as directly and or indirectly stated by the student; (b) links to the student's interpretation of it and the sense-making process of it – lessons learned from the experience; and (c) references to its value or significance for the students' wellbeing and engagement in learning. Both goals were accomplished with Step 1 and Step 2 of the analysis. The eight research texts are presented in Chapter 6.

Goal 3:

Goal 3 was accomplished with Step 3 of the analysis, whereby the theoretical framework was used to analyse the participants' narratives in terms of the PPCT model. The outcome of this analysis phase is presented in Chapter 7.

Stories are not found, they are made. Stories are being retold through the researcher's analytic redescriptions and "through our concepts and methods – our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives – we construct the story and its meaning" (Mishler, 1995, p. 117) together with the storyteller (Clandinin, 2016). The individual narrative research design and purpose needs to be addressed by the chosen data analysis method; this can be achieved by adapting and modifying existing analysis methods (Kim, 2015). In narrative research, there is a range of different analysis approaches to field texts (Clandinin, 2016; Kim, 2015). The primary goal for narrative inquiry is to continue *thinking narratively* regarding experiences within the three-dimensional inquiry space.

The general aim of narrative inquiry analysis is "to create research texts that allow audiences to engage in resonant remembering as they lay their experiences alongside the inquiry experiences, to wonder alongside participants and researchers who were part of the inquiry" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 51). In the case of this research study, three approaches to data analysis were adopted, which produced a combined effort to gain a deep understanding of the narratives at hand:

- Step 1: Development of themes in preparation for Step 2 and 3
- Step 2: The writing of research texts and the identification of resonant threads
- Step 3: The application of the theoretical lens to participants' narratives

Step 1: Theme analysis. Narrative research is characterised by seeking to analyse participants' narratives by retelling them, together with identified themes or categories of information (Creswell, 2014). The analysis requires to situate the narrative within a contextual and personal setting whereby information is chronologically analysed in regard to the past, present and future (Creswell, 2014). In narrative inquiry, this setting is the metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space for narrative research, where information about personal interactions, continuity and situation are included in the retelling of the participants' narrative, as described earlier (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Clandinin (2016) addressed Gergen's (2003) warning that some methods that focus on coding and theme identification may negatively impact on the narrative thinking

given that the aim is to dissect and categorise (Clandinin, 2016). I acknowledged that aspect in that I engaged in theme identification *in preparation* for Steps 2 and 3 of the analysis and not as the sole analysis approach in order to enable a deeper and more sophisticated level of familiarisation with the interview transcripts.

In Step 1 I adopted the general approach of data analysis for qualitative data in order to transform the “messy” (Kim, 2015, p. 185) data into meaningful stories. I identified themes from the transcript data as a way to further familiarise myself with the data and enable a thorough understanding of the generated data. In line with Kim’s (2015) standing, narrative researchers are foremost qualitative researchers, then narrative inquirers, and I aligned with this principle throughout my research study.

Development of codes and themes. The data generated from interviews, like other data in qualitative inquiries, can be analysed into themes through coding, as “the identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences” (Creswell, 2014, p. 513). I began the analysis with a preliminary exploratory examination, in which I re-read the interview transcripts several times to familiarise myself with the data. I wrote brief memos on the transcripts after having become “intimate with data” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 157), or, as Kim (2015) puts it, “flirting” (p. 186) with the data. As explained by Kim (2015), flirting in the field of psychoanalysis and Freud’s work indicates a free-floating attention or free association (Phillips, 1994), and “the idea of flirtation asks us to undo our commitment to what we already know and question its legitimacy” (Kim, 2015, p. 187). Flirting with the data indicates a process in which the researcher is open minded and does not know where the analysis will lead to and what the outcome will “look like”; it refers to distancing oneself as the researcher from literature related to the subject, preconceived ideas and/or anticipated findings. The process is driven by surprise and curiosity, and that “allows us to dwell on what is unconvincing, uncertain, and perplexing, rendering surprises and serendipities, and of course, disappointments as well” (Kim, 2015, p. 187).

After exploring the general sense of the data and allowing associations to freely occur I then predominantly applied Creswell’s (2014) procedure to initiate the coding process. In line with Creswell’s (2014) suggestions, which are based on his previous work (2013) and Tesch’s (1990) coding recommendations, my intention was to “get a sense of the whole” (p. 243) with regard to the phenomenon under study. Reading the

transcriptions carefully, I considered the “underlying meaning” in each participant’s narratives about the experience of positive attitude change. Sentences that “fitted together” (Creswell, 2014, p. 246) in that they represented one idea were bracketed into text segments (see Figure 4). I then coded these text segments with codes such as “positive/ negative emotions”, “lack of confidence”, “lack of perceived autonomy”, “lack of experience to approach a problem”, and “negative impact on concentration in class or friendship groups”.

I grouped similar codes and identified redundant codes so as to not “overcode” (Creswell, 2014, p. 244) the data. With a smaller number of codes, I then identified the strongest quotes from the transcripts to support each code, using the participants’ own words. Following Creswell’s (2014) suggestion, I reduced the number of codes and I developed themes representing a “major idea” (p. 244) from the transcripts that are frequent, unique, surprising, and/or expected). Themes such as “emotional engagement”, “support network”, and “coping mechanisms” were developed. Figure 4 shows a section of a coded interview transcript with initial themes and or ideas derived from the coding process.

Broadening, burrowing and restorying. In line with the narrative inquiry tradition, I further implemented Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) three analytic tools of “broadening, burrowing and restorying” (p. 11), to what Kim (2015) refers to as “narrative coding” (p. 207). Broadening refers to making generalisations for character or social descriptions – for example, relevant to my research was the question: “What sort of person and student are you?” when reflecting on each participant’s “character, values, way of life” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11). Burrowing refers to a process of concentrating on the experience under study, with the “focus on the event’s emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11) and analysing “why the event is associated with these feelings and what their origins might be” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11). Restorying refers to the analysis process where the significance of the lived experience has been identified and represented. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that the significance arises from asking a question that is related to:

what the meaning of the event is and how he or she might create a new story of self which changes the meaning of the event, its description, and its significance for the larger life story the person may be trying to live. (p. 11)

All three analytic tools described are relevant to the analysis of the data to address the research questions.

Codes	Transcribed interview content	Themes/ideas
<p>Positive emotion</p>	<p>Participant: <i>I don't know, I went from a dark place to like a happy place; my brain's at the moment a sunnier place, you know, it's not dark anymore.</i> (2, 1:00)</p> <p>Interviewer: <i>And what made it dark?</i></p>	<p>Emotional engagement</p>
<p>Stress Lack of confidence Feeling</p>	<p>Participant: <i>I think it was just stress, a lot, and I was like, all these built-up emotions.</i> (2, 1:45)</p> <p>Interviewer: <i>And how did that make you feel?</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>I wasn't confident at all ... when I had no confidence at all, I didn't go out anywhere, so I was like "I don't feel good, so I'm not gonna go out and do anything"; I felt really crap.</i> (2, 2:00)</p> <p>Interviewer: <i>Not even with good friends?</i></p>	<p>Negative emotions about situation and oneself</p>
<p>Negative impact on friends</p>	<p>Participant: <i>Ahh, I think it was just like a lot of effort, having to go out with them. Even if they were good friends, because they still wanna go out and do things, coz they're not really in that dark place, it was just me. So I felt like I didn't want to bring them down, so I just stopped myself from going out.</i> (2, 2:14)</p> <p>Interviewer: <i>Did it help to isolate yourself?</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>I think it helped with people around me, I suppose. I think it helped other people more than it helped me coz I was such a downer, and I don't think people like being around downers, you know. So I think it helped them more than it did me.</i> (2, 2:20)</p> <p>Interviewer: <i>And did it help you at all?</i></p>	<p>Friendships/ support network</p>
<p>Worries Anxiety Concerns</p>	<p>Participant: <i>I think it gave me a lot of thinking time, yeah, so I could think about, you know, what I'm gonna do to change, everything.</i> (2, 2:29)</p> <p>Interviewer: <i>What were you thinking about?</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>I was trying to distract myself half the time, like watching TV, being lazy, not doing anything, being in my room half the time, in the dark; it wasn't really good. I don't know, I tried to stop thinking about everything, but ... I was worrying about everything ... worrying about, I don't know, just, the whole having to socialise, like when I have to go back to school. I was worrying that I have to socialise again and talk to people and, you know, I put on a happy face; it was very stressful ... I was worried that I have to do that for a very long time, even though that's not how I felt at the time.</i> (2, 3:42)</p>	<p>Idea: ineffective coping mechanism – isolation</p> <p>Negative emotions about situation and oneself</p>

Figure 4. Example of transcript analysis: codes and themes (second interview, A).

Step 2: Research texts and the identification of threads. In addition to the development of themes for the transcript data as described by Step 1, my analysis of the narratives has two more procedural levels: first, I developed research texts for each participant's story of positive attitude change, which are presented in the next chapter; and second, the simultaneous analysis of the eight narrative accounts took place by "metaphorically laying them alongside one another" or "cross-reading" the accounts and analysing whether or not and to what degree there are "resonances or echoes" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 132) that reverberate across the eight narratives of positive attitude change.

Development of research texts. Inspired by the work of Clandinin et al. (2010), who examined the experience of 19 early school leavers as to "how their lives shaped their leaving of school and how leaving school shaped their lives" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 104), I developed research texts with the objective of presenting how the positive attitude change to school shaped the student participants' lives and school experiences as described in the previous chapter.

I moved from field texts to interim research texts by negotiating meaning with the participants during their second interviews and providing them with a "sense of mutuality" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 132) in the creation of the research story as described within the design considerations. Clandinin (2016) describes how the term *narrative account* reflects the work done to the interim research text in that its content is negotiated with the participant, until he or she feels that it is an account that represents "something of who they were and were becoming" (p. 132) as "in our use of the term *narrative account* we strive for a sense of being morally responsible to each other and to our negotiated relationships as well as to our negotiated texts" (p. 132, emphasis in original). After relevant points of importance had been clarified and elaborated on in Interview 2, the research texts were developed as narratives of positive attitude change to school in adolescent students.

Development of resonant threads. After developing the research texts, I "looked across" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 132) the eight narrative accounts of positive attitude change "to inquire into resonant threads or patterns" (p. 132) that could be identified.

This was compatible with the idea of theme identification that was described in Step 1, following Creswell's (2014) approach. However, Clandinin (2016) rightfully emphasises that it is not congruent, and that resonant threads are not themes due to the

positioning within the three-dimensional space when looking across the narrative accounts and not detaching oneself as the researcher from the text or dissecting the text into separate parts. In narrative inquiry, looking across attempts to initiate the opening of new “wonders” (Clandinin, 2016, p. 132) and questions in relation to the research puzzle.

I identified five resonant threads and additional sub-threads, which are outlined in Chapter 7.

Step 3: Application of the theoretical lens. The third step in the analysis approach addressed the third analytic goal where I applied the theoretical lens to the data. After I identified the relevant components of each student’s experience of positive attitude change, I discussed them in relation to the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and examined if and to what extent the components were congruent with the model’s theory. I analysed the content into components related to the individual person, their environment, and the interactions the person engages in throughout a certain period in time.

Ensuring Research Rigour

To validate the accuracy of research findings, suitable evaluation criteria need to be identified (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative research, the criteria applied vary depending on the research emphasis; however, fundamental qualitative standards are based on the three ideas concerning philosophy, procedures and participation (Creswell, 2014).

Key criteria for rigour. Relevant to my research study were Richardson’s (2000) participatory and advocacy criteria as they address key design considerations for narrative inquiry. Richardson’s criteria refer to the aspects of substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact and expression of reality (Creswell, 2014).

Substantive contribution evaluates whether or not the work contributes to the understanding of social life. The experience that was the subject of my research study was examined regarding individual and contextual factors involved in the experience with the theoretical lens, and through the application of the three-dimensional inquiry space, participants’ social interactions were emphasised. Thus, I believe the research has substantially contributed to the understanding of attitude change to school in adolescent students as part of the social life of adolescents.

Aesthetic merit refers to the invitational quality of the research texts as described earlier. I intended to write the research texts to invite interpretive responses and not to provide final answers to the research questions and not to view the research puzzle as resolved, which followed the traditions of the narrative inquiry research community (Clandinin, 2016).

In relation to reflexivity, I have described the development of the field texts and the move to the interim research texts (together with the purpose of the second interview round) and the research texts in order to outline how the development process continuously emphasises the importance of the co-composition of the work together with the participant and the negotiation of meaning throughout the process.

In terms of impact, the criteria examine whether a research text has an effect on the audience, emotionally and/or intellectually. As stated before, addressing the identified knowledge gap in research on attitude change to school in adolescent students implies that the knowledge creation in this area has the potential to initiate new teaching and learning practices as well as develop new approaches to teacher–student relationships and student wellbeing. This study was conducted with the intention of assisting teachers to provide a “helping hand” to disengaged students who had negative attitudes to school.

Lastly, Richardson (2000) poses the question that if a research text seems “true”, how well does it embody “a flashed out sense of lived experiences?” (Creswell, 2014, p. 285). In line with the narrative inquiry methodology, the focus is on a rich and detailed description of the lived experience in the research text. The eight participants’ narratives thus present eight individual truths about the experience of positive attitude change to school.

A good qualitative study. Polkinghorne (2007) argues that “the general notion of validity concerns the believability of a statement or knowledge claim. ... a conclusion is valid when there is sufficient evidence and/or reasons to reasonably believe it is so” (p. 474). In the same notion, Moen (2006) states that “true stories are, thus, stories that are believed” (p. 63), and the question on whether or not a narrative is “true” is dismissible by nature of narrative inquiry and storytelling.

For this argument, Moen (2006) refers to Denzin (1989) in viewing research texts as fictional. The collaborative process between the participant and the researcher

distances both from the “real lived event”, and therefore narrative research is about presenting “stories about remembered events and how these were experienced” (Moen, 2006, p. 63), and these stories carry the notion of facts, facilities and fiction:

Facts refer to events that are believed to have occurred, and facilities describe how those facts were lived and experienced by the interacting individuals. Fiction, then, is a truthful narrative that deals with the facts and facilities, and is faithful to them both. (Moen, 2006, p. 63)

Moen (2006) further refers to E. Bruner (1984) to allow for another distinction of life as “lived, experienced and told” (Moen, 2006, p. 63). An experience that has been lived is what “actually happened”. A life experienced includes all affective components, whereas a life told is “a narrative or several narratives influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context” (Moen, 2006, p. 63). Consequently, “there are inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expression” (Moen, 2006, p. 63), and further, in reference to Goodson (1992), there is another distinction for life as rendered in text, and a research text “should be produced in a way that achieves as much harmony as possible across these levels” (Moen, 2006, p. 64). I believe that the two rounds of interviews, with the interim research texts in the form of summaries acting as a validation tool for the understanding of the experience of positive attitude change, addressed the issue of minimising discrepancies between the lived and rendered in text experiences of positive attitude change.

Qualitative touchstones. In considering issues of research rigour in relation to my study, I also drew on the work of Clandinin and Caine (2012), and their notion of “12 qualitative touchstones” as criteria for judging narrative inquiries following the definition of the narrative inquiry methodology, as outlined in the previous chapter, and the conceptual frame for thinking narratively of the experience of positive attitude change to school.

The touchstones address the seven design considerations for narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016) as detailed in the previous chapter. The touchstones further address the aspects of “relational response communities”, “justifications” and “attentiveness to audience” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 173–175), which are further outlined.

In order to ensure research rigour was observed, I set up a response community that included the principal supervisor and the associate supervisor of my PhD research

study with whom to share and discuss my inquiry. Given my teaching work at both secondary school and university, my extended community consisted of teachers like myself, educational lecturers and researchers. It also encompassed my university's ethics committee of which I was a member during this inquiry. This community provided "responsive and responsible dialogue", which enriched this inquiry, particularly through the continuous initiation of the reflection of the development of research texts from field texts. Based on "trust, respect and a sense of care" (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 173), the community helped me understand the complexities of the research puzzle for which I am sincerely thankful.

My justifications for this study, as presented in the previous chapter in relation to the research puzzle, addressed the questions of "so what" and "who cares" as I positioned myself within the current literature and the identified knowledge gap. With my research study, the intention was to initiate reflection of the school environments for adolescent students, students' attitudes to school, students' wellbeing and students' engagement levels. Relevant to this study is in particular the theoretical justification that "comes from justifying the work in terms of new methodological and disciplinary knowledge" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 436), in comparison to the social justifications encompassing social action and policy (Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

The task of narrative inquirers is to find balance in the existing multiplicity of "voice, signature, and audience" (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 175) and to examine the impact of social, institutional and cultural narratives on the participant and the researcher (Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

In research texts, the participant's voice remains the most influential one; however, research texts also need to reflect the researcher's voice as well as the larger narratives the experience under study is embedded in. The scholarly community is an audience to whom the researcher is also responsible to, and the social and or theoretical justification needs to be made visible to that audience. In the case of this research, being a PhD study, a framework was established for the inquiry from the outset against which the research rigour was also evaluated by the scholarly community at hand.

Relevant to the narrative inquiry methodology is the understanding of experience that "there will never be a final story" (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 175); however:

while this is troubling to researchers who rely on truth or accuracy and verifiability of data, it is opening the possibility for narrative inquirers to continuously inquire into the social fabric of experience and to not lose sight that people are always becoming. (p. 176)

Clandinin and Caine's (2012) conceptualisation of the 12 qualitative criteria is presented the following way:

While one meaning directs our attention to a touchstone as a quality or example that is used to test the excellence or genuineness of others, we were also drawn to a touchstone as a hard black stone, such as a jasper or basalt, that was used to test the quality of gold or silver by comparing the streak left on the stone by one of these metals with that of a standard alloy. We wondered, if we metaphorically touched or scratched a narrative inquiry, with kinds of streaks or marks would be left. (p. 169)

To evaluate research rigour, or the quality of work of narrative inquirers as Clandinin and Caine (2012) refer to it, these criteria are used to determine the extent to which the touchstones have been addressed and the ways in which they have shaped the narrative inquiry. The touchstones reflect the methodological and relational commitments of narrative inquirers, demonstrating that "the central value of narrative inquiry is its quality as subject matter" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10).

The application of the concept of the 12 touchstones aligns with Riessman's (2008a) approach to validity in that "the validity of a project should be assessed from within the situated perspective and traditions that frame it" (p. 185). The research rigour of this research study has been discussed in light of normative criteria for qualitative researchers together with the particular criteria of the narrative inquiry traditions.

Strengths and Limitations

Given the lack of research on adolescent students' positive attitude change to school, the findings from this study have started to bridge the gap in existing knowledge on students' attitudes towards school and this phenomenon of attitude change. This research study examines adolescent students' attitude towards school through the experience of positive attitude change. I used the narrative inquiry methodology to gain an understanding of students' perceptions of their lived school experiences and have co-developed with the participants narratives to represent these experiences and highlight the multiple dimensions and complexities of them.

Lessard, Caine, and Clandinin (2015) state that researchers, educators and policymakers need to attend to the “multiple worlds” of adolescent youth – for example, their world as a student at school, child at home, as well as a friend and peer. This “multiplicity of worlds” (Lessard et al., 2015, p. 210) needs to be acknowledged to holistically understand the adolescent learner within the school environment and it is crucial “neither to erase or write over other world nor to privilege one world over another” (Lessard et al., 2015, p. 210) in order to comprehensively address adolescent students’ needs to enable engagement in learning.

The strength of my research study is that each individual’s different worlds were acknowledged and are present in the students’ narratives. This is particularly important when addressing adolescent students’ needs given that they are “usually seen in more stereotypical and deficit ways” (Lessard et al., 2015, p. 210). The richness of the data enabled a meaningful exploration of the experience of positive attitude change to school to be undertaken, and consequently allowed for a meaningful response to the research aim and questions.

In line with the research tradition of narrative inquiry, my own narrative, as discussed in the introductory chapter, was included in the research study and it provided the required transparency to address my own (the researcher’s) biases and approach to the research aim. Thus, my own experience of positive attitude change would have influenced the development of the research texts and their interpretation. However, necessarily, and in line with the applied social constructionist epistemology, the researcher’s background and positioning is clearly stated to enhance the transparency of the participants’ narratives. I have also given significant consideration to my role as the researcher and my impact on this research in Chapter 4.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. The scope of this study was limited to research at one regional government school. This was a small-scale study that had eight participants. What is required is a larger-scale study to determine whether and to what extent this research has gained traction in other contexts.

Further, the study focused on data collected from students only. Valuable insight into the experience of positive attitude change to school could further be gained from teachers, parents and peers alike. In terms of academic achievement, the data collected was solely based on students’ perceptions of their educational outcomes. Future research

would benefit from implementing actual academic achievement measures to support students' statements such as "I got better marks", and "I did really well at school". The socio-cultural backgrounds of the students were not addressed, which would have added another dimension to the already complex and multidimensional interpretation process of the results. Caution should be exercised when applying the results to similar contexts. This research study has provided a detailed and nuanced insight into eight Year 10 students' lived experiences of positive attitude change to school and, therefore, the application of generalisations to the wider cohort of Year 10 students is limited. However, it was not the aim of this study to extrapolate the findings to a greater population but to expand the knowledge in the field of students' attitudes towards school and the affective component of student engagement.

Further, it needs to be noted that although my study has not indicated causal relations between constructs, it has provided information regarding the possible direction of effects between the constructs of student attitudes and student engagement. Further, this research was limited due to my personal context inadvertently influencing the design and analysis of the research study and the interpretation of the findings. I did, however, give significant consideration to my personal relation and impact on this research as explained in Chapter 4.

Despite these limitations, this study has significantly contributed to the understanding of student attitudes to school, and in particular the experience of positive attitude change, student engagement and student wellbeing, and the relationships of these constructs to academic achievement.

Due to there being scarce extant research on the specific topic of the experience of positive attitude change to school in adolescent students, future research would benefit from qualitative and quantitative approaches to the phenomenon under study. The aim would be to broaden the understanding of the experience and extend the research approaches and methodologies applied in order to further examine the impact of positive attitude change and emotional engagement on a range of social and academic factors.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter I have outlined the research design, which involved presenting the methods and procedures used to collect and analyse data that were suitable to investigate

the principal research question of this study. In choosing to apply the narrative inquiry methodology, I was able to explore students' lived experiences of positive attitude change by developing detailed and nuanced narrative accounts of their experiences. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to gain deep insight into the students' perceptions of their experiences and use the students' own words to describe them. I have discussed the steps of data analysis, highlighting the theme analysis as a preparation process for the development of research texts and resonant threads in the tradition of narrative inquiry. I further traced the process of the research rigour for my study and identified its limitations.

In the next chapter, I present the eight developed research texts, which are the students' narrative accounts of their experiences of positive attitude change to school.

Chapter 6

Participants' Narratives

Overview

In the previous chapter, I outlined the research design for this study to address the research puzzle and the associated research questions.

In this chapter the eight students' experiences of their positive attitude change to school are conveyed as co-constructed narratives based on two rounds of interviews with the participants. The narratives are presented as research texts, which were developed using the three-dimensional inquiry space of narrative inquiry and are in response to the question of "What happened?" in regard to each student's experience of positive attitude change.

Preliminary Note

As outlined in the previous chapter, the interview questions were developed to directly address the research question's two sub-questions:

1. What or who can influence and or trigger positive attitude change to school?
2. What is the meaning attached by adolescents to the experience of positive attitude change to school?

The participants' narrative accounts convey directly who the students found to be most supportive in relation to their experience of positive attitude change. I phrased the relevant question around an imaginative award ceremony in order to ascertain from the students who they would want to give awards for the best support they received during their positive attitude change, as illustrated in Figure 3. Extract from a transcribed interview (second interview, B). Regarding eliciting responses to answer the second sub-question, I phrased the interview questions to inquire about the differences between the perceived schooling experiences before and after the positive attitude change in order to illustrate the meaning of positive attitude change for the students.

The narratives are sources of important knowledge and understanding to fill the knowledge gap identified by this research study, and they do this by shedding light on to the phenomenon of positive attitude change to school in adolescent students in relation to

their engagement in learning. Taking into consideration the reviewed literature, my aim was to use these narratives to display the diversity in the experiences of positive attitude change within the area of student engagement and in particular the affective component of engagement, which encompasses students' emotional reactions to their schooling experiences (Fredricks et al., 2004).

When preparing for the interviews, and considering the applied narrative inquiry methodology, I did ask myself "what makes a good interview and consequently a good story" in order to maximise the significant opportunity I had been given to speak to adolescent students about their schooling experiences. The answer came to me from an experienced interviewer, who spoke about his career on the radio. He stated that the most interesting content comes from participants who carry with themselves "a notion of reflection". It struck a chord with me when I was contemplating the transcribed interviews because I sensed that notion acutely from all the eight students that I spoke to. From the students' notions of reflection I perceived the gravitas that they attached to the topic when they shared their experiences with me. They exhibited a willingness to share their stories with me as an educational researcher in order to help others who were experiencing disengagement issues due to negative attitudes to school.

It was evident that the students truly appreciated the interest in their experiences, and in their opinions, thoughts and ideas on how to make school a better place for adolescents to engage in learning to the best of their ability as they were mostly leading the conversations and would, without much prompting, elaborate on the statements they had made. My interactions with these students have inspired me to conduct further research with adolescent students in order to capture more of their voices and their perspectives on schooling experiences so as to enrich our understanding of how best to teach and learn in secondary school settings.

Presenting the students' narrative accounts to such length is in keeping with the narrative inquiry methodology and has the purpose of holistically representing the students' experiences, of providing a "bigger picture" of the phenomenon, and it has been prompted out of respect for the students' willingness to share their stories with me. I hope these narratives inspire reflection on the challenges of student engagement and on the challenges of being an adolescent in the secondary school setting as well as initiating interest in future research into this topic area.

Anna's Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

The dark place. Anna found herself to be in “a very dark place” for about two years in secondary school. After being bullied in Year 8, she lost a friend to suicide in Year 9 and as a result described herself as having experienced significant mental health issues. She reported to have self-harmed in the past.

Being in the dark place and having to deal with several serious issues at once, Anna eventually began wagging/skipping class and getting low marks. She reported, “*I went through a very bad part of my life*” (1, 5:47). She described how the teachers did not understand where she was coming from, and why she did not feel “well enough” to do her schoolwork. Consequently, she started not to enjoy being at school and stopped caring about her academic outcomes. Anna also lost interest in doing things with her friends after school. She stated, “*I wasn't happy, I didn't want to socialise with people, I was just stuck in my room all the time*” (1, 12:39). The bullying continued and Anna did not put in any effort at school and eventually “*I stopped going to school because I couldn't handle seeing people that made me feel bad*” (1, 17:07).

As a form of ultimatum due to Anna's low academic outcomes, her mother started talking about Anna having to move away to her father's house. She did not want that to happen as she was not close to her father. She acknowledged that it was her mother's way of really pushing her to do better at school. Anna indicated that she perceived it as a significant, yet empty threat, a “last straw” attempt by her mother to show Anna how serious she was about her having to improve her approach to school and learning. Anna emphasised that the threat did not result in her positive attitude change, though it did influence it.

Her mother also became concerned regarding Anna's wellbeing. Anna described her mother as a person who worried a lot, and explained that it used to stress her considerably when her mother worried about her. Anna believed that “*she was kind of embarrassed that I was in the dark place and she didn't know how to help*” (1, 22:46). As a result, Anna did not want to continue to upset her mother by exposing her further to her daughter's negative state of mind and the “dark place” Anna found herself in. She knew her mother would only get more anxious, and it would not help to carry the burden of those worries as well as dealing with her own negative emotions and thoughts.

The dark place was described by Anna as “*stress, a lot, all these built up emotions*” (2, 1:45). She reported, “*I wasn’t confident at all ... When I had no confidence at all, I didn’t go out anywhere, so I was like, I don’t feel good, so I’m not gonna go out and do anything. I felt really crap*” (2, 1:55).

Anna knew school was important and worried about failing:

The fear of not being good enough and successful; yeah, just not being good enough and not doing well and failing and I think failing is a big thing. People just don’t try because they think they gonna fail ... because it makes you feel bad, because other people see you as you’re not good enough, because you failed. So, I think it’s like other people view you a certain way, and that like really hurts your self-confidence ... just like family because they pay all this money for you to have an education and then you fail because you’re not doing well ... With teachers I think ... once you do badly they just expect you to keep doing bad. So, I don’t think they’re very helpful; they’re like, oh, she’s done bad, so the chances are she’s probably not gonna do any better, so we’re not going to spend that much time on her anymore. (1, 29:10)

When asked if she believed a positive attitude would make the situation better in regard to the student–teacher relationship, she stated, “*I think so, coz then they see she’s trying to do well, so we’re gonna help her to do well*” (1, 29:30).

With regard to feeling uncomfortable meeting her friends, she explained:

I think it was just like a lot of effort, having to go out with them. Even if they were good friends because they still wanted to go out and do things, coz they’re not really in that dark place; it was just me. So, I felt like I didn’t want to bring them down, so I just stopped myself from going out. (2, 2:00)

Anna stated that she thought of her isolation as beneficial for her friends because she did not want to negatively impact on them:

I think it helped with people around me, I suppose, I think it helped other people more than it helped me coz I was such a downer, and I don’t think

people like being around downers, you know. So, I think it helped them more than it did me. (2, 2:10)

She had tried to stop thinking about anything, and at the same time she was worrying about “everything”. For example, she stated that she was worrying about having to socialise with people eventually, and having to put on “the happy face”, although she didn’t feel that way. She had also become quite self-conscious, and had started to worry about how she looked: *“I was worrying about how I looked ... when you don’t do anything for like a long time, it just makes you feel really bad about yourself, so I was just worrying about physical appearance and stuff” (2, 5:50).*

Regarding her isolation, she explained that *“I feel like a few days is like something you can get away with” (2, 6:00)* and that it could have the benefit of providing *“a lot of thinking time a lot of thinking time, yeah, so I could think about, you know, what I’m gonna do to change, everything” (2, 2:29)*. However, *“if you do it like four days, of not doing anything, you just like start going downhill” (2, 6:07)*. The following statement summarises how she felt when isolating herself:

I was trying to distract myself half the time, like watching TV, being lazy, not doing anything, being in my room half the time, in the dark, it wasn’t really good. I don’t know, I tried to stop thinking about everything, but ... I was worrying about everything ... worrying about, I don’t know, just the whole having to socialise, like when I have to go back to school. I was worrying that I would have to socialise again, and talk to people and, you know, put on a happy face. It was very stressful ... I was worried that I have to do that for a very long time, even though that’s not how I felt at the time. (2, 3:42)

When asked why she felt like she could not be honest with her friends, she answered that she did not like the idea of bothering anyone. I pointed out that “bothering” is an interesting way of seeing it, as she had previously mentioned that she was a good listener, and that she enjoyed it when people came to her to talk about their issues; to that she laughed and acknowledged the paradox that she did not want to bother others, but enjoyed others coming and talking to her about their problems. Nevertheless, she explained she could get rid of the feeling of bothering others if she opened up to them about her feelings and fears.

Anna's negative attitude to school was continuously reinforced by her increasing self-perception that she was *"not being good enough, not successful, not doing well, and failing"* (1, 23:07).

I just had to get out. Anna was in a dark place for about two years. During a school assembly, Anna learnt about a free counselling service that was available to students. An event had been advertised for students to meet with counsellors who had volunteered their time to provide free counselling services for students. Anna liked the fact that it was confidential, one on one, and free. In addition, it was conveniently located close to her home. Anna saw this as an opportunity to seek help without her mother or her friends getting involved. She wanted such assistance to improve her situation as she realised that *"I wanted to do well, because I have seen other people do well; and I wanted to be like that"* (1, 18:13). She felt comfortable talking to one particular friend (from another school but who lived nearby) about the free counselling service as they had both been through something similar, and Anna asked that friend to accompany her to the introductory event. Anna also spoke to her mother about the counselling session: *"Well, I started talking to my mother about the counselling ... I was just talking to her about ... that I think I want to see someone, because she was getting worried about me"* (2, 6:40).

The announcement of the free counselling event was very timely. Anna said that she felt like she had to get out of her dark place and explained that even just going to that event would help her as it would make her get out of the dark place for a moment. The event took place two weeks from the announcement at school, and at that point Anna had decided to leave her home after school and meet her friends without putting the happy face on. Anna explained that despite feeling unwell and anticipating that her friends would ask her about her wellbeing, she knew *"I just had to get out"* (2, 10:11) and leave the dark place before it got any worse. Thinking of the event and anticipating that she would get help there gave Anna the strength to be honest about her feelings to her friends. She had also felt hopeful in handling the two weeks of being honest about her situation given that she expected to be helped at the event. It was a time Anna said she felt like she could manage independently, knowing that she needed to get out of her dark place.

Arriving at the centre, she said she was really nervous, but she did not know why: *"It was just that feeling of, oh, everyone is just going to be really judgemental, but they*

weren't" (2, 12:10). She described how she realised her worries were unjustified as the volunteer staff made her feel very comfortable and included. Anna liked that they were wearing casual attire rather than a suit. It made her perceive them to be more relatable and approachable:

It's better when they are not so "buttons up" all the way to the top, so professional looking as they seem more friendly in casual clothes; even though their business is all about being professional, they seem friendlier in casual clothes, and you are more willing to approach them that way. (2, 12:15)

After the event, Anna felt better. She described the impact it had had on her in the following way:

I felt ... like ... happy, I don't know, it was weird, coz I felt like ...relieved, I don't know, I felt like, uh, I have done something, you know. I got an appointment, went to see these people and I felt good that I was finally taking that step to see someone. (2, 12:10)

She confirmed that she would have stayed in a very negative mindset for a long time had that announcement at school not been made, which led to her seeking help and opening up to a counsellor about her situation. She stated, *"I think I would have for a long time. That I'd probably keep staying in my room and be in, like, a dark, dark hole that I couldn't get out of. I think that I'd still be there. Yeah"* (2, 16:49).

Anna attributed the improvement in her wellbeing and her attitude to school and learning to her taking action: *"I think I am mostly proud that I actually put the time in to getting help, coz it's harder than you think to go and actually take the step to get help"* (2, 15:15).

Trying to explain her attitude change, she reported:

I think you have to look for it and you have to ... fake it till you make it, so like pretend like you're happy until ... like keep working on it ... you have to put effort in, even if it might be hard in the beginning ... it doesn't happen overnight, sadly. I wish it did, but it takes time to work on it. (1, 33:46)

When asked who was involved in her positive attitude to school change, Anna named her friend, with whom she went to the event, and her counsellor, whom she considered to be the main attributor:

The counsellor was very nice, not that old, young too, still experiencing and she was very stressed too [like Anna herself was] so I felt very comfortable around her. She just made everything so easy for me to talk about. She was very nice. And she listened a lot, and asked questions that she felt would help me; and she pointed out that I didn't have to answer questions, and that's what I liked about it. (2, 14:20)

Anna did not mention her mother when she was asked to name people who were involved in her attitude change, but when I inquired about her mother's involvement, she said:

She did help me at the start to like push through and, like, she still was a really big help because she drove me to places all the time, even though it might have been inconvenient for her, ... she helped me get there [to the counselling centre], and I think she's just a big help with everything, even like when I didn't feel like talking to her about everything, she still put the effort in to help me. (2, 15:15)

Despite having good friends, Anna did not want to talk to them about how she felt: *"I just don't like the idea that I'm bothering someone when I am talking to them about problems; I just feel like I am being annoying"* (2, 4:12). Taking the action to go and speak to a counsellor about her feelings enabled Anna to exclude people from the process of seeking help that she did not want to get involved.

The happy place. Anna stopped going to the counsellor during Year 10 because she had been feeling better: *"I went from a dark place to a happy place; my brain at the moment is in a sunnier place"* (2, 1:00). After the positive attitude change: *"I've been more positive; I enjoy learning more and wanna get involved more"* (1, 13:56).

Reflecting on her attitude change, Anna stated, *"I think I have been pretty successful so far in changing my mind and being in a more positive place"* (1, 20:20). Consequently, Anna became more outgoing and more engaged with learning:

I'm just more social now, like I wanna actually go out and experience more things coz before I wasn't happy so I didn't want to socialise with people. I was just stuck in my room all the time, but now I'm going out and enjoying what I can ... Because I've been in a better mood, I've been wanting to put in more effort and do well in school and I think that the counselling helped me see the smaller things in life that matter ... just being in the moment. (1, 13:20)

When asked what the key was to her maintaining a positive attitude to school, Anna stated:

Just surrounding myself with people who have a positive mindset, like, coz I have a big group of friends, and there're all very positive, and that's good to be around instead of being ... coz I feel like it's like a leech, you know they latch onto you, and you just feel bad if they feel bad, so you should surround yourself with positive people ... they always like laugh and they make you laugh so you feel very happy and positive about yourself ... literally having a fun time, and it's the best thing – just being surrounded by people that are happy and positive, that make you laugh and make you feel confident about yourself. (1, 34:42)

According to Anna, however, the most important aspect is to take care of oneself:

I think you have to work on yourself before thinking about school. I know that seems bad coz school is ... you have to go to school, you have to try, but like ... but think about yourself, a lot, even though, you know, school is important ... you do need to take care of yourself in order to have a positive mindset about school. (1, 26:56)

Anna was driven to maintain her positive attitude to school because she believed that “attitude to life and attitude to school connects, because if you don't have a positive attitude outside of school, then you'll probably not have a positive outlook at school” (1, 26:31).

When asked what advice she would give to schools to help students with their attitudes to school and prevent other students from getting into a dark place like she had, Anna said:

The teachers need to be more understanding, sometimes. Teachers take it out on the kids if they don't get a good mark because they are stressed out, because of something that's going on at home, and teachers don't think about it and that makes students feel worse. ...

They say stuff in assembly, but one on one, everyone's more comfortable with that, just chatting about "Are you okay?" casually. [At assembly] they talk about something for a little while, but then it goes away eventually, so keep bringing that up, that the [school support service] is available, mental health, they talk about it for five minutes and stop, and you forget about those things, just reminding people. (2, 17:10)

From her experience it was more beneficial to have confidential meetings one on one because she believed that way you could build a closer bond.

Reflecting on the time she had a negative attitude and how it impacted on her engagement in learning, Anna stated:

You just you don't care, you give up and you don't see yourself doing well so you don't try coz you think you gonna fail; so you're like, well, there is no point ... so you don't see the point in trying because you're like I'm probably gonna fail and that's very bad for you to think that way, so I think if you have a positive mindset and you're like I am gonna do well, then you probably will do well, and even if you don't do as well as you thought, then you still have that positive mindset to go back to and say I can try harder and can get better marks; there's still like hope. (1, 27:52)

Anna further explained that when she had her negative attitude to school, she had a negative outlook on her future, which changed with the positive attitude change:

I didn't see myself having a future. I was not gonna do well, and I was probably not gonna make it out in the big world. But now I've had that positive attitude [change], I feel like I want to do well, and have a career. (1, 17:13)

After experiencing positive attitude change, Anna understood that "negative feelings" could go away again and could be managed. She reported that the counsellor

taught her to apply a strategy for when she was having a “bad” day: “*take a breather, there could be better days tomorrow, bring yourself to that kind of place, think positively, it might not get positive, but you just believe it will and it might*” (2, 20:13). In terms of being self-conscious, Anna gave the following example of a strategy to apply:

Look in the mirror, and tell yourself you’re beautiful and the whole thing, and it sounds silly, but it does help eventually. Just try things out, even when you don’t think they’ll work, try all the different methods out to see what works best for you. (2, 21:37)

Despite being successful in managing bad days more effectively than in the past, Anna acknowledged that:

They’re still like times, where you go back to that dark place for a while, but just trying to move forward, being stronger. Once you are happy and you don’t worry about that stuff anymore, you think positive so you don’t ... you let all those negative feelings out. (1, 37:33)

Anna, the hardworking student. Anna described herself as a tomboy. She enjoyed playing soccer, reading and writing poetry. She was generally “*not into a lot of things that other people are*” (1, 2:00). When asked what animal she would be, she said:

A funny animal. I tend to laugh a lot now and make people laugh ... a very happy animal, maybe a meerkat coz they seem pretty happy and they just pop out of nowhere and work hard ... I try to put a lot of effort in quickly, I’m hardworking, so I can get good grades. (1, 24:00)

Anna said she did a lot of schoolwork at home. She described it as a good distraction “*because I haven’t been feeling well lately, mentally, being emotionally unwell, I suppose*” (1, 3:00). It was due to the stress with school exams she explained. She really wanted to get good marks in order to do well in the future and get a “better” job. She reported that she wanted to study psychology and that her experiences of seeing a counsellor had inspired her to head in that direction because she felt like she wanted to help other people who had similar struggles to her own.

Anna stated that she really liked the subjects she was studying; however, she considered some of the teachers were not particularly helpful. She said she enjoyed going

to school, the learning, but some things were harder for her to learn “*because I don’t have the same mind as everyone else*” (1, 3:15). For example, she struggled to understand maths and get the support she felt she needed from her maths teacher. Consequently, she decided to change classes in order to have another maths teacher. Fortunately, the change was effective as Anna perceived the new teacher to be very understanding and helpful. Anna moved out of her former maths class out of her own initiative because she used to feel alone in that class, and people were loud and she could not concentrate, which bothered her. She made it clear that it was important to her to be in a class where she could concentrate well because she strived to have good marks.

In Year 9 she was selected to participate in her school’s leadership program of which she was very proud. It involved a trip to China, and Anna really enjoyed that experience. She had also been awarded for her leadership skills in soccer. She was particularly proud of that because she reported to have worked very hard for it.

Max’s Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

When the school becomes a minefield. Max changed schools to his current school in Year 10. Max reported that he associated his previous school solely with negative emotions and developed a negative attitude to school as a result of that. He previously attended an all-boys’ school and explained that “*it was not my kind of thing to be surrounded by guys only for three years*” (2, 8:01). He reported:

Year 9 was absolutely awful. I felt very confused coz I am at that age where I am trying to figure out who I am and I was in a school of all boys and there was just lots of pressure on me to be someone else and I was very unhappy there and it caused me to not focus in class and I hated going to school, I hated it ... like I used to skip classes all the time, and I wouldn’t pay attention and I would sleep in some classes, honestly (laughter). (1, 6:49)

Max was not able to pretend to be someone else in order to fit in and be accepted by his peers. As a result, he got bullied. He stated that the bullies, to which he referred to as “*crap people*” (1, 6:00), constituted the low point in his schooling. Max did not solely blame the school for the bullying as he explained:

I wouldn't really put that against a particular school coz there's crap people everywhere. It was more just that ... I wouldn't want to say that the school didn't do anything about it because I personally think I didn't do anything about it, like, I could have stood up for myself or gotten help rather than just trying to deal with it. (1, 5:40)

Nevertheless, he evaluated the school as “*not handling the bullying very well*” (1, 4:52) and described it as being a dangerous place for him given that he was not accepted the way he was:

Every morning I just had to walk down that hallway, with all the lockers ... it was like a minefield; you walk through and I felt like there were bombs going off all around me and I just felt so unsafe there; it was a really bad time. (1, 26:40)

Max's perceptions of the school's lack of support for him as an individual led to his belief that he did not belong in that particular school environment. There was little hope that Max would have developed a sense of belonging to that school, as he reported.

Initially, Max identified his feelings towards his peers as being afraid of other students at the school, especially the bullies; however, with time Max came to understand that he was not just afraid of his peers: “*The way that I hated school, it just made me fear who I was. I was scared to be myself, so I guess my biggest fear was myself*” (1, 21:04). It got to the point where he skipped almost every class, and/or sitting in the counsellor's office each lesson, and, consequently, he started to significantly disengage from learning. In addition, his wellbeing had been severely impacted by him not living out his true self. He concluded: “*I didn't think I can go any lower than that, and I just wanted to get out of it [the school]*” (2, 3:05).

Max changed schools to a co-ed school only in Year 10. He had endured three years of bullying, which he believed had prevented him from reaching his potential academically:

I guess I was unhappy at my previous school, ... being unhappy at my last school meant that I wasn't doing well with my work. I was quite unfocused and I was very distracted and I couldn't be the best to my ability. (1, 4:52)

The school culture had been one that he felt he could not connect to, but he had not imagined himself changing schools before Year 10. Max explained that his older brother was at the same school with him, and he had a “good name” for himself. Max further explained that he thought he would have negatively impacted on the good standing his family name had at the school with him leaving, and because of that he explained that he had intended to wait until his brother had graduated before he changed schools.

In contrast to the school setting, Max described his home setting very positively. He stated that his family was quite loving and that he could be described as a contented individual outside the school setting:

I have always been a happy kid, so outside of school I was pretty much fine. Any negative thing I had outside of school was caused by school, so, I guess, if you take the school out of the picture, I was fine. (2, 20:45)

However, he stated, “*I was rarely not thinking about school*” (2, 20:50). As a result, the situation at school significantly impacted on his wellbeing within and outside the school environment.

I didn’t think I could go any lower than that. Before his brother’s graduation, the long-awaited event, Max experienced an emotional meltdown:

It was this awful morning and I started crying in the car on the way to school. I was at a real low at that school. I was not well at all, like I had some real mental issues, and I just remember the day I just suddenly burst into tears in the car on the way to school and Mum just asked what’s wrong, and I said I need to move. (1, 26:49)

Max referred to the moment in the car as a breaking point:

That was just a breaking point. I’d never felt so negative about school, just a fear of ... like people ... there were days where, like, students just don’t want to go to school, but I had a day where I feared it and I cried because of it, I actually felt so scared to step into that school and I guess that was just such a breaking point for me. I didn’t think I could go any lower than that, and I just wanted to get out of it. (2, 3:05)

Max explained that he believed that the meltdown that morning could have easily happened on any other day; however, he knew he would have broken down eventually as he had anticipated that *“students there, who are quite mean, would have done something mean [eventually] and that would make me break down”* (2, 11:00). He managed to soldier on until his brother had graduated and the school year had finished; however, after the meltdown, he started to feel better knowing that he would be changing schools. He reported that he had begun to feel empowered regarding his situation because *“I took control of my schooling”* (1, 4:45) by stating that he wanted to move schools. He reported that *“I thought I am going to take control and I am going to move schools. So when I made that decision, suddenly, my outlook on school has become, like, 100%, when it used to be like 20%”* (1, 5:00).

According to Max the positive attitude change was *“very fast. It just all happened very quickly. I’d describe it as positive on me – it changed me as a person as well”* (2, 1:26). Reflecting on how it came about, Max explained, *“I don’t really take much credit for it, because it wasn’t really me who like enforced the positive change on myself. It was the school that gave me a new environment”* (2, 2:06). After three years of having a negative attitude to school, Max’s attitude changed to be positive with the change to the new school:

It’s this school. This school is why I am happy, that’s it ... Everything was completely different here than it was at my previous school. I just felt such a vibe here, such positive energy and that’s how I knew straight away that I was happy at school. (1, 19:45)

Despite attributing his positive attitude change to school to the new school, he also acknowledged a friend, his parents and two Year 10 coordinators as influential in the change. Regarding the friend’s involvement, Max explained that:

We clicked the first day we met. We had the same personality, common interests, we are both just crazy ... both really weird people. When we’re around each other, we’re just the weirdest little duo you can meet. She just lets me be myself, I have no insecurities around her at all... It gave me a reason to come to school. If I ever had a bad day, if I ever had a day where I didn’t want to come to school, I thought, oh wait but X is going to be there, and she was always gonna brighten up my day. She gave me a

reason to always stay positive, even if I was a little bit ... didn't want to come to school. I knew I had a best friend there to have a good day with. (2, 9:38)

He stated that it was a lucky coincidence that they had met and decided to become friends. Max described her as a person who has ups and downs, however, *"I'd say generally she's quite positive"* (2, 10:23). He admired the fact that she was goal oriented and that she worked hard, and he considered her to be "the best person" he had ever met.

Max explained that he thought his parents were influential in the positive attitude change as well, as they "let" him move schools and helped him find a suitable school. He stated that *"they showed me exactly how to get where happy is"* (1, 22:49), and he felt their support for him was being true to himself.

The two year-level coordinators contributed to the change, too, because *"they welcomed me into the school"* (2, 6:15) and *"they felt like friends, not teachers, they don't feel like they're here to just teach you and stuff; they actually welcomed me and made me feel like I was a friend of theirs"* (2, 6:37).

Max explained how he perceived that taking action and talking to his mother about his situation was a success in itself:

That was a big achievement for me, stand up for myself, make a change, definitely proud of that. The fact that I was able to say that I was not okay, to be able to admit that I am unhappy, coz that's a big thing to tell someone that you're not happy; because it's quite a vulnerable thing to admit it that you are unstable, like, coz, I don't know, it's a negative thing to be ... I mean, it's okay to not be okay; don't get me wrong, but like, it's definitely, ... you rather not be upset all the time, so like to tell someone that you need help that can be a bit daunting and it's a vulnerable thing to admit that you are not okay. (2, 19:22)

When asked if he would have stayed negative towards school had he not reached a breaking point that one day on his way to school, Max replied: *"I think I would have come around eventually to say that I wanted to move schools ... I know I would have said it eventually"* (2, 4:11).

The new school. After Max had changed schools and had developed a positive attitude to school, he described school as being “amazing”. He said that he “loved” coming to school every single day, and that he “loved” learning. Right after the move, he said he realised that he should have been at that new school all along. At the new school he “loved” the people and *“I love learning, taking notes and doing tests, doing projects, I really love school”* (1, 8:05).

He pointed out that as much as he was happy at school at the time of the interviews, he was a realist and knew that one does not only have good days at school. He reported that when he experienced “bad” days, he would tell himself:

Remember that day you came here and how happy you were? That’ll happen again ... I just remember to hang in there. There’s two years left [Year 11 and 12], and it’s pretty important. I may as well just finish it off and go on with the other 70 years of my life left. (1, 22:00)

He explained how he thought *“you just gotta go through bad days. There’s a lot of worst things going on in the world”* (1, 22:15). He added that he really could not complain if he was in a bad mood as he realised there were more serious problems in the world than his own: *“You gonna hit bumps and realise, ‘Oh crap, what do I do here?’ It’s up to you to learn, work around stuff. Best way to build a person is to let them fall and get back up themselves”* (1, 17:00). In addition, he stated:

I think that’s where my positive outlook comes from – knowing there are people worse off than me. So if I have the opportunity to be here, I am going to make the most of it and I am gonna make sure I use it to the best of my ability. (1, 28:20).

With the change in schools and the ending of being bullied, Max saw himself capable of appreciating his circumstances.

Reflecting on his schooling, Max stated, *“It’s definitely a big deal to find some sort of happiness at school. It’s a big deal”* (1, 25:00). He was most proud of making friends because he had never had a big group of friends: *“I’m really proud of myself that I was able to just be myself and that attracted the right kind of people”* (1, 10:10). He described himself as being a “more free” person:

Outside of school, I guess, it's the same sort of thing. Outside of school I'm a lot more myself now because of school. School has made me be more myself and now in the outside world ... I am wearing what I want to wear and I am doing what I want to do, just being a more free person, and I know that's not exactly an achievement, but I am proud of myself ... making that change to just being myself in the real world. (1, 9:43)

Overall, Max believed that “if you can survive school, you can probably survive life” (1, 32:00).

In the end Max stated that he regretted waiting so long to change schools:

It was quite hard because I wanted to move in Year 7, but my brother was in that school and he held a very high name for himself, so I felt like I couldn't leave because my brother is here ... so if I left it would be like I was throwing away my family name because my brother was quite a big deal at [that school]. When he graduated in Year 12, I was like “Can I move now?” I know I should have moved regardless; I should not have worried about what my brother was doing, but back then I was quite worried I was throwing away something. (1, 24:10)

This was Max's advice to schools to help students who were in a similar situation to his so that they would not develop a negative attitude to school when being bullied at school:

I would have pushed for more ... more action taken for mean students, like students that are bullying, bullies in general, I felt like telling them off and saying that's bad isn't good enough. They need to, actually, like, I don't know, keep them on patrol for a while or give them bigger, I mean, better punishment; just giving them a detention isn't gonna change how they do it, they need to actually be educated on how to be a nice person, I guess, like they need to be told how to treat someone ... well, coz they don't know, so, I guess, I mean, in the end, you can come up with heaps of ways of what teachers can do, but I guess it's always up to the students, coz, like, as much as you can tell a kid to stop being a dickhead to someone,

it's gonna always be up to them whether they gonna make a change ... changing how they are. (2, 14:40)

Max reported he was generally against stricter rules, as he did not want teachers to become stricter, but in relation to the bully, he stated that he was unsure about what could work best, but being consistently strict towards them would be a good starting point:

I don't know, sitting them down and very sternly talking to them how to be a nicer person, like telling them exactly what they did wrong and how they should do it better next time, and make sure every time it happens again you tell them again and again, and again, don't let it be a one-off ...I don't have any solutions, but yeah. (2, 14:58)

Nevertheless, he also emphasised that, generally, schools have support services “*but it's up to the students whether they choose to be supported*” (2, 15:14), and he believed that in order for an individual to admit they were “not okay”, being not okay should be further normalised in schools as a general approach to increase student wellbeing, as “*to tell someone that you need help, that can be a bit daunting and it's a vulnerable thing to admit that you are not okay*” (2, 19:22).

I just love everything about this school. Max described himself as a person who loved music and the performing arts. He reported that he saw himself in the future as a singer. He had received support from his family, particularly from his father, to pursue his passion for music, despite no one in the family being musically inclined or talented.

I was lucky enough to attend the school musical with my fiancée, just a few weeks before the participants for the interviews had been identified. When Max and I sat down for the interview, I recognised him from the musical. His acting and his singing were impressive. You can tell when a person feels confident on stage and in the spotlight in comparison to someone who is trying to act confidently. Max appeared to be a natural and a ball of energy.

Max is adopted and appeared to be quite conscious of the fact that he was lucky to have been adopted from a developing country. He repeatedly stated that he appreciated what he had during our interviews:

I know how to be grateful for something, I know that what I get ... it needs to be taken care of. There are kids who don't have an education, and there are kids that would kill to have any sort of schooling. (1, 28:20)

Max was even grateful for his past mistakes: *“In retrospect, any mistake that I have made so far, I am really grateful that I made because it's who I am today; it teaches me maturity and stuff like that” (1, 18:10).*

Max stated that school was going well at the time of the interviews and described how much he liked his new school:

I just love everything about this school, I love the people. There's a huge, broad range of individuality here that I really love, and I feel really welcomed. I also love the teachers. I love pretty much every teacher, never really met one I didn't like coz they are engaging, kind and funny and they know how to teach you things. (1, 2:48)

Looking back at his entire schooling, Max said, *“My highlight of my schooling so far was choosing to move to a different school” (1, 5:03).* When asked about aspects of school he may not have liked, he acknowledged that *“there are mean people here, but there are mean people at any school. I wouldn't hold that against [this school]” (1, 3:30).* He had approached his new school with no real expectations, yet he did so optimistically:

I didn't really have much of an expectation... I really didn't. I just came in thinking it's a new school ... I definitely knew it was going to be better than before. I knew for fact it was gonna be much better ... because it's unisex, and being surrounded by guys for three years wasn't my kind of thing, and knowing that there are girls here would help me come out of my shell a bit more. (2, 8:01)

Sabine's Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

I just hated school so much. Sabine just didn't want to be at school; it made her feel "sick". She hated school so much that she never wanted to be there, not even for the breaks when she could catch up with her friends. She reported: "*I never wanted to go to school, I wanted to stay home*" (1, 15:20).

The reason for Sabine not wanting to go to school was because of a conflict with a peer student that occurred in Year 8. According to Sabine, "something little" was taken the wrong way by the student, which caused a significant conflict to arise between them. As a result, teachers, parents and the principal had to get involved to resolve the conflict. Sabine considered the conflict more "bad luck" than anything else, portraying it as an external issue to herself. She reported that she and her family believed she had not been at fault in that conflict.

Before the conflict, Sabine had been engaged in learning and enjoyed going to school. She said she always knew that school was important for the future and once the conflict happened she was determined to stay engaged as schoolwork was very important to her, but she faced significant difficulties focusing on her studies because, as she reported, "*I just didn't want to be there [at school] ... when someone said, like, how is school, it made me feel sick, like, I just hated school so much and never wanted to be there*" (1, 17:48).

Despite her personal drive to succeed at school, the conflict got in the way of her engagement. She explained that she wasn't concentrating as much in her classes because her thoughts kept returning to the conflict, and she found herself unable to focus on her studies. She explained further that it was difficult to be in a class with the student or that student's friends despite having a "great" group of friends at school that tried to support her throughout the conflict. From Sabine's narrative it became clear that having good friends did not protect her from having conflicts with peers and being bullied.

On a daily basis, Sabine feared confrontations with the student and that student's friends. Sabine reported that being at school only "dragged" her down. At school, Sabine was sad and anxious, but she explained how she always tried to leave the conflict at school and not take it home with her because she didn't want the conflict to affect her family as well. She said she had always been close to her family, and she did not want

them to worry about her. To prevent them from worrying, she knew she had to cover up her sadness and appear content after school in order to be perceived as a person who was managing the conflict well. To achieve this, she approached her afternoons rather strategically:

I'd just try to keep my school life at school. When I got home ... I didn't want to drag my family down, so like I'd just like go out and do things that I knew I'd enjoy and I'd be able to lift my family up as well as myself ... even just going for a walk around my block or a run helps a lot to make me feel better. (1, 23:48)

At school Sabine tried to avoid seeing that student, but that was a difficult task as both students were in the same year level and thus in the same physical space of the school.

Regarding her school's approach to managing the conflict, Sabine felt like "nothing" was being done to help her. She perceived the lack of help as evidence that the teachers did not believe that she was innocent. She thought that she deserved more support because it was not her wrongdoing that had led to the situation. Further, Sabine believed that she did not receive the right kind of support.

The frustration with the situation was evident in Sabine's voice when she talked about the student and the teachers who were involved but, according to Sabine, took no suitable action to help resolve the conflict. Instead, Sabine felt like she was being punished through not being supported appropriately. Within a short period of time, the conflict resulted in Sabine being bullied by the student. Believing in her innocence in the matter, Sabine felt that she had been treated unfairly – as if she had been the perpetrator, not the victim. She was convinced that the school should have taken her side.

In Year 9, a year after the incident had occurred that had initiated the conflict, Sabine realised that the conflict's circumstances could only be changed with a change of schools and, hence, she did just that. Sabine remembered that all she wanted by the time Year 9 had commenced was to "*get myself away from it all*" (1, 19:00) because nothing the teachers or the principal had said or had done had actually stopped the bullying. Consequently, Sabine struggled to stay engaged in learning given that she continued to feel stressed and anxious at school.

She reported that she had the support of her family and closest friends, but “*a lot of the teachers didn’t really do that much*”, which came as a big disappointment to her because “*they always said to come to them and tell them things, and that they’d stop it then and there, but then when you did go to them, nothing would really seem to happen*” (1, 18:58). Sabine complained that she was not receiving enough support and not seeing enough action being taken to resolve the conflict by the school, in general, and, as is evident from the previous quote, from the teachers in particular. She was blaming the school and the teachers for not dealing with her situation effectively.

With regard to the right kind of support, she further stated that she was angry that nobody had taught her how to manage the situation herself. She acknowledged that she had no experience with conflicts like these and therefore no skill set to apply. Consequently, during the time of the conflict, Sabine felt that she had no control in what was happening and felt disempowered. She stated, “*I felt like I had no control in any of it*” (1, 22:24). She reflected on it in the following way:

They could have given me, like, more sort of help, getting through it all, like, giving me places I could go to – me by myself or me and my friends – or giving me advice on what to do, rather than just saying, “Oh, we’ll go and fix it.” That kind of thing. (2, 12:54)

Sabine believed the following:

If somebody is, like, affected, giving them places that they can feel safe to go at lunchtime, with, like, their friends or, like, giving them advice on more people to talk to outside of school, or places that they can go to get help with what’s going on. (2, 13:32)

Apart from the conflict at school, Sabine explained how her life was “pretty good”. She said she was close to her family and had a great group of friends. She was also a member of a sporting club where she enjoyed attending to “get away from things” and distract herself from the conflict that had occurred at school.

During her two interviews, Sabine seemed very relieved that it was over. She stated that she still struggled to understand how the conflict had arisen and had progressed, and how it had had such a significant impact on her life and the lives of the

people close to her, like her family and her very good schoolfriends. Further, she was puzzled by the lack of care from the school side of things – the teachers and the principal.

The feeling of empowerment. One day during the start of Year 9, Sabine was talking to her mother about her situation at school and the continuous negative impact it was having on her wellbeing and engagement in learning. She described feeling helpless about her situation at school, and that she had doubts about it ever getting any better. That particular conversation with her mother about her feelings and the idea of changing schools was significant because her mother's words addressed Sabine's perceived disempowerment directly:

When Mum said it's up to you, like, what you want to do with the situation. If you want to leave, if you want to take more action against the school or, like, she kind of like ... that's probably why I had a lot more courage to leave because, like Mum said, it's your decision to get out, like, it's up to you. (2, 7:30)

The crucial part of the conversation addressed the sense of helplessness Sabine had: *"It made me feel like I had more control in the situation than what I thought I had"* (7:35). As a result, Sabine confidently stated her wish to change schools in Year 9 after experiencing significant continuous discomfort at school and even outside school when thinking of the schooldays ahead and the student in her cohort with whom she was in conflict. She reflected on the move in the following way: *"Being somewhere where I didn't have to worry about all the other people ... coming here [to the new school] I didn't have to worry about seeing her, running into her and stuff like that"* (1, 17:48).

Sabine came to understand that certain conflicts may not be resolvable through the execution of school policies and removing oneself from the environment by changing schools could be the best solution. She explained that she did not see herself being able to manage the situation as she was not equipped with the skills to resolve such a conflict and stop the bullying. In addition, the conflict had already caused significant harm regarding her academic outcomes and personal wellbeing, and the prolonged state of being bullied without receiving appropriate support for it would only exacerbate the negative impact it was having on her, her family, and her friends. Furthermore, she eventually lost trust in the school's support system altogether and did not want to leave it

to the teachers or the principal to resolve the conflict and ameliorate the overall situation. Sabine explained:

If you're not, like, enjoying it [where you are], or, like, something bad is happening to you, so then remove yourself from it, and then once you move out of that problem, kind of, you become better ... I was over with nothing being done and, like, coz, like, having what happened, kind of like, I lost trust in a lot of people, so, like, having to rely on myself to sort of get things done ... and to get it done I sort of had to just leave. (2, 3:07)

On one hand, Sabine's decision to change schools had not been an easy one for her as she had a good group of friends at the school, which made it a "hard choice". On the other hand, Sabine knew it was the right decision:

I think it was coz, like, I could see that it wasn't just affecting me, like, it was affecting my friendship group, my family and seeing that, like, they were getting affected and hurt by it, like, I felt that it was all my fault, so I kind of wanted it all to stop ... My family, because like it was all happening to me, like, they all kind of were getting worried about what I might end up doing, or like, my mum being a mum, like, gets upset about it and then my friends, like, seeing kind of what I am going through and, like, how I was feeling like always down ... that kind of brought them down. (2, 4:14)

Sabine moved to a new school in Year 9 for Term 2, and with that move, her approach to school changed right away: "Being somewhere where I didn't have to worry about all the other people ... coming here [to the new school] I didn't have to worry about seeing her, running into her and stuff like that" (1, 17:48). Sabine attributed the positive attitude change to the decision to remove herself from the conflicted environment:

I think my attitude change was definitely, like, the moving school, like, being somewhere where I didn't have to worry about all the other people, like, it was just kind of, like, me and meeting new people that made me feel happier about like coming to school. (1, 17:00)

I think coz, kind of like, coz I came from a school where, like, I never wanted to go, and I just like wanted to stay home, and then coming to, like, a new school, like, I just felt so much happier and I wanted to come to see people. (1, 15:45)

The change in attitude improved Sabine's wellbeing and engagement in learning:

Because at my old school it was kind of, like, to just get through the year or just like get over what was happening ... but when I came here, I was, like, make new friends and, like, picking my grades back up and just, like, be better. (1, 24:14)

Changing schools enabled Sabine to refocus on her school work and concentrate on her future:

I think it's very important [academic achievement] because as we're getting closer to Year 12, we have to think about what we wanna do and what subjects and stuff, or how best to do that ... getting those grades and being able to go to uni and do that career, would then like make our life better. (1, 24:39)

In relation to people who had influenced her positive attitude to school change, Sabines said, "Definitely, like my family, and then the friends that I made here [at the new school] coz they've been, like, a big help, just forgetting about what happened" (2, 5:01). She was most grateful to her mother:

My mum, coz, like, she was the one who kept going, like, to the school, was kind of just, like, there to try to help me through it ... she would, like, go and speak to the head teachers, kind of, like, see what they were doing about it, and she went to other places to get advice on what to do. (2, 6:27)

Sabine was also satisfied with her own active involvement in the attitude change. She described it the following way:

I am proud that, like, I was able to get like myself out of the situation that was making me, like, not happy, was making me like a different person, and I am happy that I've been able to like move myself out of that into a

better place, that's been able to help me be like happier, brighter person.

(1, 19:20)

When things aren't going well. Sabine realised that doing nothing was not an option as the situation at school would not improve by itself over time and she would continue to be unhappy at school and not do well academically. When asked directly if she believed that she would have kept the negative attitude if she had not changed schools, Sabine answered:

Yeah, definitely. ... I think it's just coz, like, at my old school, the workload was so much more from, like, the start, so, like, having that and then everything else on top of it and not wanting to go. Yeah. (2, 15:53)

By taking control of her own situation and deciding to move schools, and thereby experiencing a positive attitude change to school, Sabine stated that she felt empowered to manage a difficult situation in the future given the confidence she had developed to deal with them with the experience she had. She explained: *"Now I know that, like, I can turn anything that's negative, I can then, like, get myself to turn it into a positive and, like, enjoy it"* (1, 22:03). She said that she had really enjoyed her new school from the outset and that she had made great friends at the school. She reported that she was continuing the friendships with her friends from her previous school – for example, through shared sports activities – which she said was really good because they were very good friends of hers.

Sabine had taken pride in her change in attitude and her confidence in making decisions on her own about her day-to-day school life. She reported: *"I'm pretty proud of knowing, like, when things aren't going as well as they should be and, like, being able to remove myself from, like, not good, like, situations, and, like, before, like, things get worse"* (1, 5:05).

Sabine had developed a skill for identifying the negative factors within her school environment and managing them promptly – for example, by consciously removing or distancing herself from them – in order to protect and maintain her positive attitude to school and, with that, her engagement in learning. The following is Sabine's advice for students:

Keep doing, like, the things that, like, you're enjoying at school, and if you can see, like, that something negative is happening in, like, your friendship group or in the classroom, getting away from that and, like, finding people that are happier. (1, 29:33)

Sabine, the advocate for fair ground rules. Due to her personal experiences with bullying, Sabine felt strongly about having effective school policies in this area. When asked what advice she could give to the principal of her new school, she made the following suggestions:

Especially for bullying, to have, like, set ground rules, like, if someone does bullying that they have, no matter what kind it is, like, there are set, like, consequences that that person has because, like, with me, the person that was, like, targeting me, she had, like, so many warnings – warnings after warnings – but, like, it didn't do anything, so, like, having harder consequences, not changing it for, like, certain people, no matter, like, what the family does for the school, fair ground rules, that is, for everyone, no matter age or anything like that. (10:36)

She further explained her thinking:

If people have, like, harder consequences, like, they kind of know that can't happen again coz, like, it can affect them ... most people, like eventually, like, it hits them, like, "Oh, it's gonna affect me in like the long run ...". (2, 11:37)

Sabine explained how she believed that “set ground rules” that were transparent would have been effective in her situation:

It probably would have gotten me to, like, be at school more and concentrate more because I'd know that, like, things are getting done, like behind scenes that, like, I don't have to worry about something that's, like, not my fault. (2, 11:37)

Overall, Sabine believed that asking for help had not been sufficiently normalised, and gave the example of the school support service and how a student was supposed to go there when “something was wrong” but it was very public because

“people hearing someone went to the [support service] think something’s wrong with them” (2, 14:00).

Sabine said that she was a hardworking person who liked to play sport to relax. She associated herself with birds *“coz birds are just, like, they can go out and have fun, but they still do what they need to do, build a nest, do what they have to, but at the same time go around and have fun” (1, 30:55).* Sabine rated her school experience as eight out of 10. According to her, it could not be a 10 because disputes with teachers or friends had occurred, which are part of daily life at school, and she understood that. She did not enjoy getting up early, but apart from that, she reported that school was “really good”. She pragmatically concluded that *“some days are good, some days are bad. There are ups and downs, and by the end of it, it’s probably like half and half” (1, 39:32).*

Sabine stated that she believed that friends played a significant role in having a positive attitude to school:

[If] you have a positive attitude to school, it’s normally because you have either got a really good group of friends that, like, you’re happy to be around, but if you’re kind of negative towards school, like, you’re not talking to people, so then you kind of feel more lonely, and you don’t have as many friends that you feel like you can trust, when you have positive feelings towards school, like, you kind of go to more people and, like, talk to them and so then you feel as though you have more friends, get along with more people. (1, 34:16)

Nevertheless, a good group of friends cannot necessarily prevent the development of a negative attitude to school, as evident from Sabine’s narrative, who had good friends at her previous school but still decided to change schools in order to escape the bullying she was receiving.

Patrick’s Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

I used to be a very negative kind of person. At the start of Year 7, Patrick experienced a friendship fallout:

When I started off at high school, I only had my one friend. They were the only person that I would hang out with, but we kind of grew apart over

time. ... it was kind of really upsetting for me to come to school and to have to kind of deal with that. (1, 22:54)

When he commenced secondary school, Patrick realised that his negative attitude might cause him to miss out on making new friends, similar to when he lost his dear friend from primary school due to his negative approach to school. He believed that “*no one wants to be around a whole group that’s negative; it’s not a fun experience*” (1, 45:16) and explained that “*I think me and my friend grew apart because of that negativity that I suffered from in primary school, and so over time that just kind of wore down our friendship*” (1, 44:25).

Coming to school and not having friends to hang out with was getting Patrick down. It led to Patrick losing motivation to put in effort into his schoolwork, and at the same time prevented him from trying to make new friends: “*I used to be a very negative kind of person. I was kind of closed off to just myself, and didn’t really socialise a lot (...)*” (2, 18:35).

In primary school Patrick had a “traumatising” experience with the school principal. In Year 5 he received a three-day-in-school suspension for something he reported he had not done. Patrick believed the principal knew he was the wrong person for the punishment, but despite having his family’s full support in the matter, he had to go through the suspension nevertheless, not understanding the principal’s actions and reasoning. This experience significantly impacted on Patrick:

That kind of gave me a little PTSD kind of feel; that wasn’t a really good time. I was just really stressed and freaked out whenever I went to school for the next two, three years ... really cautious about what I was doing in Year 7, especially, coz I wanted to make a good impression. That was really stressful and quite horrible for me. (1, 7:41)

The suspension was “humiliating”, and it made him really angry. For example, Patrick described how he had to sit on the floor in the principal’s office and do his work there instead of at a desk.

Patrick explained that the development of a negative attitude to school, as a result of the suspension, led to the friendship break-up in secondary school with his only friend at the time. Consequently, Patrick explained that he carried with him the guilt of losing a

good friend, knowing that it was his negativity towards school that caused the friendship to end. Patrick reported that during the last two years of primary school and in Year 7 he was “not fun” to be around. He did not blame his friend for distancing himself from him. He acknowledged that he might have done the same if it had been the other way around.

At the start of secondary school, Patrick was seeking a new start with a new principal and in a new environment, but, nevertheless, remained negative towards school. Patrick described that how, despite having initially hopes of a new start to schooling, the friendship break-up took away any hope of secondary school being any better than primary school had ended up being.

Patrick was not working effectively in class; he did not do his work on time and often just sat there and listened to music. He had disengaged from learning. He said he did not enjoy going to school due to his own negativity. Eventually, fears of failing subjects surfaced:

I had a couple of fears with actually failing my subjects, so because of that negativity, I wasn't really happy going to school, or I wasn't happy in class or anything, so I wasn't working effectively ... so I sat there, on my phone listening to music or whatever, so I wasn't approaching my work positively. (1, 25:27)

Patrick acknowledged that school was important:

I still understood that school is important, but I guess I wasn't really showing it through my actions; I was being really negative towards class and towards school work and I just didn't want to do any of it. (1, 25:56)

The conflict with the principal in primary school had significantly impacted on Patrick's wellbeing and his academic outcomes:

Life outside of school wasn't too bad. Just being at school kind of brought back that bad situation. Every time that I was there, it was just a really bad experience for me so I was always really stressed, so I was getting really, really bad grades in primary school coz I was so stressed all the time, overthinking everything [the conflict with the principal]. (2, 18:35)

The new persona. The change came at the end of Year 7. Patrick described it the following way: *“I kind of got into a really positive friend group that always tries to help each other out and that really kind of lifted my attitude to everything, as it made me wanna try harder”* (2, 1:03). The way things played out for the better was really “a lucky coincidence” as Patrick described it. However, Patrick also became active and tried to influence the good development of things at school. This is how Patrick explained his approach:

[At the start of secondary school] no one knew who you were, so you could be pretty much anybody that you wanted to be. It’s kind of a big change. Leave that [the past] behind and become a new person. (2, 3:58)

However, with the friendship break-up Patrick’s attitude became very negative yet again in secondary school. It took Patrick over two terms in Year 7 to get to that point of wanting to change his own circumstances and take action to escape his own negativity towards school.

Patrick engaged in conversations with his parents to whom he was always able to talk to openly. He felt their support when he experienced the conflict with the principal in primary school as well as in the period after the friendship fallout at the start of Year 7. Patrick emphasised throughout the interviews his parents’ role in his positive attitude change to school and described his family generally as “really loving”:

My mum and dad help me out a lot so I can always talk to them; I always felt like I can talk to them. ... They are kind of really innocent, approachable people. Nothing ever really faces them that heavily, they’re never really sad or angry, they’re just kind of there to give assistance for whenever we need it. (2, 5:58)

When asked about the starting moment of the attitude change, Patrick described how, in the second half of Year 7, he felt like he had to change something to reduce the negativity he was perceiving at school. He struggled to manage his negative emotions at school, and his schoolwork was negatively impacted by that, which started to significantly worry him. Self-reflecting on his situation and opening up about it to his parents helped him to initiate some changes in his approach to school.

He started to notice the “more positive” students and felt drawn to them and their “sense of happiness”. He observed them and perceived them as having fun in class *and* with the schoolwork – both things he so desperately sought but couldn’t get himself due to his negativity.

Consequently, Patrick had actively developed a strategy to make friends:

When I came to high school, I kind of tried to pretend to be somebody else. I tried to be happier and I tried to be more approachable and as people started approaching me, it made me a lot happier, so I genuinely felt those things instead. (2, 3:33)

Patrick did become proactive and started changing to become a “new” person, but the process was not a quick one. Although the friendship break-up made the “pretending to be somebody else” very difficult, he did not give up on that strategy and eventually had success with it. When I asked him how he got into his new group of friends, Patrick explained that he appeared happier in class and *“I tried to include them in my conversation. And they would do the same for me, and gradually we became closer and closer” (2, 2:53).*

Patrick explained how he realised his strategy was working because “positive students”, students he looked up to, had started to approach him. The approach made him feel valued and cared for. Realising how good that made him feel, he started to approach other students. Patrick was driven by the idea of having more “positivity” at school. It turned into a win-win situation, as he enjoyed approaching them, knowing how good it felt to be approached. Patrick put it down to people making an effort, which makes a positive impression on others. He realised that *“just saying Hi and asking how they are doing, how their school work is going made other people feel happy” (1, 23:03).*

Patrick reported that he had a good group of very close friends, which made him want to go to school and do well. He stated that *“it was that sense of positivity and people backing you up to push that little bit higher [regarding academic achievement]” (1, 25:00).* Patrick explained that all his new friends had and continued to have a positive attitude to school, which the group tried to maintain together:

When a friend is not that positive towards school, we try to help each other out – for example, after school we’re always talking on our phones

etc. and playing [computer] games together, and while we are playing games, we have casual conversations, and if school work comes up, we try to talk to that friend about it, and try and give them that positive influence, to trying to get them back on track. (1, 25:03)

Patrick described himself as a person who valued his friends and would nurture his friendships. It is not surprising that he attributed his positive attitude change to school to his group of friends:

My main friends [stating five names] ... Yeah, they are really just a big help to me, yeah. I usually go to my friend X, whenever I have a problem that's making me sad, and then, when we are all nice and happy, and everyone is happy, we all get together and we'll do something great, and it makes us that bit happier still. (2, 5:25)

Patrick explained that the greatest support he had received was from a friend whom he had had since Year 7: “Coz he motivates me to do the best that I can and just to do better and better” (2, 7:20). Patrick said he appreciated in him that “there’s never a time when he’s not available, school work or anything” (2, 8:00).

In looking back at the start of secondary school and the development of the positive attitude to school, Patrick also attributed the change to himself. He was proud of his attitude change and described it as a success story:

I do think of it as an achievement coz it's quite a struggle to have that big of an attitude change. It is a big struggle and it is a lot of hard work and you kind of have to dedicate yourself to trying to ... resolve the problem and trying to change and switch to that positive side, so, yeah, I'd say that it is an achievement, yeah. (1, 32:37)

With positive attitude change came the positivity. Evidently, Patrick had managed to move on from the negative experience with the principal in primary school, as well as from the fallout with his good friend at the start of secondary school.

He came to understand that the negative attitude had impacted on his schoolwork and his social life at school. In order to change his situation, Patrick said he knew he had to change his attitude to school and, in particular, he had to be more “positive” in his

approach to school. He said, “*Now that I am past that, it’s become really positive. Now I have a big great group of friends who all care about each other, and that made a really positive change on my schooling*” (1, 22:54). Patrick also reported that the friend he had had the fallout with had become a good friend again, which Patrick was really happy about.

When asked about strategies to stay positive towards school, Patrick answered that smiling is an option:

I’m not sure what it is, ... it’s like there’s something in the air that just makes you smile that little bit more, and it makes you that much more positive and engaged towards your work, you just want to keep working, working, working, because it’s this huge sense of positivity radiating around you and it’s a great experience. (1, 42:10)

Over the years in secondary school, he learned that the following:

By switching over to being positive you definitely engage in a lot more conversation with different people, so you meet new people, make new friends, and all of this, and it’s a really needed asset, for high school especially, you just need people to talk to. (1, 45:16)

Patrick realised that there were two directions regarding a student’s attitude to school, and they could choose which one they wanted to go with, depending on the friends they had. When discussing a group of friends who had a very negative attitude to school, Patrick explained:

It’s kind of a chain reaction of all of them being negative. It just forms this big negative circle. So their friends, instead of trying to lift up their friend and make them more positive, I think they kind of succumb to the negativity and they just decided to kind of join them, instead of making it better. (1, 47:44)

In hindsight he is “kicking himself in the butt” when thinking of the negative attitude he had. When asked what he would tell his younger self, he answered:

I was quite a negative kid in primary school, so I was getting into a fair bit of trouble in primary school and, you know, I didn’t really like doing

work. I still loved maths, but all the other work ... I just wasn't really into, I didn't enjoy it, ... so I'd probably tell myself ... I'd probably, like, kick myself in the butt, so I'd kind of get my backside into gear and just kind of focus on all of my work, and I'd tell myself to keep smiling. I'd probably try and reinforce a positive attitude in myself to therefore better my learning for the whole of primary school and heading into high school. (1, 44:27)

If given the chance, he would advise schools to encourage students to seek help from the school support services more. He stated that “*I guess we can kind of teach kids to approach people and to be approachable*” (2, 9:00) so that students feel confident in asking for support when they are not feeling happy at school and in order to improve peer relationships by “teaching” students to be more caring with each other and to create closer bonds between peers.

You're still having fun, while you're doing your work. Patrick said that he was into video games, go-carting, and that he had previously been involved in competitive gymnastics. He said he loved being active, but also enjoyed relaxing at home. If he were an animal, he would be a puppy:

I can be as playful as I like to be, but I can be very analytical when I want to be, so with the right amount of teaching, I can basically do anything the teachers want me to do (laugh out loud), but I still mess around with my friends. (1, 48:35)

At the time of the interviews, Patrick stated that school was going well and that he was enjoying it. His favourite subject was robotics. He pointed out that he had a lot of engaging and interesting teachers. He said he liked the ones in particular that could have a joke with the students and who allowed for some freedom in the structure of a given course. He reported that he “despised” homework, mainly because he worked almost every day. He explained that he simply preferred to do schoolwork at school and keep the other time to himself.

Despite having a difficult start to secondary school and having the fear of failing subjects, Patrick managed to push his negativity aside for mathematics. He even surprised himself with an award he received at the end of Year 7:

That was pretty cool. I think my maths teacher really enjoyed working with me, so that was ... yeah, I thought that was pretty cool, so I tried my absolute hardest in Year 7, and, yeah, I came out with that. (1, 6:08)

Patrick was doing the advanced classes, and that was a big step for him from Year 9. Confidently, he stated that he was coping really well, and that he was proud of himself. Due to his teachers instructing in a “positive way”, as they are getting really one on one with the students in those advanced classes, he said that he was enthusiastic about them and about learning: *“I think because there’s that little sense of positivity, so you’re still having fun, while you’re doing your work”* (15:40). Particularly in maths, one of his favourite subjects, he said he did *“try and learn it a bit more than other people do, so at home I looked things up”* (1, 10:15). When asked to rate his school experience, he gave it *“about a nine or eight”* (1, 16:30).

Apart from the principal in his primary school, Patrick stated that he could not say a negative word about any of his educators. He said that the secondary school teachers may have even inspired him with their positivity towards teaching and the profession, as he himself wanted to become a teacher. He envisaged himself as the teacher who managed *“to provide students with those little moments of comedy, and always smile – it makes everybody feel better and is kind of contagious”* (1, 27:45).

Patrick described himself as a sensitive person, and admitted to having “a bit of” anxiety. He said he was aware of the fact that he might not cope with “little things” at school as well as other students do, as he tended to overthink them. Little things have the potential to make school “horrible” he said – for example, seeing a student behaving really inappropriately towards another student would cause Patrick significant distress. He explained further that the little thing did not even have to involve Patrick himself to make him feel uncomfortable. Being as it was, Patrick can definitely be described as an advocate for positivity:

[Learning] has to have that little bit of a fun aspect, not all has to be fun, but little dots every now and then, just a smile or everybody laughing. It makes it that much more positive and everybody wants to work more.
(1, 20:41)

Kate's Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

A tragic friendship fallout. Kate faced significant difficulties at school in Years 7, 8 and 9. First, she felt unprepared for secondary school. She explained:

You get to Year 7 and you're like, "Oh my god, I don't understand how do all those people know all this?" ... You don't know the teachers and you don't have that kind of relationship you have in Year 10, and you don't know them and you're trying, kind of, to figure out your place in that class, in that year level. It's confronting and difficult; it's quite hard to get along, and it just makes you really hate being there. You just don't want to be in the class, doing all that work that you don't understand, and you're not like close to the teachers, and you're just confused. (2, 6:14)

Second, she was worried about not having friends and/or not understanding the content covered in class:

From, like, Years 7, 8 and 9, I was just, like, being one of those kids that had no friends, and, it was either that or not understanding what they were doing in class. So like, you miss out on a day or something, you go home and you are sick, and next day you come back and you're, like, I don't understand anything: "Oh my god", and you're just, like, sitting in class and everyone is just, like, working and you're like, "Oh my god, oh my god, what did I miss?" You know, and that was kind of a big fear of mine, missing out on a day because something like that would happen. (1, 41:27)

She summed it up why she disengaged in learning the following way:

Going into Year 7, you're kind of, like, "I don't want to be here" ... the first couple of months or so you're, like, trying to make friends, fit in, trying to, like, catch up on other things you didn't learn, you're trying to connect with people, like, you're trying to make the friends that you want to be with all the way through school ... work is not, like, on the top of your list. You're kind of, like, "Screw work, I don't want to do it". (2, 7:32)

In Year 8, Kate's two best friends, who formed a three-people friendship group with Kate, had a friendship fallout. Kate explained how the two girls suddenly decided that they did not want to stay friends anymore, and they started to have arguments. The friendship fallout followed a critical statement being made between the two girls, which resulted in school staff needing to get involved in the conflict. Kate explained: *"It was such a drastic thing; one minute we're all kind of happy, and then one sentence is said and then everything is just like nuts"* (2, 11:12). The conflict resulted in Kate losing both friends, and she reported that *"it was just such a big thing. It was just quite tragic"* (2, 11:40).

Kate tried to stay friends with both girls, but due to the circumstances, it was not easy to manage the friendship. Kate started to feel conflicted, and her days at school were filled with worries concerning the friendship. When she was getting ready for school, she would start to get anxious. She explained her thinking the following way: *"Oh, I have to deal with this when I go to school, I don't want to talk to this person and then make the other person upset, and it was kind of like having to balance that out"* (2, 14:48). Her attempts to stay friends with both girls started to negatively impact on Kate's ability to focus on her schoolwork. She became significantly anxious about her academic outcomes. The incident and its consequences affected her concentration and caused her to neglect her schoolwork at times. She said, *"I have been focusing so much on this [the friendship issue], I haven't been focusing on much, like doing homework, finishing things; you kind of go, 'Oh, yeah, I'll finish that tomorrow'"* (2, 28:30), and became visibly distressed and teared up.

Kate also believed that the school did not handle the critical incident with her two best friends very well: *"They didn't really do much, they kept them [the two girls] separated, and hoped for the best"* (2, 13:48). She further explained how the incident caused her significant distress: *"It was a really big thing at the time, ... and it affected me"* (2, 14:38). She believed she was not given enough support to "balance" things out while being at school. This resulted in Kate staying unfocused and struggling with her schoolwork. The staff who had got involved in the incident only addressed the two girls; not her in any way. She felt like she had been significantly affected by the incident as well and wanted to have received advice on how to deal with it.

Kate was preoccupied with friendship issues. Once the friendship with both girls had finally ended, Kate struggled to move on given that she was confronted with the situation on a daily basis at school and she felt lonely without her trusted friends. It also bothered Kate that the two girls had developed new friendships, even though she eventually made new friends herself:

You have your friendship groups and in class you sit with your friends ... you separate from your friends and you make new friends, and then those other friends make new friends, and you feel a bit jealous, like, "Oh, they're making friends." (1, 37:05)

Worrying about the initial incident and continuing to feel jealous towards her former friends made it difficult for Kate to focus on her studies. She reported that she always knew school was important, even when she had a negative attitude to school:

I want to say no, but, yeah, I've always thought that school was important. You're trying to set yourself up to get, you know, a job, you know, a future, and ... sometimes I thought, is it really necessary to go to school? And then the more you kind of think about it, the more you go, well, you know, successful – not all successful people – but most, go to school, they go to university, they study hard, they do what they are supposed to do, you know. Clearly their success comes ... they've done that, and you kind of see that it is important, school and work and that. (1, 44:05)

Despite acknowledging the importance of schoolwork, and wanting to catch up on missed work, Kate found herself frequently distracted with past and current friendship issues, which she was happy to discuss in great length during the interviews. They eventually caused her to be in a constant state of worrying and she could not concentrate on her studies, or get things done on time and complete her work to the expected standard. As a result, her fear of failing continued to grow. Kate explained how she did not want to be rebellious, but simply could not focus on school work given that she was preoccupied with friendship issues:

Sometimes it's just, like, you get some kids, and they're just going against the teachers because they think it's fun, like, it's just the year [Year 9] to rebel, I guess ... you get all the kids that are running around and doing

things, and in Year 9 you're like, let's not do what the teachers say, and you know, not learn, but not all kids. I wasn't like, yell at the teacher, because we can, but I just didn't want to work. You get to the point where you're like, I just don't want to do it. (1, 37:05)

When Kate was experiencing her negative attitude to school, she reported that she particularly enjoyed being back at home after the school day had finished, stating that reading was quite a relaxing activity for her as it distracted her from her friendship worries:

I am away from everything, I don't have to deal with it anymore, I am home, I can just sit down and read my book. You're not having people in your ear going, "Oh, I really don't like that person, or they are looking at me funny, or this or that" ... you're just home. (2, 36:15)

Worries are a waste of time. In Year 10 Kate really started to feel the pressure to do well at school. She realised that she needed to focus more on her studies and less on her social life and the past and present friendship issues, some of which started years ago. The friendship fallout that involved her two best friends in Year 8 continued to negatively affect her wellbeing as she continued to "obsess" about the two girls and be jealous that they had found new friends.

Initially, Kate realised that she did not approve of the actions of either of the two girls and how they had handled the incident. She decided on her own that separating herself from them was her best option to get over the friendship fallout:

Just separating from them was kind of a good choice at the time, like, I am not part of this, don't complain to me coz I can't do anything, I am not part of it ... I didn't want to be part of it, so I just went off on my own. If you got problems, don't talk to me, I don't really want to make your problems better. I care about you, but I don't wanna have to deal with your problems as well while I am trying to get through school. (2, 16:15)

Despite her separation from the girls, Kate struggled to move on with the new friends she had managed to make because she continued to be preoccupied with her two former friends and their social lives. According to Kate, she obsessed about it continuously. After sharing her obsession with her older friends and admitting that she

was not over the friendship fallout, they gave her some advice, which eventually sunk in. Kate engaged in conversations with her older friends as well as her mother and opened up on the impact the friendship issues were continuing to have on her. From those conversation she realised the following:

I just didn't find a point in thinking about them and what they're up to ... it was really just a waste of time ... and Mum said, "Build a bridge and get over it. What happens in high school you're not gonna remember, like, in 20 years' time. It's just a waste of time having, like ... such a hatred for someone, letting that take up all your time at school." I reckon that was kind of what helped me like get over it. (2, 13:08)

Kate understood that she had to improve her engagement in learning. In order to do that, she knew she had to focus more on her schoolwork. She stated:

In Year 9, and even now, I have a lot of friends who are in Years 11 and 12, so, like, they're really mature and you talk to them and they're like, "Why are you wasting your time obsessing over that person, when you're clearly not friends with them anymore?" The more time you kind of spend with those older kids, the more you kind of realise that what you were doing was kind of irrelevant to you, like, to your study and all that. (1, 38:45)

As I pushed to learn more why Kate would take her older friends' advice seriously, I learned that it had to do with her perception of them really understanding her situation. She explained:

They've all got their problems, they are in Years 11 and 12, they clearly had, you know, friend issues, and they're just like, it's a waste of time – wasting so much time on someone that's not like actively part of your life. You see their point of view, and you're like, it makes sense, they've gone through it all before, and you're picturing yourself in their shoes, and you're like, I can understand why you're saying that and it makes sense. (1, 39:46)

For Kate, the imaginative award for best support in the positive attitude change would go to her older friends:

They've been through this, they had like problems, friendship breakdowns, they've been there, done that, they kind of were, like, just get over it, you can do this, like you know, it's not a hard thing to do, it's just something that everyone has to do eventually [meaning to separate from certain people]. They were like contributors in helping me with the whole like friendship issue and they were like supporting me ... yeah. (2, 17:08)

It is from those friends that she learned valuable life lessons. For example, she stated, *"You're not always going to be friends with the same people, it's gonna change all the time, and it's them who really kind of helped me"* (2, 17:30).

One girl in Year 11 stood out in particular when Kate reflected on the support she had received that had influenced her positive attitude change. Kate said that the girl had her own personal problems and had described them as quite significant ones, but what made her stand out was that she always offered to help Kate. At the time of our interview sessions, Kate said that *"the friend was always there for her and was always 'willing' to help out"* (2, 20:00).

After her older friends, the imaginative award would *"probably"* go to her parents, as she explained:

I tell my mum a lot of things, you know, I really don't want to be at school, because ... or I am finding it hard, it's just difficult to do things, and she'd be like, well, I have been there, I have done that, I am still here. She's always kind of encouraging me, she's always there. If I have problems, I just talk to her. (2, 18:03)

She quoted her mother who said, *"Build a bridge and get over it"* (2, 12:30), referring to the critical incident with the former two girlfriends. Kate found her mother's comments to be encouraging. In one of the conversations, her mother had said, *"What happens in high school you're not gonna remember, like, in 20 years' time – it's just a waste of time having like such a hatred for someone, and letting that take up all your time at school"*, and Kate reported that *"I reckon that [the comment from her mother] was kind of what helped me like get over it"* (2, 13:08). It did, however, take her a significant amount of time to *"get over it"*, approximately two years.

You just eventually grow up. The positive attitude change to school had significantly impacted on Kate's wellbeing at school and on her approach to friendship issues:

I think as you kind of get older, you kind of get over those fears, you kind of, like, I've got friends; I have been friends with them since the get-go. I've known them for ages, and you're with them, and you do have your fights, you have your moments where you just don't want to talk to them, and then you kind of get over those moments, like, why was I angry at them. You know, they have their opinion, I have my opinion. I have still got older friends, I have still got younger friends. It's kind of like, I don't know why I am so, you know, afraid that I am not gonna have friends – I have so many! And it doesn't matter that one person doesn't like me, I've got the ones over there, and the ones down there, kind of thing, and it's just easy to, kind of, you know, tell yourself, you've still got friends; doesn't matter if that person doesn't like you, you still got all your other friends, so yeah. (1, 42:45)

Upon reflection, Kate concluded that the following:

In Years 7 and 8 you make your friends, and you're, like, really close to your friends till you get to Year 9 and you're, like, slowly maturing and you're breaking away from some of these friendship groups. Like, you have your fights with your friends, and you have those people that you really don't want to be around, you know. (1, 35:00)

Kate explained how she now understood that friendships changed throughout the school years and that it was a normal rite of passage in adolescence to experience friendship issues and to be affected by them. She acknowledged that obsessing about friendship issues significantly interfered with her engagement in learning. In hindsight she knew she should have prioritised her studies over her friendship issues, but she viewed it as a process of maturing:

It just eventually gets, kind of, I don't know, you just eventually grow up and, oh, they've got friends. What to do? They've moved on, we have moved on, you know. And you get to Year 10 and it's, like, you forget

about that person, you are not obsessed with what they do, who they are doing it with; you're not obsessed with who they're friends with, you're like, "Oh, what, they are friends"? I didn't know that ... you're not over obsessing with people, but just like trying to focus on your work. And it's kind of, like, the whole, that person is kind of irrelevant now; I have to finish all this before I can focus on that [friendship issues], but that's pretty irrelevant, so I don't know why I am focusing on it. (1, 37:05)

She added that *"I still have the fear of not having friends, but it's not gonna happen, I still got friends (laugh out loud)" (1, 41:27).*

Kate went from grieving the friendship fallout to disliking the girls due to their behaviour during the incident, to accepting them as class mates. In Kate's words:

You're sitting in class, and you hear that person talking and you're, like, "Oh, I really don't like that person", but after a while you're like, "Oh, that's a very valid point", and you're kind of agreeing with some things they say ... you just kind of get over it after a while. The gradual kind of ... you're kind of forgetting about them for a while, just weeding them out of your life, I guess. You just, you know, you just don't care. (1, 38:55)

The relationships with her teachers had improved since her attitude change. Kate reflected on her secondary school years and the rapport that she had developed with her teachers in Year 10:

Teachers are so different ... You get used to it – first couple of years you're, like, I hate this, I hate school ... Year 9 got better, yeah. Year 10, like the teachers are more understanding, you got a couple of teachers that don't kind of, how would you put it, yell at you, they just kind of say, look, you can't be doing this, you're in Year 10, you've had so many years to mature, to get over yourself. They've told you to, you know, just grow up. They're very understanding. You get teachers that are like ... they spend time with you, you know, they're so much more willing to teach you, than in Years 7, 8 and 9. (1, 33:00)

Through her positive attitude change to school, Kate learned to the following:

Assess situations, you know, if you are in a serious situation [referring to the critical incident in Year 8], to be able to assess what's gonna happen, you're not gonna do something stupid, like, and everything just goes down the drain, kind of thing; assessing how you're gonna act towards the situation, and like being positive in a situation, like, that would be helpful because you are not, like ... yeah, of course, you'd be like stressing out in a situation like that – like, oh my god, what do I do – being positive will just keep you, like, how do you say it, like, you're not gonna freak out and have a fit; you just gonna kind of go with it. (2, 2:44)

After her positive attitude change to school, Kate managed to stop obsessing about friendship issues. She became more focused in class and reported that she felt more motivated to do well, and additionally, more confident to ask for help from the teachers given that she perceived them to be more approachable.

On “bad” days she would tell herself:

It's gonna get better. It's a thing I heard about, it's, um, it gradually goes back to a medium, so you can have really good days or bad days, and it always goes back to the medium. It's always in that middle ground – balances itself out ... it's school, you'll always have good days and bad days. (2, 31:58)

Interestingly, when asked if she was proud of her positive attitude change, Kate stated that she was not, and explained that you do not receive a certificate for it, so you cannot be proud of it as an achievement as such. She concluded that she believed it would be “good” if an attitude change was acknowledged more often, but she was doubtful that such an acknowledgement would ever be made at school; she elaborated on that by stating that due to the class sizes of about 25 students, and teachers having five classes per day, “*they don't notice you hated school at the start of the year, and then by the end they are your favourite teacher – they aren't gonna notice that*” (2, 33:32).

School's not here for entertainment. Kate stated that she lived on a farm and that she helped her family with the farm work on a regular basis. I had a strong sense that she was very proud of the family's farming efforts and her contribution to that, as she went into great detail describing her responsibilities and her input.

She was learning Japanese and hoped to go on the school trip to Japan. At the time of the interview, Kate said that school was going okay. She did point out, however, that Year 10 was all about "you can't fail". Kate compared the previous years to Year 10 the following way:

In Years 8 and 9, and even Year 7, they are pretty okay; like, they don't really care if your work is a little overdue or if you haven't ... oh, they do care if you don't do it, but they're not like, "Oh my god, you're gonna fail", but when you get to Year 10, it's like 'You're gonna fail, you're gonna fail, if you don't do all this ... but it's probably the same for all schools, it's not that different I guess. (1, 4:48)

In Year 10 Kate managed to build good relationships with her teachers:

Some teachers are really interesting, like, yeah, some teachers are really into what they do, and they've got interesting ways of teaching, stories, and you just get the teachers that are so into teaching and they're trying to teach you new things and it's kind of, I don't know, you just find it easier. I find it easier to learn. They are so into it, like, I can help you, it's okay, doesn't matter if you get it wrong, and you have your friends and that, and that just helps the boring classes to, like, get through. (1, 5:44)

Kate reflected on her behaviour in the past, based on her negative attitude to school, and the change in Year 10:

Year 9 is when you're, like, oh, I don't want to learn, I don't want to do this. I think it's the rebellious year, Year 9, and it's kind of like, I don't want to do it. You can't make me. And in Year 10, you're like, oh, that wasn't a good decision. And you kind of grow up and mature and teachers become kind of your second parents. (1, 33:21)

As mentioned previously, Kate worried about missing class due to sickness because she felt like she was automatically behind when being absent from school, which was due to a lack of support from the teachers to help her catch up on missed content. However, from Year 10 onwards those fears started to diminish:

Now it's kind of like, yeah, that's ok. You miss days and, you know, the teachers now are more, you know, yeah, we'll help you, this is what we're doing, this is what we're up to, this is how we're doing it. Back in Year 7, it was like, here's the work you missed. Do it. (1, 41:27)

Despite having had a negative attitude to school for years, when asked about what had been the highlights of schooling so far, Kate answered “so many”. Unsurprisingly, most of the highlights referred to her primary school years. She was the vice-captain of her school, and for her debutant ball in Year 6 she was asked to help out with the event. She provided me with a great amount of detail as she had clearly remembered that special event and the great feeling of having been given responsibility by the teachers within a supportive environment. Despite Year 7 being described by her as “not a good” year, Kate did receive several awards for leadership, “here and there”.

Kate described herself as a student who was generally really worried about exams, even when she was prepared for them. She considered that the stress regarding the exams was the ultimate low point in her schooling so far:

Exams. Definitely exams. You got, like, so much pressure building up to that point and you're, like, the week before exams, everyone is, like, “Oh my god, “Oh my god, how am I gonna do this?”, and you get to the exams and you're, like, “Oh my god, can't do this”, and when it's over, you're, like, “Oh my god, I don't know what I was worrying about”. It's just the stress before you do one, and when you actually get the exam, you're like, oh, it's not that hard. I don't know what I was worrying about. You do it, you're home and it's all like ... fine. (1, 15:04)

When asked why she thought she stressed so much, she said, “*I think it's the teachers. They put so much pressure on you to do well in the exams, and they, I don't know, it's kind of like they are pressuring you into like studying and preparing, I guess*” (1, 16:05).

Overall, Kate gave her school a rating of eight out of 10.

Well, it's got its up and downs, you know, even if it's at its constant, it's not good, but it's not bad; it's never gonna be, "Oh my god, this is amazing", I love going to school coz it's always in the morning; you don't want to wake up (laughs out loud) ... it's always just that constant base, it's not good, it's not bad, it's just trying to find the level between the good and the bad. (1, 24:54)

In Kate's opinion, school did not need to be fun to learn. She said she believed that a student needs to "knuckle down and do things". Pragmatically, she explained that there were days with "fun subjects" and days that were more "serious". According to Kate, *"school's not here for entertainment. It's here to actually learn. It's not for you to throw tantrums at teachers"* (1, 29:17).

When asked what animal Kate saw herself as most similar to in terms of her personality, she stated that she did not know but described herself as "shy, nervous" but also "sarcastic" and "mean" at times: *"Depends on what day you catch me on ... like a rat, a cornered rat will bite the cat"* (1, 56:25).

Benjamin's Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

Not being happy with oneself. In Year 9, Ben started to disengage from school and developed a negative attitude to school when personal stuff *"got in the way"* (1, 9:05). He "dreaded" going to school: *"I just enjoyed every time I got home from school last year"* (2, 27:01).

In Year 10, Ben came out as gay. In Year 9, Ben did not want to accept who he was, and he reported to just be *"blocking out the stuff"* (2, 30:45) and kept trying to *"push it away, avoid it"* (2, 8:24). As a result, Ben occasionally lied, which really bothered him. He stated that *"it made you really feel uncomfortable last year if someone brought it up because you wanted to really avoid the conversation"* (2, 16:58).

Ben was not happy as a person because he did not feel confident in his skin, and he was concerned about how others might perceive him. He reported that one can only have a positive attitude if one is happy, and *"the problem was probably not being happy with myself, hmm, ... because of, I don't know, it's probably just personal, but worrying"*

about what other people might think” (2, 8:24). He described Year 9 as a “tough” year for him, and stated that “you can’t talk to anyone about it” (2, 8:24). Socio-politically speaking, it was an interesting time in Australia when Ben was in Year 9 because at that time the federal parliament was debating the possibility of holding a plebiscite on gay marriage. Ben explained it the following way:

At the back of my mind, I probably knew it didn’t matter, but you see lots of hatred going around. If I had come out before this plebiscite stuff, I would have been more scared because of all the stuff online about gays – it has just blown up. (2, 20:10)

Ben struggled to be engaged with learning, but he continued to enjoy being engaged in an extracurricular activity. He stated, *“So I wasn’t really focusing that much on school, apart from the [theatre] production! When I did the production, that just took my mind off it – the physical schoolwork. It was hard to focus and enjoy school” (2, 5:23).*

He was aware of having a negative attitude:

It didn’t feel good, but I didn’t really show much of it, but it didn’t really feel that good, no ... Oh well, when you wake up in the morning, it doesn’t feel good having to go to school, when you don’t enjoy it, especially. (1, 32:39)

He reported that he feared what his friends and other people would think of him. Ben explained that he himself did not want to believe he was gay in Year 9, and *“that’s why I probably worried what other people might think of me, and that caused me to leave my group of friends, and that wasn’t good” (2, 11:28).* He isolated himself from others in order to reduce the number of conversations about himself – for example, talking about teenage relationship matters and discussing whether or not he was interested in some girls in his year level. Overall, Ben explained that the way he felt at school interfered with his engagement in learning:

If you’re not happy, then it’s hard to focus at school. It’s probably one of the bigger things. And you can get quite distracted at times, just thinking about what other people might think, and what goes through your mind, it

just Eventually it just outdoes all the school stuff, and that's why I had a bad attitude last year. Yeah. (2, 4:42)

I was just too tired of lying. The change in Ben's attitude came at the beginning of Year 10 when he had a change of attitude towards himself:

At the start of the year, it was kind of different because I had decided I am just gonna accept who I am, but last year I didn't want to. So at the start of this year, I am, like, I am sick of it, I'm just gonna accept who I am, and whoever finds out, finds out. (2, 4:16)

He always felt supported by his mother despite not having directly spoken to her about his sexual orientation:

Mum always made it obvious that she was accepting of it [being gay]. She'd always talked about it and been positive about it. And always been there. She started to pick up on it at the start of the year when things got brought up and I was no longer saying, "No, no I am not". (2, 18:00)

Due to his increasing disengagement from school and learning, Ben eventually realised that *"if I keep trying to push it away, avoid it, it's not gonna help"* (2, 8:14). At the end of Year 9, Ben said that *"I was just too tired of lying, like, anymore"* (1, 35:06) in an effort to avoid conversations about himself. Ben did not want to lie anymore about himself nor his sexual orientation, either at home or at school. He did not want to deny his sexuality any more when suggestive comments were made by his older brother, his classmates or his friends. He explained:

So the action was at the start of the year, after going through a tough year last year, and the thing is you can't talk to anyone about it, that's why I didn't talk to [the school support services]. At the start of the year I decided ... the action was to stop worrying about it, come what may. (2, 8:24)

He reported that he wanted to improve his academic outcomes as well as his personal wellbeing: *"I basically decided, at the start of the year, that I needed to work on school and be happy"* (2, 1:33). In order to achieve that, Ben developed a strategy for himself, where he focused more on the positive things at school:

So, in order to do that, I just cut out all the things that were bringing me down ... and having a bad effect on my school, and I started to bring in more positive attributes and focus on the things I love, like [theatre] production. (2, 1:33)

In addition, Ben also distanced himself from his friends and spent more time alone, which was his own initiative:

I like being in my own company sometimes, and I can entertain myself, like I can look at [theatre production aspects] on the internet, I like doing that ... coz I can entertain myself, it doesn't really bring me down [to be alone]. I don't rely on having friends necessarily, like, though it is good to have friends and someone to talk to. I don't let that worry me, like having to keep friends and stuff like that. (1, 34:24)

Ben described how he liked to “*focus on those things [theatre production aspects], and start planning my future and stuff, and just figure things out and that usually makes me happy and that's why I had a positive attitude change*” (2, 1:33). Having decided to accept his sexuality and stop worrying about what other people might think of him, he was able to change his approach to school and be “happy” there and be able to prioritise what mattered to him and his future. He believed that “*if you can't be bothered, then you don't really have much hope*” (1, 40:00) of turning things around for yourself in order to be happier at school. Ben came to understand that a proactive approach was needed and therefore he took charge of his attitude to school.

Only after the positive attitude change had occurred a few months into Year 10 did Ben officially come out as gay to his family and at school. He anticipated a mixed reaction, but the overwhelmingly positive reactions that he received significantly enhanced his positive approach to school and allowed him to engage further with learning. He had self-reflected on his situation and his approach to school and came to the following conclusion:

Well, if you're negative, you don't really have the drive to wanna do work and stuff like that, or be involved in things; but when you're positive, you get past the bad bits and you take it with a positive approach. (1, 35:19)

He further explained that *“because I had things that I enjoyed doing in the background of school, that’s what probably made it easy to be positive so quickly”* (1, 40:46).

Ben repeatedly stated that he likes his school, and that *“it’s a very accepting school”* (2, 5:23). When asked to identify the people who had made him feel accepted when he came out as gay, he said:

Definitely my group of friends; they’re very supportive. I reckon everyone in the Year 10 cohort is very supportive, accepting, and whether they say anything or not, it’s just the fact that they don’t say anything bad, which just makes you feel accepted. I probably, definitely put my group, and other friends of friends, but definitely the Year 10 cohort had something to do with it. (2, 9:38)

Teachers, they all ... I never heard a teacher say anything bad about it, they have all been accepting. I don’t know ... it’s basically that. You know that they’ll be nice, no matter what. And just knowing that helps. (2, 12:37)

Family, friends of family, they all texted ... Mum had talked to people and they were all happy about it. (2, 16:14)

Ben reported that his mum would say that it did not matter what others thought, and that she had no issue with his sexuality.

Not worrying about what others might think. Ben considered his positive attitude to school to have had a significant impact on him and, he stated he was grateful for it. He said the change *“even affected my personal life as well, just being happy in general, so, I couldn’t really ask for more”* (1, 49:46).

The attitude change enabled Ben to be more resilient: *“You just don’t have to worry about stuff anymore, and if people say nasty things, you go, I don’t care. You don’t have anything to be offended by”* (2, 16:58).

He acknowledged that the attitude change was not an easy task” *“Enjoying school is probably a good success story”* (1, 38:03). However, he also stated that the following:

I guess the positive happened at the start of this year. I just changed things in my personal life, outside the school, and then this year ended up being a pretty good year, apart from the fact that everyone else has things going on, which isn't really good coz the negativity can bring down your positivity ... not just friends but there are people I don't even really talk to that have personal ... not even personal, but around the school, stuff that goes on it can bring you down ... but I chose not to let that influence me. (1, 34:24)

In general, the one major thing that's quite easy to change is whether you enjoy school or not; you can chose to be unhappy and let that get you down, or you can chose to be happy and do things that you love and all that type of stuff. (1, 42:11)

Nevertheless, according to Ben, there was an imbalance of positive and negative experiences at school that affected a students' approach to learning and their wellbeing:

I reckon it's probably easier to have a negative attitude than to have a positive attitude because one little thing compared to a lot of good things can bring you down and can make you have a negative attitude to school. That's why you need to be careful, like especially teachers and stuff, they have to be careful, and make sure they ... be positive. (1, 51:15)

In terms of students developing a negative attitude, Ben explained his perception of the possible causes:

I reckon they develop a negative attitude for lots of reasons. It can just be a general reason because they just don't enjoy school, they don't feel like it's the right place for them, or it can be other factors, like, personal matters or friendship groups or they can't do something they love, They're constantly being hassled, or teachers ... they are not really big fans of the teachers, teacher may not be nice to them, so it can be a lot of things ... can come into factor. (1, 51:15)

Ben had developed the skills to put things into perspective. Having experienced the impact of his negative attitude on his wellbeing, he came to the following conclusion,

formulated as advice for students who find themselves in a similar situation to his before his attitude change:

Don't dwell on the things that bring you down in school and stuff like that. Think ... Don't let it stress you out, that's one thing coz there's no point. It's not ... your happiness comes over your schooling. That's what I believe anyway ... I reckon there's no point being so stressed about school and things like that coz that can affect you in the future. One little thing in school can have a major effect on how you act in the future, or how you feel. So don't dwell on the negatives and don't let it get to you. Such things like stress and stuff. (1, 49:17)

He believed that schools needed to acknowledge students' personal problems more particularly instead of expecting students to be able to leave them behind when coming to school:

Because usually the problems come out at school ... I would probably suggest ... making people feel better, and just suggesting to go to the [school support services] if something is wrong, to talk to someone, rather than saying leave them [the problems] at home. It's not as simple as that. (2, 25:31)

Ben described how he had developed a strategy for himself that enabled him to enjoy school more on a day-to-day basis by “not relying” on his friends but rather “enjoying his own company” and focus on his passion for theatre production during the school day, when possible, instead of worrying about what his peers might be thinking of him. His strategy to maintain his positive attitude included a range of strategic steps:

Well, how you get into the positive attitude, those steps, you should be using in your everyday life, like, even throughout the year, while you're at school. If you get to a positive attitude change, you wanna make sure you keep it. The steps that you have taken to be positive, you wanna make sure you're using them throughout the year, to stay positive ... not stressing about things, it can make you feel quite proud when you actually achieve things, so when you get recognised for things that you might do, that can make you positive and you wanna make sure you keep doing things, and if

you get your work done and you do things properly, you don't ... you gain trust in teachers, and that can have a big positive snowball effect. You just wanna make sure you're doing things that can make you stay positive throughout the year, and use the things that you used to make the change. Yeah. (1, 53:08)

Ben also acknowledged how important the teachers were in assisting students to develop a positive attitude to school:

Teachers want to see the students being happy. You wouldn't want to see students being upset or negative because that can affect the way you teach, I'd make sure that ... make sure you talk to the students and stuff like that, be down to earth to the students, and just generally be nice. You have to be strict when you need to be strict, and you need to tell students off that need to be told off, but make sure that they know you're their priority and they are your priority ... when they show that they care, that's when you know we're priority ... when the teachers help you out, and especially with work and stuff, you can tell that they care. If they're just sitting around and not doing anything, then you know that they don't care and don't care about what you gonna achieve or do. And when you get rewarded for positive things, that's a good thing as well. (1, 54:41)

If not for the attitude change, Ben said he would have continued to “*not enjoy being at school and general life. The negative attitude would have stopped me from doing the things that I love and it would have brought me down*” (1, 40:00). He elaborated on that, explaining, “*coz it would still be the same as last year. I dwelled going back to school, probably being by myself, stuff like that. I just enjoyed every time I got home from school, last year.*” (2, 27:01)

To experience happiness at school is crucial, according to Ben:

If you're happy at school, then it means that you ... I don't know, it's hard to explain. It makes you feel good, so, I reckon at the end of the day, before all the work and all that, I reckon if you enjoy life in general and enjoy being at school, it has a positive effect on you, yeah. (1, 38:22)

School is not “super-duper fun”. Ben said that he had been given lots of responsibility by teachers in relation to the theatre production. He taught himself all the skills required by the teachers and stated that he was proud of having received the trust and respect from the teachers to help out with the theatre production. In the earlier years he was too nervous to ask to be significantly involved, but since Year 9 he had developed sufficient confidence to ask to be given a substantial responsibility.

Ben stated that school was “good” and that he enjoyed going to his school. He mentioned that his mother had spoken to him about the option of changing schools. However, he said that he liked his teachers and was taking pride in his role in the school production, and because of that, he did not want to move schools. He explained what he valued most:

Especially the teachers, down to earth, you can have a genuine conversation with them, and if the teacher respects you, you respect them. A lot of good teachers makes you wanna do a lot of good work. Respect is needed for that. (1, 5:22)

Ben really enjoyed primary school and said that being the school captain in primary school was a highlight of his schooling together with his involvement in the school production in Years 9 and 10. He stated:

I’m proud of building myself up to participate in things like [the theatre production work]. Building myself up to be involved in doing, like, projects ... and teachers trust me with that kind of stuff, coz they know I won’t be doing anything stupid. That’s another good thing, I am proud that the teachers can trust me to be able to do some things. (1, 16:34)

Overall, Ben rated school a seven out of 10 as “it’s not necessarily a thing that’s super-duper fun. I prefer to do something I love, but you don’t have a choice” (1, 17:20).

According to Ben, the teachers played a big part in students becoming positive towards school and feeling happy there. Just like Ben’s dog–master analogy, he viewed student–teacher relationships as a two-directional relationship. He believed that teachers have to “make sure you talk to the students and stuff like that, be down to earth to the students, and just generally be nice” (1, 54:41) and students:

They should just be nice to the teachers. If a teacher tells you off, then you listen. At the end of the day, the teacher is the more ... has more control than you and you're meant to listen to them, and you should use your practice coz you have to respect the teacher. When you enter the workforce, you wanna make sure you have learned the skills to respect the person who is in charge, and if you don't, then, if you're not used to respecting people that are in charge, then you gonna struggle in an everyday job. (1, 55:21)

Ben stated that he would be a dog if he had to choose an animal to represent his personality:

A dog is very obedient, always respects its master. When the master does something for the dog, the dog turns out positive and is happy, is having a good time, and that makes the master feel good as they see an excited dog. It goes both ways – high school is a two-way street, and, again, in everyday life as well if you give a bit of love, you get a bit of love back. (1, 59:14)

Amy's Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

I'd go to school, sort of just bludge through the day. During Years 7, 8 and 9, Amy had what she described as “troubles” with some of her teachers, and she stated “*that took a bit of a toll on me*” (1, 13:55). Due to the troubles during the first three years of secondary school, Amy reported that she generally did not want to be at school, and she described how she would often say to her mother “*I just don't want to go ... I can't deal with those people*” (1, 24:20), referring to some of her teachers.

Amy also had “great” teachers who she could talk to and that would help her manage her troubles, but according to Amy's account, the great teachers could not compensate for the “bad” teachers. She described having a significant argument with one teacher in Year 7, and in Year 8 having another major conflict with another teacher. She explained that the Year 8 teacher and her were both “*very strongly opinionated and we would both not budge*” (1, 19:22) and at times “*we were just very nasty to one another*” (1, 19:30).

To resolve the conflict, a substantial number of meetings were held at the school to which her mother was invited and she, too, at times. Amy accused the teacher of lying several times during those meetings, which made her very angry, and she said “*it all blew up*” (1, 19:22). She became frustrated with the school system and how it had handled her situation. Amy was convinced that the teacher’s actions – for example, lying about certain conflict situations or treating her unfairly in class needed to be criticised and scrutinised but had not been:

It felt like nothing happened to him [the teacher she was in conflict with], nothing happened. He went back to teaching. It was like he didn’t get punished for it at all. ... I suppose you can’t really suspend them, but ... something that the student knows that they have been punished for what they have done. So that they think that it just hasn’t been pushed under the carpet and that they [people responsible to manage the situation] just forgot about it, but that they [the students] actually, I suppose, mean something or whatever. If someone does something to you, you want them ... not so much revenge ... but you want them to have consequences or something. When that happened, it sort of felt like it didn’t. (2, 19:11)

She perceived that the school had not taken her situation seriously enough to want to help her:

It made me feel like the school is a bit useless when it came to that. They have all these protocols, and they’re meant to be here for the students and for the students first, and why isn’t that the case? Coz it certainly didn’t feel that way at the time. (2, 19:55)

Throughout the years, Amy had suffered from the stress the conflicts with teachers had caused her. She had become disengaged from learning and as a result she had started to feel anxious at school when she realised that she had fallen behind academically:

I think, coz my attitude and how much I wasn’t trying, I was more scared that I wouldn’t pass, more so than anything. I’d gone to school sort of just bludged through the day, sort of just doing the minimal possible, and get away with it, and while that was all going on, I thought, hmmm, na, when

it got to ... middle of the fourth term [Year 8], I thought, na, I am gonna fail, this is not going to be good. Mum's gonna kill me, everyone's gonna kill me. (1, 33:09)

The conflicts with her teachers had diminished her motivation to study and her focus in class. By the end of Year 7, Amy had started to be “scared” of failing subjects due to her lack of engagement in her schoolwork. Amy had admitted that she was “just not trying” to do well. She also started lying about her academic outcomes and her engagement with school: “You got people asking about school, and I would say it’s good, when it was pretty crap” (1, 33:37). She admitted the following:

It was horrible. At class it was very much I am here coz I have to be, not because I want to be, and I have no other choice, um, I tried not to talk to him [the teacher I was in conflict with] as much because if I didn't engage with him, there wouldn't be any problem, and then ... yeah, but there'd still be times where he'd be ... at one stage I was reading a book in class, and he [made a notification of it] as not following instructions coz I wasn't doing my work, but I had finished my work anyway, and so ... yeah. (2, 3:52)

Some of the teachers were described by Amy as “facetious” because “*they snap at you, they are like abrupt and very rude to you sometimes, but they don't think they are*” (2, 9:31). She also noted that those teachers could be like this to one student, but then “completely” different to another student. She admitted that she was “fighting” with teachers and acknowledged that herself “*being a bit arrogant or whatever didn't help the situation at all*” (2, 17:25). She described herself as a person who had a very short temper, who could also get “quite nasty”. Amy explained that her father understood her frequent fights with teachers as he was “a bit of a rebel” in school himself: “*He went through what I went through, but not as in depth like me*” (2, 13:06).

Being a bit arrogant or whatever didn't help the situation at all. Amy engaged in conversations with her mum and some teachers whom she liked and felt understood by: *"They talked to you like a person, not a student per se, you weren't spoken down to, they spoke to you"* (2, 9:03). She felt that they respected her and took her personal situation seriously. Amy reported that the conversations with her mother motivated her to go to school when she did not want to go. She stated that her mother supported her throughout the several conflicts she experienced with some of her teachers:

She helped me sort out the whole thing ... She always said to me that if you tell the truth that there'll be no problem, I'll back you up a hundred per cent, but as soon as you lie to me, I'll be your worst enemy, completely ... She always had my back because I have always been honest. She's always helped me. (2, 11:00)

Amy also spoke to her siblings about her situation. Her siblings were at the same school as her, and this enhanced Amy's assumption that they would understand her situation and be able to provide suitable advice: *"They told me what the go was"* (2, 14:58), informing her where to go and whom to talk to in school considering her circumstances. She valued their advice because of *"the fact that they've been through it themselves, and they knew what they were talking about, and it worked for them, and it had helped them, so it's probably gonna help me too"* (2, 15:41). Amy had been in conflict with teachers, one in particular, for a few years. She acknowledged she was partly to blame for the conflicts continuing for an extended period of time: *"My ... being a bit arrogant or whatever didn't help the situation at all"* (2, 17:25). She explained how she eventually took the advice given to her seriously:

I think it's coz at the time, I thought I knew everything. Coz 12-, 13-year-olds think they know everything; it's just part of the ... whatever. I think after a while I thought, "Oh, I don't know everything, these people know what they're talking about, they've been through it", and then I started to listen. (2, 16:37)

In Amy's case, the advice given to her by her mother and older siblings enabled her to objectify the crucial conflict she had had with her Year 8 teacher and gain a new perspective on it. Conversations with other teachers had helped as well:

There was Mr X as well. He'd kind of give you the whole point of view from his angle, from his side; so, like, he's a teacher, so he sort of gets it, but he'd sort of say put yourself in his shoes and see where he's coming from. (2, 12:31)

Amy told herself *"to try and solve it, and get at least ... on civil terms, and once the year is over, just sort of move on a bit"* (2, 3:06), as well as the following:

You not gonna die, it's not the end of the world; he's just a teacher, it'll be fine, just calm down, and not get overly angry, and just ruin everything coz then your whole mindset is just gone and nothing is straight and it's just not practical. (2, 24:53)

She realised that a change in mindset was required:

It took a lot of things to change from my negative attitude to my positive attitude. Um, you got to have the mindset to want to have a positive attitude instead of just, I suppose, fumbling through for the rest of the years in school if you have a neg one. (2, 00:49)

Time was required and *"a lot of meetings, emails, and going to class and trying to just, gradually, not get over it as such but like, put up with it until the year finished"* (2, 3:00).

The actual change in attitude began in Term 2 in Year 9. After her many conversations with her mother and older siblings, in which she was repeatedly given advice to "not worry so much" about the relationship with teachers and what they might think of her, Amy came to the following conclusion: *"If I have a fresh start and just keep going and not worry about certain things, then I might do a bit better and ... that did help"* (1, 27:20). Those conversations initiated some self-reflection regarding how much time she spent worrying about the teachers instead of focusing on her studies. Moreover, during those conversations, Amy's mother also threatened her with a ban on her hobbies if she did not improve her behaviour in school and increase her engagement in learning. The hobbies were ones that the whole family enjoyed doing together, and therefore her mother's threatened ban was a source of anguish as she really valued that quality family time. Amy realised that there was only one opportunity to do well at school:

You only have school really once, so you don't want to stuff it up. I think it was more like Mum and Dad as well because they said, "If you don't put up school very well, then hunting and fishing and everything goes on hold." So, that was a big factor of it. (2, 5:50)

Having shared her feelings and concerns about her situation with her family and engaging in self-reflection and acknowledging her mother's threat to the hobbies, Amy decided to work on herself, and give the situation a 'fresh start' by changing her approach to school:

I wasn't arguing anything with my teachers. I was getting good marks at the time, I wanted to come to school, and the teachers were giving off that positive attitude ... and it was just a lot of fun to be at school. (1, 26:45)

With the changing attitude, Amy perceived that her old as well as new teachers generally had a "better" attitude towards her. Amy explained how the teachers' attitudes mattered significantly to her being engaged in learning:

It's more the teachers' attitudes that make the classes enjoyable. You want to learn, some teachers with a really bad attitude towards you – you sort of think, "No, I don't want to be in here, I don't want to learn, I just shut you out and don't wanna know about you." Teachers make the whole thing just a bit easier for you. (1, 13:55)

She described teachers with a "good attitude" towards the students the following way:

They are open towards you, they tell you about themselves, they make you laugh, they make you want to be in the classroom. They make it a friendly environment, make it fun, make you look forward to going to their class. (1, 14:00)

Amy's decision to make a "fresh start" was the starting point of the attitude change. What encouraged her to persevere with her new approach was the reward of getting better marks and enjoying school as a result. Having teachers with a "good attitude" simply enhanced her positive attitude to school.

Amy stated that she would have stayed negative towards school had those conversations with her mother and siblings not been fruitful in initiating her self-reflection and prompting a change in her behaviour towards the teacher she was in conflict with because *“I would have tried to get out of it [the classes of that teacher] as much as I could, just not go to class”* (2, 22:58).

Don’t worry, relax. With the positive attitude change, Amy re-engaged in learning:

The positive attitude I have now, compared to when I had a negative one, and I didn’t want to do any work, ... Coz I have a positive one now, I think I’ll try a bit more, do all my work, get it in on time, and just ... keep going and getting myself higher marks and eventually finish with good grade at the end of Year 12. (1, 28:27)

She described her situation at school after the attitude change as “smooth sailing” and at the time of the interviews stated, *“It’s just great”* (1, 23:15).

On difficult days at school, she reported that she would remind herself that *“You’re nearly done [for the day], you can go home soon and relax. Next week might be better; don’t worry, relax”* (2, 24:53). When conflicts with teachers did occur, she adopted the following approach:

Because of the troubles in Year 8, that I thought “You’re not gonna die, it’s not the end of the world. He’s just a teacher, it’ll be fine, just calm down, and not get overly angry, and just ruin everything” coz then your whole mindset is just gone and nothing is straight and it’s just not practical. (2, 24:53)

Amy stated that the key to maintaining a positive attitude to school was the changed mindset:

Having the mindset that with time it can get better, you’re not here for ever, but while you’re here, even if it’s bad, you have to keep going and push through it, and then if you push through it, it can be better. (1, 46:06)

She further elaborated that *“if you have a positive attitude, you gonna be more happy because you’re enjoying school and whatever and you’re willing to try new things and you enjoy what you’re doing, so you have a positive attitude towards it”* (1, 50:49).

Amy described that she was very close to her parents and her three older siblings who also attended the same school. She enjoyed being outdoors – for example, hunting, fishing, and/or camping. Her whole family would get involved in the hunting and fishing, and thus it was a big part of her family life. When asked what animal she would be, she said, *“Something that’s determined, once it starts something it finishes it, and doesn’t leave half way through it”* (1, 46:50) – for example, a hunting dog.

Amy said she wanted to become an electrician as she liked to be “hands on”. She explained that *“my sister’s boyfriend works as an electrician and I happen to see him work and found it very interesting”* (1, 3:16). Another option would be welding, she said. In Year 10 Amy did her work experience in metal fabrication. She stated that her cousin was a welder, and that she would like to do a “man’s job”. She said that after she had completed a good job during her work experience, she was offered an apprenticeship.

Amy scored her school a seven out of 10 due to the bad experiences she had had with some teachers in Years 7, 8, and 9, but *“other than that, it’s been really, really good”* (1, 13:55). It was rather surprising that Amy had said that about her schooling, considering the amount of stress the conflicts with teachers had caused her, to the point that she did not want to go to school. However, at the time of our interviews she was “very happy” with her schooling. She stated that school was going alright and laughed out loud when she continued to say that *“I haven’t failed any classes, which is really good ... I like all my teachers, which is very different to the last couple of years”* (1, 4:23).

Amy received an act of kindness award in Year 6, an academic award in Year 7, and in Year 10 she was appointed captain of a sports team. She stated that those achievements had been the highlights of her schooling so far (1, 5:05).

Lachlan's Experience of Positive Attitude Change to School

An issue of compulsory subjects. Lachlan developed a negative attitude to school in Year 7. He stated it was due to the fact that he didn't like many of the subjects, which were all compulsory in Years 7 and 8. His negative attitude was characterised by the feeling of *"being forced to do something that you don't necessarily want to do, or don't feel comfortable doing, but you have to do it"* (1, 19:20). The feeling of being "forced" to do subjects regardless of his personal interest in them made him disengage from learning. He repeatedly stated that he did not want to do the school work in subjects he was not interested in, or that did not *"describe you"* (1, 19:20).

He perceived that primary school operated on students' interests in subject matters and quickly became disappointed with secondary school when he realised that compulsory subjects were non-negotiable. Lachlan reported that he persevered with subjects he "liked" to do – for example, Chinese – but not with subjects that he "did not like". He felt as though he had been forced at school to undertake subjects he did not enjoy studying, which basically deterred him from school altogether, and contributed to the development of his negative attitude to school. He quite consciously approached the different compulsory subjects with either a willingness to do well, or had no motivation at all.

The option to choose subjects. Lachlan said his positive attitude change occurred when he was given the choice to choose subjects for himself, which started in Year 9 and continued into Year 10. He enjoyed being able to choose what he wanted to learn and be invested in his academic achievement. He stated:

In Years 7 and 8, and in a little bit of Year 9, I didn't really enjoy school, but then I hit Year 10, and I suppose sort of Year 9 as well, I just started to enjoy it a lot more, and that was because of the choice of subjects; so, it was something that I would like to do, like, I wasn't forced to do something that I didn't necessarily like to do. And I suppose that's where the negative attitude towards school, I think, was for me. (2, 1:22)

In Year 9, when the school structure permitted Lachlan to choose a few subjects, his engagement in learning started to increase and his attitude to school began to become less negative. He enjoyed school more, and by the time Year 10 had commenced, he

approached all his schoolwork with a markedly more positive attitude. The option to choose subjects “*can be a big boost and a big change to your attitude, and how you deal with school, and how you cope with it, and how you perceive it*” (1, 19:20).

Because he did not know and understand the advantages of having a range of different compulsory subjects in the earlier years in secondary school, he reported that he had been unwilling to fully engage in learning in some classes because of a lack of interest in the subject matter:

I know it's structured so ... coz there is dance, there's cooking, there's drama, there's woodwork; there's the whole range of things, and that's just to give you the sense of what subjects there are. And I get that [now]. But, I don't know, I just didn't really like some of them, and that's probably where the negative attitude was and why I wasn't doing the work. (2, 2:07)

In hindsight, Lachlan believed that he could have engaged more in subjects that he did not like had he known then “why I have to do them”. He had perceived that he had been in an unfortunate situation and said that the set structure had not been explained to the students when they commenced secondary school and, consequently, it felt like it had been put upon them. He elaborated on it further, saying that “*I think it's sort of one of the things you only hear of from your family, your mum ... for me anyway; it was never really said all that much [at school]*” (2, 17:34). Lachlan further made the connection that his school needed to explain the importance of the set structure and point out the benefits of it, as it was not satisfactory just for relevant others external to the school to point that out (if they happen to do so at all, that is). For students to truly understand the “why” of the inclusion of compulsory subjects in the curriculums of Years 7 and 8, the school needs to explain and justify the structure to the students directly in order to not have students think they are “forced to do them”, and not see themselves as hopelessly exposed to it for years to come. It is disempowering, and according to Lachlan, leads to disengagement.

Lachlan believed that the school did not sufficiently explain the advantages of the set structure of subjects, if at all, to students entering secondary school, and thus the feeling of being “forced” to do something negatively impacted the willingness to engage in learning. That feeling of being forced to undertake certain subjects stayed with

Lachlan for over two years, and he reported that negative feeling was the obstacle to his increased engagement in learning despite his belief that school was important and that he always wanted to do well at school. When asked what he believed the school could have said to motivate students to fully engage in learning in all compulsory subjects, whether they liked them from the outset or not, he suggested schools emphasise the necessity for a wide range of compulsory subjects in order *“just to get out there and experience new things, coz, if you’re just stuck doing that one thing for the rest of your life, think of all the other opportunities you missed out on”* (2, 17:58). Lachlan blamed the school for not conveying such a message to students entering secondary school given that he was convinced that he would have done better academically had he not developed a negative attitude to school.

Before Year 9 and the opportunity to choose subjects, Lachlan was rather sceptical of the school’s approach to compulsory subjects. He explained that the assistant principal once discussed the importance of “liking a subject” and the link to academic achievement in a subject that one enjoys, but then he felt that for Years 7 and 8 the school ignored whether or not a student liked the compulsory subjects. He paraphrased what the principal said and referred to his own experience with a subject he did not like but had to do anyway:

It is proven that you put more time and effort into things that you like, compared to things that you don’t like. Getting the choice of doing subjects that you like, I am going to put more time into them, compared to if I was just forced to do woodwork all the way through ... maybe if I did it for long enough I would understand it, and I would enjoy it, but at first glance it just wasn’t me, I suppose. (2, 24:53)

His perception that the school system contradicted itself did not help Lachlan’s engagement with subjects he was not interested in such as woodwork. In Lachlan’s case, it was the actual change in structural arrangement of the curriculum and subject choices that reportedly caused the attitude change; however, he did point out that his mother had significant involvement in sustaining him over the years when his attitude to school was not good in Years 7 and 8. He is appreciative of her support throughout the years. Without his mother’s support and encouragement, he may have been even less engaged in subjects he was not interested in.

Lachlan's father passed away when he was a baby. He had three older brothers; however, he reported that his mother was his only role model as he did not consider his siblings were particularly successful. In talking about his mother, he said that "*she always wanted the best out of us ... I want to try to be better than them, or like do better than them. I plan to go to university, whereas my brothers and Mum never did*" (2, 13:38).

Lachlan described his mother as a person who was "always there for you" and that she was the one person really motivating him to do well at school despite his dislike of some of the compulsory subjects. He stated:

I know a lot of people where their mums are so disconnected, if it might be down to their job or they just never planned on having children, as bad as that is to say, yeah, she was just always so ... persistent on us doing our best. She just didn't want us to get Ds or just the baseline of "that's a pass, okay, next year". She just wanted us to aim for our best, and I think that's what I tried to do, at least. (2, 15:14)

Lachlan's perspective on his situation did not change until the actual situation altered. From Year 9 onwards, students were given the opportunity to choose some subjects which empowered Lachlan in his schooling and gave him the motivation to learn and do well given that he could choose more subjects that he enjoyed and was interested in.

I love school. Eventually, Lachlan displayed a pragmatic approach to schoolwork in that his hindsight taught him that schools were structured a certain way for a reason, and it was a good reason according to Lachlan. When he had bad days at school he would tell himself that "*it's fine. It's alright, it's not the end of the world*" (2, 25:59). Lachlan believed in the value of schooling and he wanted to retain a positive attitude to school; it was obviously more beneficial than his previous negative attitude. He explained:

I've actually just started to say, "Nah, it's fine, it's alright". It's what I tell myself, it's, like, no, it's fine. It's alright, like, doesn't matter, it's just a little thing ... say something bad happens in class – it's alright. (2, 25:44)

The attitude change had a direct, positive impact on Lachlan's academic achievement. He believed that *"if I have a negative attitude to school, I wouldn't be doing so well. I wouldn't be putting the effort in"* (2, 26:36). As Lachlan said, the positive attitude change affected his engagement levels immediately and directly, which resulted in him achieving better marks.

When asked about his satisfaction with life in general during the time he displayed a negative attitude to school, Lachlan stated that *"life was fine. I think I did alright. I think it always has been, really"* (2, 27:16). The negative attitude was the only aspect he struggled with regarding his schooling, as he had acknowledged that he had not engaged to the best of his ability in studying certain subjects in Years 7 and 8, and because of that, and he did blame the school for lost opportunities. According to Lachlan, schools need to send clear messages regarding their teaching and learning structures for all year levels, and communicate the justification for them effectively to the students in order to avoid disengagement based on "liking" or "not liking" certain subjects. Lachlan believed that nobody liked to feel forced to do something, and that feeling of being forced to do the compulsory subjects was an obstacle to his learning.

Lachlan appeared to be a pragmatic person. He described his experience of positive attitude change quite matter-of-factly and considered the contextual factors of his schooling journey to have been either black or white. Lachlan also appeared to be a quite joyous person; he was very upbeat during the interviews and would often laugh out loud and make jokes. At the time of the interviews, Lachlan answered the question about how school was going the following way: *"Good. I love it. I love school. I don't really have any complaints about it"* (1, 3:01).

Lachlan very much enjoyed his primary school years. A highlight of his schooling so far has been an award in Year 6, and the accomplishment of a certificate through school on which he can build further after graduating. Both accomplishments had been announced proudly and described in great detail. A low point of Lachlan's schooling occurred when his grandparents passed away. Their passing had a significant impact on him and his ability to focus on his schoolwork, but he reported that he nevertheless continued to enjoy school because the friends he had there helped him to manage his grief.

Lachlan was interested in a wide range of fields, such as photography, psychology, law and criminology, but he was quick to point out that photography will only ever be a hobby of his as he doubted it could be made into a “stable career”. At the time of the interviews, Lachlan planned to study criminology at university. When asked what animal he would be, he said a bird. The freedom to fly was something that he envied of birds, but he also admired them for their productive hard work – for example, when building their nests.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter I have provided eight unique research stories of the experience of positive attitude change to school, which were co-constructed by the participant and myself, the researcher. In my consideration of the research puzzle and the principal research question and its two sub-questions, I have identified from each participant how their experience of positive attitude change had been lived out, who the participant perceived as the most influential person in that experience, and what the experience meant for the participant personally.

In the next chapter I identify the resonant threads that emerged from undertaking a cross-account reading and compare and contrast all the participants’ experiences in relation to the principal research question of how positive attitude change is being lived out by adolescent students. The threads are further discussed in terms of the literature review and theoretical lens that was applied to this research study.

Chapter 7

Data Analysis and Discussion

Overview

In the previous chapter I presented eight narrative accounts from secondary school students of the experience of positive attitude change to school. The narrative accounts provided insight into the meaning students attached to positive attitude change and the factors that were associated with that change. In this chapter I analyse the data to address the principal research question: *How do adolescent students experience positive attitude change to school?* I explore the experience of positive attitude change in the eight adolescent students collectively by comparing and contrasting the constructed narratives and identifying the five emerging resonant threads in order to illustrate how the experience was lived out. The resonant threads are: (1) Personal problems; (2) Support framework; (3) Reaction to hitting rock bottom; (4) Application of changed perspective; and (5) Self-efficacy around emotional wellbeing. I further discuss the resonant threads in relation to the relevant literature with which I compare and contrast the identified threads and the theoretical lens.

Introduction

The eight narratives provide detailed accounts of the experience of positive attitude change to school. While each student's experience was specific to their circumstances and unique in its own way, five common resonant threads were identified and explored in these narrative accounts of positive attitude change.

In order to identify the resonant threads of the phenomenon under study through a cross-account analysis, I shifted my focus from each student's individual story regarding positive attitude change to examine the eight narratives collectively in order to explore and reflect on my understanding of students' positive attitude change to school to address the study's research question. By co-constructing the research texts, as presented in Chapter 6, and by "listening to, and inquiring into, their stories" (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009, p. 141), I explored what could be learnt by teachers and educators from the experience of positive attitude change in relation to student engagement by adolescents. To gain an understanding of the experience of positive attitude change and to make sense

of its impact on students' school experiences and learning outcomes, I questioned what had happened to these eight students when comparing and contrasting the narrative accounts of positive attitude change in order to identify the resonant threads or "resonances or echoes" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 132).

As a narrative inquirer, I acknowledge that in examining the narrative accounts of positive attitude change, I have left "the intimate space of the relational" (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 443) between a participating student and myself as the researcher, and "the relational shifted to" (Clandinin et al., 2010 p. 443) the relationships across the experiences of the eight students and myself. Making such a shift implies a "freezing" (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 443) of the adolescent students' lives in motion as I represented them in the narrative accounts. However, I acknowledge that those students' lives continued to be in motion when the accounts were written, and I acknowledge that "their lives and ways of understanding their school experiences continued once the inquiry was completed" (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 443) to fulfil the design considerations for the chosen research approach as outlined in Chapter 4.

In line with the way in which Clandinin et al. (2010) metaphorically laid one story of an early school leaver next to 18 other stories, I laid the eight stories of positive attitude change alongside one another to examine the issues that kept recurring, and the similarities and differences between the stories that related to the experience of positive attitude change. After completing a cross-account reading, the five threads emerged, which took into account the outcomes of coding the transcripts during analysis as described in Chapter 5.

Resonant Threads

During their interviews, I asked the students to describe their schooling experiences before the positive attitude change occurred, which facilitated analysis of why the students had developed a negative attitude to school and had disengaged from learning. A pattern of personal issues was evident in the students' answers, which I identified as Thread 1: Personal problems. Thread 1 could be regarded as the starting point of the students' narratives of positive attitude change. Linked to that was the aspect of valuing education and wanting to do well at school, which is outlined in the section

entitled “School is important but...”. It identifies the students as being ambitious learners who generally wanted to do well academically.

When further examining the data, I posed the question of how the negative attitudes evolved when the students were facing personal problems and identified Thread 2: Support framework. This thread consists of two sub-threads: Sub-thread 2.1 – No “helping hand” at school – encompasses the lack of support the students experienced within the school environment from teachers and/or other staff members that pertained to their personal problems. Sub thread 2.2 – Available support – emerged from the students’ descriptions of the available sources of support outside of school, such as family and friends.

In Thread 3 – Reaction to hitting rock bottom – and Thread 4 – Application of changed perspective – I addressed the question of how the positive attitude change occurred. The third and fourth threads represent a chronological arc together, with Thread 1 being the starting point in the identified timeline of events that led to the students’ positive attitude change. Thread 3 also consists of two sub-threads: Sub-thread 3.1 – Reaching the breaking point – outlines how students reached their personal low points due to their personal problem remaining unresolved; Sub-thread 3.2 – Taking the right turn – portrays how the students took concrete actions in trying to improve their situation. Finally, Thread 5 – Self-efficacy around emotional wellbeing –emerged from the students’ narrative accounts as a complementary aspect to Sub thread 2.1. Whereas Sub thread 2.1 addresses the need for supportive and caring teachers, Thread 5 deals with the development of students’ own capabilities to manage negative emotions effectively.

Thread 1: Personal problems. This thread emerged from the narratives of seven of the eight students. Lachlan had a different experience, which only in part aligned with this thread. His experience is explored at the end of this section.

Before the positive attitude change, all eight students reported experiencing a negative attitude to school, which resulted in low engagement levels and lower levels of student wellbeing in all of them but to varying degrees. This was associated with an increasing dissatisfaction and disconnect with school. Seven of the narrative accounts addressed clearly the occurrence of a personal problem in the adolescent students’ lives and its substantial impact on the students. The personal problem was reported to have caused the negative attitude to school. It was important for my understanding of the

experience of positive attitude change to also develop an initial grasp of why the students had developed a negative evaluation of school as a whole. Consequently, I examined the personal issues and determined the similarities and differences by systematically making comparisons between the narrative accounts.

The negative attitude to school had developed as a result of a personal problem that had occurred, which was then not managed effectively by the individual student and/or significant others such as teachers. Consequently, students' wellbeing had been negatively impacted both internally and externally of the school environment, and as a result student engagement in learning had decreased. Interestingly, none of the personal problems described in the narrative accounts addressed school-related skills – for example, academic skills and aspects such as self-agency in terms of schoolwork, managing assessment stressors, or the homework load. Instead, students reported to not have felt “good” or “well enough” to have approached their schoolwork effectively due to the personal problem affecting them – for example, hindering concentration efforts or causing anxiety at school. Some of the students described a fear of failing subjects; however, this fear was not deemed to have caused their distress at school; rather, it was considered to have been the result of the emotional distress caused by a personal problem in the students' lives.

Hall's (1904) notion of storm and stress resonated with the students' experiences in that the students' various personal problems had led to substantial tensions between the desire to do well at school academically and their enjoyment of the schooling journey, and the wish to avoid school or distance themselves from school due to the negative emotions they had experienced there. Students can experience significant personal problems in secondary school, such as friendship fallouts or conflicts with teachers, which can produce detrimental effects on student wellbeing and engagement in learning. This point was well illustrated by the students' narrative accounts. Their descriptions of their experiences indicate how personal problems can cause significant distress and turmoil in the lives of adolescent students and negatively affect their ability to engage in learning, and how other people's perceptions of the severity of the problem differs from the students' perception of it. The narratives speak clearly to the issue of personal problems being understated by significant others and students struggling to openly and accurately convey the severity of their problems.

As stated in the literature review, coping with stress and negative emotions and managing school or study problems are the two top items on the list of issues of concern for adolescents (Mission Australia, 2011). During adolescence, students continue to learn to apply suitable coping mechanisms (Folkman, 1984) such as self-control (Finkenauer, Engels, & Baumeister, 2005), self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001) and resilience (Masten, 2001); however, it is evident from the narratives that the students were not equipped with skills to manage their personal problems and negative emotions effectively on their own.

Research indicates that low levels of self-reported self-control are strongly related to behavioural and emotional problems for adolescents (Finkenauer et al., 2005), whereas high efficacy beliefs, which “influence aspirations and strength of commitments to them ... perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, resilience to adversity ... and vulnerability to stress and depression” (Bandura et al., 2001, p. 187), promote general wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, adolescent students do well if they feel cared for by adults and develop the ability to “manage their own attention, emotions, and behaviour” (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, p. 215). However, the identification of the resonant thread of personal problems raises the question of how the school environment can best address and foster the development of such abilities in order for adolescent students to stay engaged in learning and maintain a positive attitude to school despite facing personal problems in the secondary school setting.

In the following section I outline the personal problems reported by the participants.

Mental health issues. A subcategory of Thread 1: Personal problems addresses mental health issues. Anna found herself to be in a very dark place. After being bullied, she lost a friend to suicide and as a result said that she had been experiencing mental health issues.

In line with earlier research (Offert & Schonert-Reichl, 1992), findings from the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (Lawrence et al., 2015) indicate that approximately 20 per cent of adolescents aged 11–17 years experience high to very high levels of psychological distress (Lawrence et al., 2015), and “approximately one in seven children and young people have experienced a mental disorder in the past year. This is consistent with comparable international studies”

(Lawrence et al., 2015, p. iii). Anna also reported to have self-harmed in the past due to being in the dark place, which is an experience shared with approximately 11 per cent of Australian adolescents (Lawrence et al., 2015). Particularly alarming are the following facts:

42% of adolescents with a very high level of problems had seriously considered attempting suicide during the previous twelve months, compared with only 2% of adolescents with a low level of problems. Furthermore, 25% of adolescents with a very high level of problems reported having made a suicide attempt during the previous twelve months as compared to fewer than 1% of those with a low level of problems. (Sawyer et al., 2001, p. 49)

Mental health problems are associated with anxiety, depression and related disorders – such as substance misuse or dependency, or a combination of these (Moon, Meyer, & Grau, 1999) – and are a leading cause of health-related disability in adolescents, which also have long-lasting impacts into adulthood (Kieling et al., 2011). Even relatively mild mental health problems “can derail and disable, seriously limiting or blocking potential” (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie, & Jorm, 2007, p. 5), and are associated with “high rates of enduring disability, including school failure, impaired or unstable employment, and poor family and social functioning, leading to spirals of dysfunction and disadvantage that are difficult to reverse” (McGorry, Purcell, Hickie, & Jorm, 2007, p. 5).

In relation to positive attitudes and emotions towards school, Shochet, Dadds, Ham, and Montague (2006) argue that school connectedness is an underemphasized parameter in adolescent mental health (Shochet, Dadds, Ham & Montague, 2006). Defined as a student’s feeling of being “accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (Goodenow, 1993b, p. 80), school connectedness correlates to and can predict depressive symptoms in adolescents. My findings support the view that “preventive interventions developed to improve school connectedness by informing and equipping teachers with skills and strategies to foster school connectedness could complement interventions that address other individual risk factors for depression and other adolescent problems” (Shochet et al., 2006, p. 178). Students had repeatedly stated that they had experienced a lack of “warmth, acceptance, inclusion” (Shochet et al., 2006, p. 178) at school when they were dealing with their personal problems. Interventions targeting teachers to address these aspects in their

classrooms and in their interactions with students may thus be required to successfully address students' mental health problems and wellbeing at school.

Mental health illnesses are considered “the chronic diseases of the young” (Insel & Fenton, 2005, p. 591), with the World Health Organization World Mental Health (WMH) Survey showing that “careful consideration needs to be given to the value of treating some mild cases, especially those at risk for progressing to more serious disorders” (Demyttenaere et al., 2004, p. 2581). Despite research showing that early intervention and prevention can help avoid mental health issues in adulthood and improve personal wellbeing and productivity, “the mental health needs of children and adolescents are neglected” (Kieling et al., 2011, p. 1515).

Regarding the frequency and severity of emotional disturbance experienced by adolescents, little is known and the “dearth of reliable estimates ... is particularly unfortunate when so many disturbed adolescents may go unnoticed” (Offer, Howard, Schonert, & Ostrove, 1991, p. 1007). Key challenges in addressing mental health issues in adolescents are “the shortage of mental-health professionals, the fairly low capacity and motivation of non-specialist health workers to provide quality mental-health services to young people, and the stigma associated with mental disorder” (Offer et al., 1991, p. 1302). My findings confirm the need “to integrate youth mental-health interventions with all existing youth programmes, including those in the health sector ... *and* outside this sector (such as *education*)” (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007, p. 1310, emphasis added) in order for policies to explicitly address mental health issues in educational settings.

Bullying. Two of the eight students had experienced bullying. Max felt like he did not belong to the school and was bullied as a result. He described that he felt “scared” to be himself at school due to his sexual orientation. Max was very unhappy at his old school, and ended up “hating” school; he described his time there as “a really bad time” due to the bullying he endured and compared the school halls to minefields.

In a similar vein to Max, Sabine “never wanted to go to school” as it made her feel “sick”. A conflict with a peer led to her being bullied, and despite her asking for help and support, she reported that “nothing would really seem to happen”, and that the bullying simply continued. Despite having a “great” group of friends at school, which was not the case for Max, Sabine's wellbeing suffered significantly. She was

continuously worried about interactions with the bully, which prevented her from concentrating on her schoolwork. She eventually reached the point of not wanting to go to school anymore, stating that *“I just didn’t want to be there”* (1, 17:48).

In relation to adolescent peer relationships, bullying and victimisation are widespread problems that can undoubtedly be very harmful to a young person’s development (Haynie et al., 2001; Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel & Loeber, 2011). Research shows a prevalence rate for adolescents who are directly involved in bullying – as perpetrators, victims, or both – of approximately 20 to 25% (Nansel et al., 2001). Some research shows that approximately 40 per cent of adolescent students are victims of some form of bullying (J. Wang, Iannotti, Luk, & Nansel, 2010). Victims suffering under psychological distress are “four times as likely to experience depressive symptoms and more than five times as likely to attempt suicide” (Schneider, O’Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012, p. 173) than non-victims. In Australia, research shows that one-third of adolescents experience bullying and approximately 11 per cent feel severe distress as a result of it (Kieling et al., 2011). Research involving US adolescents has revealed that approximately 20 per cent of students have either bullied or have been bullied at school physically, over 50 per cent verbally and socially, and almost 15 per cent electronically (J. Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009, p. 368).

Bullying is associated with negative outcomes for both the students who are victimised by bullies and the perpetrators (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Academic problems, psychological difficulties, and social relationship problems are among the short- and long-term consequences (Swearer et al., 2010). In particular, bullying is linked to anger issues, aggressive behaviour, hyperactivity, delinquency and criminality (Olweus, 1994, 2001), and victimisation is linked to poor academic performance (Espelage, Hong, Rao, & Low, 2013; Lacey & Cornell, 2013), school avoidance, illnesses, anxiety and suicidal ideation, which is also linked to bullies and victims of bullying (McDougall, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2009).

In line with Juvonen and Graham (2014), who state that despite most bullying taking place in school settings, “researchers know surprisingly little about the characteristics of schools that promote or protect against bullying by one’s peers” (p. 176), my findings confirm the need for research on prevention efforts as well as for

management efforts of bullying at school due to its detrimental impact on mental health and school performance. The literature on schoolwide interventions may be “large and increasing”, however, “in some respects it is disappointing. Many of the programs simply do not work” (Juvonen & Graham, 2014, p. 177). More research is required as “some programmes do not lead to positive outcomes, some have never been evaluated, and some have been evaluated so poorly that no conclusions can be drawn regarding their effects” (Juvonen & Graham, 2014, p. 248).

Max’s and Sabine’s experiences of being bullied confirm that schools have a long way to go before becoming efficient in successfully managing and/or preventing bullying.

Friendship fallout. Another personal matter identified from the data was the experience of a friendship fallout. Both Kate and Patrick worried about not having friends in secondary school. Both students’ transitions from primary to secondary school were characterised by fear of being friendless and feeling lonely. Kate experienced a friendship fallout that involved her two best friends, and Patrick experienced a friendship fallout with his best friend from primary school with whom he entered secondary school. As a result, both were anxious at school.

Peer relationships are linked to academic and non-academic outcomes. Peer relationships positively impact academic performance as well as self-esteem (Liem & Martin, 2011). Friendships and positive peer relationships can motivate students to engage in learning (Juvonen, Espinoza & Knifsend, 2012). Conflict within friendships can negatively impact on identity formation during adolescence when young people are exploring their independence and a sense of self (R. Jones, Vaterlaus, Jackson, & Morrill, 2014).

In worrying about friendship issues, Kate stated that she had the approach of “screw work” towards school, reporting she “just didn’t want to work”, and Patrick “wasn’t working effectively” due to the perceived negativity at school as he described it. The fear of not having friends and the disengagement resulting from the negative attitude to schoolwork eventually led to the fear of failing subjects because students were falling behind in their work and getting increasingly worse marks.

I was stuck by how little of the adolescent student literature addresses resolution of friendship issues within the school environment despite knowing that peer relationships are at a peak in secondary school (Brown & Larson, 2009; Collins & Laursen, 2004; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & McKay, 2006). Research indicates that adolescents who enjoy positive relationships with their peers experience higher levels of wellbeing and more positive beliefs about the self (Wentzel, 2005); however, little research has been conducted to identify best practice in managing friendship issues in order to minimise the negative impact of such conflicts on students' attitudes to school and engagement in learning. Friendship issues may at times appear to be trivial to an adult, but as is evident from the students' narratives, for adolescents, friendship issues can become a toxic factor in their school engagement efforts. Student engagement literature would benefit from further research on conflict resolution in friendship relations and peer relations among adolescents (De Wied, Branje & Meeus, 2007).

Student–teacher relationship. The aspect of the student–teacher relationship was also identified as a personal problem in Amy's narrative account. She had experienced a few conflicts with her teachers over the years in secondary school, describing some of her teachers as “bad” and “facetious”, and who at times displayed inappropriate behaviour such as “snapping” at her and being abrupt and/or rude.

Amy also experienced the same teachers being “completely” different in their behaviour towards other students, which made her take their behaviour towards her very personally. She mentioned an incident where a teacher apparently lied during a meeting with her mother and her regarding a particular incident, which significantly upset Amy. Despite having her mother's trust in her telling the truth about the incident, and other conflict situations, Amy did not feel supported in her situation at school – for example, by the principal – which led to her eventual decision to not want to go to school. As she said, she “could not deal with those people”, referring to the teachers and staff members involved in meetings to address particular incidents; she had lost trust in them. The conflicts with her teachers had made her feel anxious at school and had distracted her from her schoolwork, and as Amy described it, having to “fight” with some teachers in the form of having arguments and receiving what she perceived to be unfair treatment caused her significant distress. As a result, her engagement in learning was affected because she was “just not trying” to do well because the situation at school was “horrible”.

Amy's experience confirms the strong link between student–teacher relationships and student engagement in learning of which there is a plenitude of research literature (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Hattie, 2008, 2012; Hattie & Yates, 2013; Klem & Connell, 2004; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). The teacher–student relationship has been identified as one of the most effective indicators of academic achievement (Hattie, 2008). Thus, teachers need to allow for students to develop an emotional connection to them (Wentzel, 2010). Research also shows that adolescent students who have discipline problems show less defiant behaviour if they perceive their teachers to be trustworthy (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

Sexual orientation. Sexual orientation and the discovery thereof can also be the source of substantial personal problems for adolescent students within the school environment (Harbeck, 2014; Herdt, 2013; Rasmussen, 2004).

In Year 9, Ben questioned his sexual orientation and became “unhappy” with himself. He felt like he could not talk to anyone at school about his situation, nor at home, which made Year 9 a “tough” year for him. He did not like going to school as he was “*worrying about what other people might think*” (2, 8:24), and he feared possible conversations where his sexual orientation would be pointedly discussed. Being at school had made him feel uncomfortable and being “unhappy” had prevented him from focusing on his schoolwork; his worries eventually “outdid all the school stuff”. He developed a “bad” attitude to school that year and consequently disengaged from learning. Max's experience of not having a sense of belonging at an all-boys' school due to his sexual orientation and the resulting disconnect from school and his dissatisfaction with learning aligned with Ben's experience. Feelings of isolation, physical assault and verbal abuse are common experiences for gay students (Ellis & High, 2004). Research pertaining to secondary school students indicates that not having a mainstream approach to sexual orientation is linked to fear at school, negative stereotypes, and discriminatory and bullying behaviour (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009).

The deficit view of adolescents, as mentioned previously, is associated with the notion of storm and stress (Bahr & Pendergast, 2007) and refers to the lack of maturity regarding interpersonal relationships (Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Petersen, 1996), which is evident in most of the narratives. It also refers to the incompleteness of personal identity, which is particularly evident in Ben's narrative account when he describes his formation

of identity, stating “*I’m just gonna accept who I am*” (2, 4:16). The narrative accounts therefore align with the deficit view in parts in that they have presented the struggles students face when trying to deal with their personal problems, considering the developmentally associated deficit in their skill sets and experiences to approach such problems effectively. What my research study has indicated is that instead of simply defining their lack of skills as a deficit and accepting this deficit as such, the students would have benefited from a focused approach to the development of skills with respect to effective communication and interpersonal relationships.

Lachlan’s situation. In Lachlan’s case it was not so much a personal problem that he faced but a dislike for the Year 7 and 8 curriculum structure at school. It could have been considered a problem because it negatively affected his engagement in learning; however, it was not a personal matter as such. Lachlan felt that he had been “forced” to do something that he did not enjoy, when he was required to study the compulsory subjects in Years 7 and 8 despite not “liking” some of them. He explained that he did not have the feeling of being “forced” to do subjects in primary school; that only occurred when he commenced secondary school. As a result he developed a negative attitude to secondary school and disengaged from the subjects that did not interest him, or as he put it, “didn’t describe him”. The first two years of secondary school felt to him like “*being forced to do something that you don’t necessarily want to do or don’t feel comfortable doing, but you have to do it*” (1, 19:20).

In contrast to the other narratives, Lachlan’s account does not portray him as having struggled in relation to his wellbeing apart from the feeling of being “forced” to do something at school despite having no motivation to do so. It was only in hindsight that Lachlan realised that he had experienced regret regarding his academic outcomes during those years. He thought he should have been more engaged in subjects he did not like doing after he had developed an appreciation for his educational outcomes. The perception of being forced to study certain subjects had significantly reduced his level of engagement in learning, which then led to him not wanting to do well in those subjects. Lachlan’s account raises the question of whether, and to what extent, primary and secondary schools teach students how to “cope” with studying compulsory subjects they dislike in order to keep those students engaged in learning.

School is important but... In this section, I describe how the students who participated in my study valued their education. These eight students did not view their schooling experiences as irrelevant, or that the curriculum was meaningless. The data indicates that the students' negative attitudes to school had not resulted from the belief that school was not pertinent to their personal development or future opportunities, but instead was from the lower levels of student wellbeing and the perceived negativity at school.

Seven of the students acknowledged the importance of secondary school when they commenced in Year 7. Even during their negative attitude phases, the students explained that they understood the correlation between school grades and future prospects; however, acknowledging the importance of good educational outcomes had not been sufficient to enable these students to re-engage with learning given that their personal problems remained unresolved. The following quote from Patrick is a powerful example: *"I still understood that school is important, but I guess I wasn't really showing it through my actions. I was being really negative towards class and towards school work and I just didn't want to do any of it"* (1, 25:56). This is a crucial finding from this research study in that it identifies the importance of targeting the "negativity towards school" in disengaged students.

Responding to the question of whether or not she understood the importance of school, Kate first laughed out loud and then answered "I want to say no", referring to her described actions and behaviours towards schoolwork (for example, not paying attention in class), stating, *"but yeah, I've always thought that school was important"* (1, 44:05). Max's account sums up the common conflicted feelings among the students:

I didn't want to be there at all [at school]. I couldn't care less about what they were teaching me – I didn't want to do the work, didn't care about the people that were there. I just wanted to get through [the day] and go home. ... I hated it ... I knew it [school] was important, but I hated it that much to the point that I couldn't care less about what I was taught.
(1, 20:29)

Lachlan did not experience such a strong reaction of "not caring" about the schoolwork, like Max did, but he, too, stated that he was not doing as well as he believed he could have in the compulsory subjects that he was not interested in. He felt forced to

do them, which hindered his engagement in learning. According to his narrative account, he did not put in the effort and eventually did no work at all.

In contrast to the other students, Amy stated that she did not acknowledge the relevance of completing Year 12 at the start of secondary school. She only realised the importance of completing Year 12 when discussing her troubled situation at school with her siblings and mother when she was 15:

I didn't think it was important. I thought if I leave school I can go and do like a VET course ... do a trade and I'd be set for life. As I got higher and higher, I started to understand a bit more and got it drilled into me from all of my siblings and Mum that school is important; you only get to do it once, it's important, you need to try ... now I realise how important it actually is. A lot of places you can't get in without having your Year 12 certificate. (1, 30:42)

At times, the worries about their personal situation guided the students' actions in class despite them knowing the actions were not appropriate or beneficial to their schooling journey. Max reported to have slept in class, while Patrick listened to music on his phone. Amy described an incident whereby, in order to distract herself from the negative feelings associated with the teacher she was in conflict with and to prevent further escalation of the conflict in class, she started reading a book to occupy herself once she had completed the given task; unfortunately, however, this behaviour only inflamed the conflict:

It was horrible. In class, it was very much, like "I am here coz I have to be, not because I want to be and I have no other choice" ... I tried not to talk to him [the teacher] as much, because if I didn't engage with him, there wouldn't be any problem, and then ... at one stage I was reading a book in class, and he [made a notification of it] as not following instructions, coz I wasn't doing my work, but I had finished my work anyway, and so ... yeah. (2, 3:52)

Paradoxically, the students may have presented an "I don't care" attitude – for example, by being easily distracted, or being on their phones, or chatting to classmates during class time – but as is evident from their narratives, they were also anxious about

their educational outcomes. The students were concerned when they realised they were unable to engage in learning to the expected level, and some reported that they feared falling behind or even failing subjects.

This aligns with Fredricks et al.'s (2004) definition of student engagement as a multidimensional construct consisting of the emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement components. Cognitive and or behavioural engagement may be present despite students being emotionally disengaged (M. Wang & Peck, 2013). This is particularly evident in the previously discussed study that involved Finnish adolescents by M. Wang et al. (2015), where the students sustained a high level of behavioural and cognitive engagement despite low levels of emotional engagement that was associated with burnout and depression symptoms.

Personal problems within the school environment. As made evident from the narrative accounts, personal problems can override schoolwork if they are not dealt with effectively as per the student's own subjective judgement of effectiveness. Even if the problems had not originated from within the school environment – for example, aspects of identity crises or family issues – they “usually ... come out at school” and “it's not that simple” (2, 25:31), as stated by Ben, to leave personal problems at the school gate to facilitate engagement in learning. Ben's statement relates directly to the “institutionalized belief about schooling” (Kunc, 1992, as cited by Osterman, 2000, p. 324) that emotional needs are to be addressed outside the school environment. It further relates to the aspect of belongingness to a school community, which is crucial. According to Osterman (2000), “children who experience a sense of relatedness have a stronger supply of inner resources” (p. 343), are more self-confident, more intrinsically motivated and have a more positive attitude to school. It is evident from the data and to Osterman (2000) that addressing students' wellbeing at school is pertinent to student engagement. Students experiencing predominantly positive emotions at school “are more likely to like school, and they are also more engaged ... and they invest more of themselves in the learning process” (Osterman, 2000, p. 343).

As mentioned previously, the data indicates that the turmoil resulting from personal problems and the inability to manage it effectively, either by oneself or with the assistance of significant others, is the key element in the development of a negative attitude to school. After identifying mental health problems in disengaged students, such

as Anna, the threat of personal problems escalating means that it is important to identify personal problems early, regardless of their scale, and implement an effective problem-solving approach for them so as to prevent the development of a negative attitude to school and a corresponding decrease in engagement.

I argue, in alliance with Gecas and Steff (1990), that adolescent relationships may be considered more harmonious than conflicted and thus the notion of storm and stress is not a universally accepted concept of adolescence; however, the degree of harmony in adolescents can significantly vary when events such as bullying occur, or there is a friendship fallout; such events can have a significant impact on the individual's wellbeing and engagement levels. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner (1995), the effect of individual and context characteristics is considered to be indirect because it is mediated through its impact on the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The characteristics that a student experiences during his or her schooling journey are thus "prompters, facilitators or constrainers" of proximal processes (Zubrick et al., 2009). Personal problems that remain unresolved and/or are not addressed effectively constrain student engagement and positive attitudes to school. The proximal processes, the so called "engines of development" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 823), come to a halt when students experiencing personal problems within the school environment do not have a person to whom they have a mutual emotional attachment and whom they trust to have his or her best interests at heart).

Unfortunately, in terms of socio-emotional difficulties, students may not be identified as being in need of professional help until a crisis situation occurs (Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003), which correlates with students' likelihood of being successful at school (Aviles, Anderson, & Davila, 2006). In order to support students before a crisis point is reached, my findings reinforce the argument that "professional development is needed to better prepare teachers and school personnel to work with children with socio-emotional difficulties. In order to provide teachers with this support, more funding is needed to conduct teacher education, provide in-services, workshops, etc." (Aviles et al., 2006, p. 37).

Thread 2: Support framework. The narrative accounts of positive attitude change presented in this thesis portray a story of students finding themselves in troubled situations that are associated with the development of a negative attitude to school and disengagement from learning. This thread addressed the aspect of support for the personal problems and has the following two sub-threads: (1) No “helping hand” at school; and (2) The available support.

In terms of the holistic analysis approach and gaining an understanding of the experience of positive attitude change, I posed the question of what happened to these eight students; however, the identification of the first sub-thread resulted from questioning what did *not* happen for these eight students that led them to develop a negative attitude to school and learning in the first place. In other words, what was it that the students did *not* experience that could have prevented their disengagement from learning?

Sub-thread 2.1: No “helping hand” at school. As outlined in Chapter 4, I included autobiographical information regarding the experience of positive attitude change to school. I stated that “*reflecting on the past, I can’t help but feel like I needed a helping hand that never got offered*” (p. 2), referring to the time when I developed a negative attitude to school and associated school solely with negative emotions. The underlying drive for this PhD research for me as a secondary school teacher was to identify how to best support students who had a negative attitude to school to enable positive attitude change.

When I analysed the data, the coded transcripts and the narrative accounts of the eight participating students, I realised that all these stories of positive attitude change had a common theme, which was the notion of *not* being offered support to address personal problems and the consequences of this lack of support within the school environment. No student stated that they had been offered “a helping hand”, which was the label I applied to this concept. From the students’ narrative accounts, it was evident that despite their experiences of negative emotions towards school, their struggles with their troubled situations, and their disengagement from learning, support was not forthcoming from the teachers nor the staff. A pertinent statement from Ben underlies the relevance of support for personal problems:

Because usually the problems come out at school ... I would probably suggest ... making people feel better, and just suggesting to go to the

[school support services] if something is wrong, to talk to someone, rather than saying leave them [the problems] at home. It's not as simple as that.
(2, 25:31)

The narrative accounts all articulate clearly the importance of effectively addressing students' negative emotions at school in order to prevent disengagement from learning. Negative emotions are unavoidable as all individuals encounter personal problems or troubling and or challenging circumstances at different times in their school life and to differing extents in their daily life, and therefore it is essential to provide support to students who are struggling to stay engaged in learning and, further, proactively *offer* support to engender in the students a feeling of being cared for by the school and, in particular, the teachers. In other words, what is missing from the students' narrative accounts, but is prevalent in the literature regarding engagement, are the actions that would depict teachers and other staff members at school as being supportive and caring, and *offering* support, guidance and help to students who were struggling with negative emotions. This would be encompassed by the fundamental need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000) being portrayed as students perceiving their school environment to be "conveying warmth, caring, and respect to students" (Niemic & Ryan, 2009, p. 141), an aspect that has been identified as missing from the students' experiences.

In line with Archambault et al. (2009), who view "socio-emotional well-being as the primary dimension that ought to be targeted by practitioners" (p. 414) when addressing academic adjustment in secondary schools and school completion, this identified thread points to the importance of a support framework at school that addresses students' emotional wellbeing in order to prevent the development of a negative attitude to school. Archambault et al. (2009) argue for student cognitions, behaviour *and* emotions to be addressed as well as the need "to integrate distinct strategies that address student emotions" (p. 414) in order to increase student engagement. The data from this research study confirms the need for the development of such distinct strategies, especially with the focus being on the proactive offering of support. The role and the associated range of responsibilities of teachers is complex; however, the aspect of caring for students' wellbeing at school and identifying students in need of support regarding their emotional wellbeing appear to be crucial factors in targeting disengagement from learning that has resulted from negative attitudes to school. Supportive relationships with teachers have also been found to serve as a protective factor against the normative

decline of students' emotional engagement in secondary school (M. Wang & Eccles, 2012b).

Being the adult figure closest to the student within the school environment, a teacher should be the first point of support for students, yet this research study has revealed that that is sometimes not the case. The next section discusses the students' experiences of the lack of support for their personal problems at school, and the consequent feelings of not being cared for by teachers and or the school.

Anna reported how she wished that her teachers had been more understanding of students who may not have felt mentally well enough to concentrate on their schoolwork. She stated:

The teachers need to be more understanding sometimes. Teachers take it out on the kids if they don't get a good mark because they are stressed out because of something that's going on at home and teachers don't think about it and that makes students feel worse. (2, 17:10)

She also stated that students should be asked if they are okay more often in "casual" one-on-one situations. She believed that schools should "remind" people more often of the support services available at school and talk about mental health issues more, frequently as "*they talk about it for five minutes and stop, and you forget about those things*" (2, 17:10). She also believed that continual discussion of mental health could help normalise help-seeking behaviour. Max had identified the same need as Anna. He reported that he perceived his previous school as "*not handling the bullying very well*" (1, 4:52), and thus he felt inadequately supported as a victim of bullying. In Max's opinion, schools needed to work further on encouraging students to ask for help but also to actively offer it as it is part of the school's duty of care towards each student. Sabine specifically referred to the aspect of offering support when she outlined what should have been provided – for example, "giving more help, giving advice on what to do, giving places to feel safe [away from the bully], and giving advice on where to seek help from outside of school"

Another pertinent example of perceived lack of support is evident in Kate's narrative. She stated that she had struggled to "balance" friendship issues, which had been stressful for her. Regarding the crucial incident where she lost both of her best

friends, Kate explained how she had perceived the school as giving her no support to manage the negative emotions that had resulted from the friendship fallout.

Experiences such as Kate's prompt the question of how schools expect adolescents to overcome such incidents effectively and what support services they should provide in order to make students feel cared for in their troubled circumstances. Also, what are the teachers' roles and responsibilities in relation to offering support to a range of personal issues – for example, friendship fallouts? The way the incident was managed was criticised by Kate: "*They didn't really do much*" except to separate the two girls from each other, which she perceived as the school having simply "*hoped for the best*" (2, 13:48) instead of being active in the conflict resolution process. Neither Kate nor Patrick received any support from the school when they were grieving their friendship losses and having to face the consequent loneliness and the changed circumstances they found themselves in. Both students became negative towards school and disengaged from learning, yet no one intervened or tried to help either of them to become more positive. Ben experienced something similar in that he did not seek support, but it was also not offered to him during that time when he was attempting to isolate himself from his friends and peers in order to avoid conversations regarding his sexual orientation.

Amy described how her worries regarding the conflicts with her teachers kept upsetting her, and made her "overly angry". Amy felt she had no support for what she was going through; from her narrative account it is clear that she believed the school supported the teachers but never herself as if the school had taken sides. Amy described how getting overly angry could "*just ruin everything, coz then your whole mindset is just gone and nothing is straight and it's just not practical*" (2, 24:53). Amy had lacked the strategies to keep a positive mindset and not let the conflicts with the teachers "ruin everything"; she, too, was not offered support on how to stay more focused on her work and manage teacher–student relationship issues more effectively.

Lachlan did not enjoy school when he was forced to study some compulsory subjects. Support appeared not to have been offered to him in any form to increase his motivation for those subjects; however, he also did not ask for support. Lachlan reported that he significantly disengaged from learning in those subjects he was not interested in, but he did not act on it; and instead, he accepted the disengagement, which he later regretted in hindsight. Interestingly, there is no mention of any support or guidance from

the teachers to assist Lachlan overcome his apathy for those subjects and help him appreciate the personal benefit of achieving better educational outcomes by being motivated to learn.

Lachlan went through two school years feeling forced to engage in learning, and at no point during that time did he receive an explanation of why it was beneficial at the start of secondary schooling for all the subjects to be compulsory. At the time of the interview Lachlan stated “*I love school*” (1, 3:01), and reported that he wanted to do well and go to university. He described how he believed he could have had better marks had he engaged more in learning at the outset of secondary school, but at the time he simply “*wasn’t doing the work*” (2, 2:07). Lachlan’s experience is a powerful example of a student who was not being supported in reaching his or her potential, but instead left to deal with his negative attitude to school on his own without intervention from the teachers.

The identification of this thread is in line with what research has revealed regarding student–teacher relationships. Caring and supportive teachers matter to student engagement and achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Adolescent students are three times more likely to have higher levels of engagement when they perceive their teachers to be very supportive, especially at secondary school level as “student experiences of engagement were more strongly influenced by high levels of teacher support at middle school than at elementary school” (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 269). In order to be emotionally engaged with school, adolescent students want teachers to be involved with them, to know about them and their personal situations as they are the adults within the school environment who the students interact with on a daily basis. This sub-thread appears to identify the difference in day-to-day schooling between “what should be happening”, in terms of support services, and “what is perceived by the students to be happening, or *not* happening”. A range of school policies exists that addresses the aspect of creating supportive learning environments such as the previously mentioned online Student Wellbeing Hub and the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (Education Council, 2018) and the national Be You (Be You, 2019) initiative to promote social and emotional wellbeing in educational spaces in Australia.

However, based on the analysis of the students’ narratives, the question arises as to how these approaches, which are specifically developed to meet adolescent students’

needs for wellbeing at school, are perceived by the students themselves regarding their effectiveness.

In order for schools to be appropriate settings to promote adolescent students' wellbeing, students need to feel connected to their school (Resnick et al., 1997), and it is evident from the development of negative attitudes to school that the students involved in this research study lost their connection due to a perceived lack of support for their situation. Resnick et al.'s (1997) study of over 10,000 adolescents found that perceived school connectedness (as well as parent–family connectedness) is a protective factor that mitigates health risks such as emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, violence, and use of substances. The following quote from Amy typifies the perception of these initiatives and school policies regarding support frameworks for students. Amy described how she did not feel supported in her conflict with a teacher:

It made me feel like the school is a bit useless when it came to that. They have all these protocols, and they're meant to be here for the students and for the students first, and why isn't that the case. Coz it certainly didn't feel that way at the time. (2, 19:55)

Sabine also stated she had simply “lost trust” in the school’s ability to support and help her when she continued to be bullied despite her reporting it and actively asking for help.

In line with Wentzel’s (1998) finding, I was also able to identify in the data that distress is a significant, negative predictor of school interest. Wentzel (1998) measured distress using statements such as “I worry too much about things that aren’t important” (p. 204), indicating low wellbeing, and school interest with statements such as “For the most part, school is a waste of time” (p. 204), which both relate to the students’ descriptions of negative emotions and disengagement. Wentzel (1998) states that “psychological distress explained, in part, significant relations between perceived social support and interest in school” (p. 207), which aligns with the students’ narrative accounts of their lived experiences.

The findings from this research study are in contrast to M. Wang and Peck’s (2013) study, which examined Finnish adolescents’ engagement in learning and found emotional engagement not to be linked to academic success. In their study, students with

high or low emotional engagement achieved similar educational outcomes; however, emotionally disengaged students were identified to be at the highest risk for mental health problems (M. Wang et al., 2015; M. Wang & Peck, 2013). My data clearly rejects M. Wang et al.'s (2015) hypothesis that "behavioural and cognitive engagement may matter more for academic performance than emotional engagement" (p. 62), as the narrative accounts from my research study indicate that emotional engagement is a prerequisite for learning to occur.

Sub-thread 2.2: The available support. This sub-thread captured the support the students had received and appreciated regarding their personal problems and resulting circumstances. The data indicates that the students gave positive descriptions of support from individuals predominantly external to the school environment.

In comparison to descriptions of significant negative emotions experienced at school before positive attitude change occurred due to a perceived lack of support from teachers, students referred to individuals – for example, counsellors, parents, siblings and/or friends from whom they sought help – in very positive terms, especially their mothers. Pertinent descriptions to this finding are "really loving parents" (Patrick); parents who were able to show "*exactly how to get where happy is*" (Max; 1, 22:49); a mother who has "always been there" (Ben); a mother who was "always there for you" (Lachlan); a mother who "always had one's back/ helped" (Amy), a mother who was "*encouraging me ... always there, if I got problems*" (Kate; 2, 18:03); and a mother who was "*was kind of just like there to try and help me through it*" (Sabine; 2, 6:27).

In Anna's case the counsellor was described as "very nice" and Anna reported that "*she listened a lot, and asked questions, that she felt would help me; and she pointed out that I didn't have to answer questions, and that's what I liked about it*" (2, 14:20). Positive emotions were experienced when the students felt cared for by significant others, whereas the institutional narrative was perceived as failing to provide the feeling of being cared for and understood and offering no support in the management of the students' troubling situations.

The findings from my research study support the suggestion that there should be an increased focus on support frameworks that specifically address students' emotional wellbeing at school when they are having personal problems. If students' wellbeing is not addressed, their negative attitude to school will continue to impede their engagement in

learning and components such as self-regulated and motivational learning, which are important aspects for academic success (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990), become secondary. When a student is emotionally and/or mentally not feeling “well enough” to focus on the schoolwork, the emotional engagement is not there, or it is at a very low level, and learning is then significantly hindered. Perceived caring is significantly and positively related to internal control beliefs and negatively to emotional distress (Wentzel, 1997). Perceived lack of care or “nurturance” – which is defined as “expressions of warmth and approval, as well as conscientious protection of children’s physical and emotional wellbeing” (Wentzel, 2000, p. 288) – is a negative predictor of academic performance and social behaviour (Wentzel, 2000).

Wentzel (1997) examined adolescents’ perceptions of pedagogical caring in relation to students’ motivation to do well at school. She questioned why some students were eager to engage in schoolwork, while others disengaged from the learning process, and referred to research on intrapersonal cognitive processes and the role of the teaching approach and quality of instructions. However, of particular interest to her were the findings that linked interpersonal relationships between teachers and students to motivational outcomes. Yet, as stated by Wentzel (1997), “explanations for why these non-instructional aspects of classroom life are related to student effort and engagement have not been well developed” (p. 411) and concluded that “this explanation translates into the notion that students will be motivated to engage in classroom activities if they believe that teachers care about them” (p. 411).

The narratives from my research study indicate that the students had perceived a substantial lack of care during the times they had a negative attitude to school and were disengaged from learning. Students mentioned teachers ‘not caring’ about their troubled situation, and/or school policies not achieving the intended result of having students feeling cared for – for example, in the case of bullying. From the students’ experiences of positive attitude change, much can be learned with regard to the question posed by Wentzel (1997): “If ‘caring’ teachers do make a difference, then what makes a teacher an effective ‘caregiver’ in the eyes of students?” (p. 411).

The students who participated in my research study indicated that a caring teacher is a teacher who offers support not just for the academic work but also for any personal problems that might develop. Caring teachers acknowledge adolescent students’

problems and the associated negative emotions they may express at school as well as demonstrating genuine interest in managing the students' worries and the actual problems within the school setting. What students perceive as a lack-of-caring attitude is when teachers treat all students the same and expect the same from all students; they do not differentiate between the students who do well academically and personally, and the ones who do not. Wentzel's (1997) findings indicate that teachers who were considered caring were described in similar terms in which effective parenting is framed, which prompts the question of how much students want their teachers to care for them at school like their parents care for them outside school in terms of their emotional wellbeing as well as their academic achievement.

This thread resonates with the effort to frame engagement in learning "not as a property of a child but rather as embedded in interactions and relationships" (Pianta et al., 2012, p. 367). As reported by the eight participating students, disengagement occurred not because the students had started to take their studies less seriously (Steinberg et al., 1996; Marks, 2000), or because they believed that doing well in school was valued negatively by their peers, but because they did not feel supported within the school environment regarding their personal problems and the resulting circumstances. As presented by Pianta et al. (2012), relationships with teachers could be viewed as "core organizers of experiences; they are fundamental to core developmental functions. Yet, the qualities of teacher-student relationships are frequently afterthoughts in battles over curricula, testing, school structure, and funding" (p. 370). This thread supports the notion that a close and supportive relationship with teachers is a key feature that does not distinguish between students who experience social and academic success and those who do not (Pianta et al., 2012).

Thread 3: Reaction to hitting rock bottom. This thread consists of two sub-threads: "Reaching a personal breaking point" followed chronologically by "Taking the right turn". I outline how in this research study the students' emotional wellbeing continued to deteriorate until it reached a personal breaking point, and how that breaking point forced students to take action to improve their personal situation at school as well as their wellbeing.

Sub-thread 3.1: Reaching a personal breaking point. Experiencing negative feelings within the school environment was a consistent factor throughout all eight narratives. The students repeatedly reported that they felt unhappy at school, and some of them reported that there were times when they did not want to go to school at all. When they were experiencing negative feelings at school, the students found it difficult to focus on their schoolwork, and these feelings negatively impacted on their motivation to do well.

It became evident from the data that the students' personal problems often resulted in the students reaching what could be defined as "a personal breaking point" and then a "turning point". A personal breaking point could be defined as an accumulation of stress to the point where a person perceives that their life is falling apart; it is defined as "the point at which a person gives way under stress" (Breaking point [Merriam-Webster], n.d.). For each individual, the intensity of the circumstances that leads to a breaking point varies, but a common aspect of reaching so-called "rock bottom" is the absence of hope that the situation can improve and strong feelings of despair regarding the particular personal problem.

In seven of the eight students' narrative accounts of positive attitude change, the students reflected on their deteriorating wellbeing as a result of the personal problem remaining unresolved, and all seven students were able to pinpoint the moment in time when they had reached their personal breaking point or had hit rock bottom. The term breaking point for this resonant thread was derived from Max's narrative account and his description of being driven to school by his mother during which he broke down and cried; he stated, "*I guess that was just a breaking point for me. I didn't think I can go any lower than that, and I just wanted to get out of it*" (2, 3:05). The other students did not use the term itself, but their descriptions of their experiences leading up to positive attitude change aligned with Max's description of his breaking point. The data indicates that the students had reached a personal breaking point when they considered that their situation was hopeless and that the attendant stress was overwhelming; the students were not optimistic regarding their future school experiences and did not believe that the school could provide them with a workable solution to their personal problems. They did not consider there was anything positive about their circumstances and were not hopeful that their situation would improve because they did not see any potential for amelioration. In particular, the students did not feel supported nor understood.

Anna characterised her perceived hopelessness as “*I didn’t see myself having a future*” and concluded that “*I was not gonna do well, and I was probably not gonna make it out in the big world*” (1, 42:13). Her dark place intensified to the point where she became quite concerned at its intensity and became increasingly anxious as to what might further develop. Anna explained how she stayed in her room for too long, which scared her. She stated, “I was going into that really dark place” and she started to feel uneasy about her self-imposed isolation. This unease was caused by the severe negative thoughts she had over which she felt she had no control anymore. She said she was unwilling to talk to her mother about her situation or her friends as she did not want to burden them with her personal troubles. She reported that she didn’t feel “well enough” to complete her schoolwork, explaining, “*it was just stress, a lot ... all these built-up emotions*” (2, 1:45). She perceived her teachers as not being understanding nor considerate of her situation and eventually stopped attending school.

With teachers I think ... once you do bad they just expect you to keep doing bad. So, I don’t think they’re very helpful, they’re like, “Oh she’s done bad, so the chances are she’s probably not gonna do any better, so we’re not going to spend that much time on her anymore.” (1, 29:10)

Max reported that he felt unsafe at school and perceived his situation as being “hopeless”, explaining that he wanted to change schools but, in his view could not do so until after his brother’s graduation. Max explicitly stated that he did hit rock bottom, reporting that “*I didn’t think I could go any lower*” (2, 3:05). He explained that he was convinced he would break down eventually due to his predicament at school. He believed that the bullies would eventually do ‘something mean’ to him given that the bullying was escalating.

Sabine perceived her situation was hopeless as well because “nothing” was being done by the support services from which she had sought help and advice. She reported that “*a lot of the teachers didn’t really do that much*”, and how the teachers would assure her that “*they’d stop it then and there, but then when you did go to them, nothing would really seem to happen*” (1, 18:58). Knowing that she would continue to see the girl who bullied her on a daily basis, Sabine felt like an easy target; she felt unprotected and fully exposed to this girl when at school.

Kate was in a constant state of worry regarding her friendship issues. From her narrative, it appeared as though she was literally “stuck” obsessing about these friendship issues and consequently neglecting her schoolwork. She reported, *“I have been focusing so much on this [the friendship issue], I haven’t been focusing on much, like doing homework, finishing things, you kind of go ‘Oh, yeah, I’ll finish that tomorrow’”* (2, 28:30).

Patrick explicitly stated that he had “a little PTSD kind of feeling” from the negative experience he had had with the principal of his primary school, which resulted in the development of his negative attitude to school. Despite seeking a fresh start at secondary school, the experience of losing his best friend at that time intensified his PTSD feeling and his negative attitude to school. For Kate and Patrick, the fear of failing subjects consequently arose from their increasing disengagement from learning and their reluctance to study was a result of their substantial negative emotions at school. Their increasing anxiety caused both students to experience the nadir of their wellbeing at that particular time. Patrick reported, *“I was just really stressed and freaked out whenever I went to school”* (1, 7:41) and Kate, referring to her friendship fallout, stated, *“It was just such a big thing. It was just quite tragic”* (2, 11:40).

Amy anticipated that her conflicts with the teachers would continue, stating that *“this is just going to keep going and going and going, it’s not gonna stop”* (1, 30:42). Amy’s narrative indicates that she had reached a crucial point when her mother threatened her with a ban on her hobbies, which made her understand how serious her mother was about the need for Amy to change her approach to her teachers and improve her efforts in completing her schoolwork. Ben also realised that he would continuously face “uncomfortable” confrontations with his peers if he persisted in not being true to himself and obfuscating about his sexuality. He had reached a crucial point in his situation when he realised that the issue of not being truthful to himself and others could not be erased by continuing to “push it away”, and he said that he was “tired of lying”.

Lachlan was also not optimistic about his situation changing for the better until he had reached the upper year levels where the curriculum allowed students to choose a certain number of elective subjects. However, in contrast to the other seven narratives, Lachlan’s experiences did not include anything similar to a breaking point. Lachlan simply disengaged from learning the compulsory subjects he did not like and developed a

negative attitude to school based on his resentment of not being able to choose any subjects that he liked. His attitude only changed when he started Year 9. He stated:

In Years 7 and 8, and in a little bit of Year 9, I didn't really enjoy school, but then I hit Year 10, and I suppose sort of Year 9 as well, I just started to enjoy it a lot more, and that was because of the choice of subjects
(2, 1:22)

Seven students reached their personal breaking point when the negative emotions they were experiencing from their personal problems, which they had not been able to manage effectively themselves or receive appropriate support for, led them to feel their lowest in terms of their wellbeing and attitude to school. As Ben described, their personal problems “outdid” all the relevant aspects of school despite the students stating that school had always been important to them and that they valued and personally desired to attain good grades. Lachlan also lacked hope that his situation could change for the better, until he reached Year 9, but his perceived hopelessness did not significantly impact on his wellbeing. He described it simply as the cause of his negative attitude and the associated disengagement from learning the subject he did not enjoy.

Displaying a negative attitude to school and eventually reaching a personal breaking point, the participating students referred repeatedly to ideas associated with low wellbeing and emotional engagement and, consequently by their account, little engagement in learning. The narrative accounts are in line with relevant research that indicates that emotional engagement influences the academic and psychological outcomes of students (Archambault et al., 2009; Eccles et al., 1993; Ostermann, 2000; M. Wang et al., 2015; M. Wang & Eccles, 2012a; M. Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

Sub-thread 3.2: Taking the right turn. The students wanted to be emotionally engaged at school as they valued education and wanted to do well, and when they identified a turning point, which was an opportunity to change the course of their disengagement from learning, they embraced it and broke the nexus they had with their breaking points.

None of the students, except for Lachlan, wanted to stay negative towards school. They desired a change in their circumstances for the better, and became driven by the desire to improve their situations.

This thread describes what occurred as a result of the students reaching their breaking point or being flooded with negativity. Some students had lost trust in their school to help them, and some of them were disappointed by the support they received. For example, Anna felt misunderstood by the teachers in her situation, and Max and Sabine perceived a lack of support and received no intervention for the bullying they experienced. Kate did not feel supported by the school when she was suddenly left without two of her best friends, and Amy felt disappointed with how the school managed her conflicts with the teachers.

This thread addresses the role significant others such as family members and/or friends played in supporting the students when they were at their breaking points, which simultaneously marked the starting points for taking action to improve their situations. Taking some form of action was a consistent resonant thread that was present throughout seven of the narratives of positive attitude change, which was associated with an improvement in the students' wellbeing. This can be seen as the first active step, a prerequisite, to the process of positive attitude change. However, what preceded the decision to take action was the reaching of a personal breaking point and the resolute thinking that things could not continue to proceed the way they had done and help was needed to resolve the difficult circumstances.

Adolescents' help-seeking behaviour is a complex matter (Barker, 2007; Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004; Rickwood, Deane, & Wilson, 2007). There is a large body of research on adolescent development that covers coping, stress and daily life issues (Rice, Herman, & Petersen, 1993), and the literature confirms that proactive help seeking is positively linked to adolescent developmental outcomes; however, little is known as to how best increase help-seeking behaviour (Barker, 2007). Confidentiality is important to adolescents when seeking help – for example, from a school-based support service (Riggs & Cheng, 1988). This need for confidentiality aligns with Anna's motivation to use a counselling service external to school as well as with some of the students' comments that to "not be okay" needs to be further normalised and accepted in order for troubled adolescents to seek help from public institutions such as from schools grounds as well as from friends and/or peers. The students stated that the stigma of not being okay when not coping at school could still be experienced; pertinent to this aspect was Max's experience when he said "*that's a big thing to tell someone that you're not happy; because it's quite a vulnerable thing to admit that you are unstable;*

like, coz, I don't know, it's a negative thing to be" (2, 19:22). He advocated for it to be further normalised in order to increase students' help-seeking behaviour.

Riggs and Cheng (1988) found that "high-risk students" – for example, those that are pregnant, depressed or suicidal – were more likely to use the school support services than students who fell into the category of "low risk". The same result was found in a study by Balassone, Bell, and Peterfreund (1991) that compared adolescent users to non-users of school-based health clinics, and found that "clinic users are high-risk teenagers" (p. 244). The results from Fisher, Juszczak, Friedman, Schneider, and Chapar's (1992) study revealed that from almost 8000 visits to a school-based clinic, only 14 per cent of them were related to mental health concerns, whereas 44 per cent were related to acute medical problems (p. 615). Offer et al. (1991) found in their study that "emotionally disturbed" adolescents frequently asked parents and friends for help and evaluated the help given as being beneficial. This aligns with Kate's experience when she sought help from her older friends, and with Patrick's and Max's frequent discussions with their parents regarding their worries.

However, Anna's experience sheds light on the aspect of not wanting to worry significant others with personal issues as one does not want to be perceived as a burden. Another reason may be the anticipated reaction to sharing a personal issue – for example, the case of Anna's mother when told of Anna's significant worries and stress. Anna also said that her mother was embarrassed that she could not find solutions to help her daughter get better, which presents an interesting aspect for future analysis of effective help-seeking behaviours for adolescent students.

Anna's initiation of the first action to change her situation was based on self-reflection of her particular circumstances. Finding herself in a frightening dark place, she realised "*I need to get out*" (2, 10:11). Parallel to that, her mother became increasingly upset at Anna's poor grades and issued her with the ultimatum that if she did not improve her academic results, then she would have to move in with her estranged father. According to Anna's account, both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors led to her being receptive to the idea of counselling once it became easily accessible to her.

Max initiated some action to improve his situation by opening up to his mother about how he felt at school and confidently declaring that he needed to change schools. He was of the opinion that only a change of schools would help his situation as he had

acknowledged to himself that he had not assimilated into his previous school's culture and had not accepted its ethos. He explained that he did not want to continue attending the school considering how unsafe and unsupported he felt as a result of the bullying he received, and stated that *"I couldn't handle it anymore, I had to get out of it [the school environment]"* (2, 19:24). Explaining his situation and the impact it had on him to his mother was the first step towards improving his wellbeing.

In the same vein, Sabine concluded that changing schools was the only solution to her problem, and armed with her mother's words of encouragement that she was capable of making decisions for herself, Sabine went through with it. Changing schools is, however, a very complex matter and can often be a traumatic event (Measor & Woods, 2019). Research findings also indicate that changing schools significantly increases the risk of underachievement (Temple & Reynolds, 1999) and is negatively related to student behaviour (Engec, 2006). It is thus not a decision that should be taken lightly.

Kate decided to open up to her older friends about her situation, after consulting with her mother, as she trusted them and considered them to be role models: *"They've been through this; they had, like, problems, friendship breakdowns. They've been there, done that"* (2, 17:08). The conversations with her mother confirmed what her older friends had advised her, and it made Kate feel better to have shared her concerns and be listened to. In a similar vein to Kate, Amy also opened up to her older siblings about her situation. She trusted that they had her best interests at heart and that due to their own experiences, knew "what the go was" with student–teacher relationships and "good" and "bad" teachers. Having access to their advice on such matters left Amy feeling less isolated with her troubling situation and more hopeful that things may change for the better.

In Patrick's narrative, it was evident that his mother and father had helped him out "a lot", and that he always felt like he could talk to them about his personal problems as they were approachable and "really loving". Although his conversations with his parents were helpful, what initiated the change for Patrick was his self-reflection on his situation, which was enhanced by his parents' constant care for his wellbeing. The turning point for Patrick was the self-reflection that led him to realise that his negativity towards school exacerbated his problem. He concluded he was being too "negative" and

decided to try to be “happier” in order to feel better and attract people with whom he might make friends.

Ben’s turning point resulted from him realising that he really did not want to continue denying his sexuality to others, but also, more importantly, to himself. He described it the following way: “*At the start of this year, I am like, I am sick of it, I’m just gonna accept who I am, and whoever finds out, finds out*” (2, 4:16). As he stated, he was “sick of it”, which implied that the turning point had been initiated by his desire to primarily improve his personal wellbeing both within and outside the school environment.

As is evident from the students’ narratives of positive attitude change, reaching their own particular breaking points enabled the students to identify what they were feeling and why they were having these particular emotions. The breaking point appears to have clarified the situational circumstances and their perceived causes and impacts. It also made students realise that there were only two options from the breaking point onwards – to continue school life as it was, or to do something to initiate a change for the better. Each of the eight students found themselves at a crucial decision-making point; some sought help, others immersed themselves into self-reflective activities without actively seeking help from others. What the students had in common was the desire to do something to change their situation for the better.

Although adolescents engage in some forms of help-seeking behaviour, such as opening up to friends and family, it is a significant fact, as stated in the literature review, that young people, in comparison to other age groups, are the *least* likely cohort to seek professional help (Beyond Blue, 2019). It is also noteworthy to acknowledge that the subjective meaning attributed to social support is more important than the objective measures (Barker, 2007), and as indicated by the students’ experiences, further research is required on a specific category of adolescent help-seeking behaviour for personal stress or problems within the school environment to help improve school support services (Barker, 2007).

Thread 4: Application of changed perspective. “Perception is reality” is a well-known adage and implies that the way a person considers something becomes the person’s truth. This view can be self-limiting. Perspective is defined as “the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance” (Perspective [Merriam-Webster], n.d.), which implies that there is a “a particular way of considering something” (Perspective [Cambridge], n.d) that depends on a person’s experiences, values and beliefs.

From the eight narrative accounts of positive attitude change it is evident that the students had developed a new perspective on their personal problems after reaching a breaking point and taking action to change their troubled situations. The students re-evaluated their circumstances from a different angle – for example, putting themselves in the shoes of a mother, older sibling or friend, and/or a counsellor. It appears as if the personal problems and the associated situations at school had been re-rationalised anew, and with that insight came a changed approach to the situation – one that included the feeling of hope for the situation to become better.

When the students experienced some form of success with the new approach, such as feeling more positive at school and thus wanting to go to school, they became motivated to continue with the new approach to further increase their wellbeing and increase their engagement in learning. As revealed in the literature review, hope is an important factor for academic achievement (Snyder et al., 2002) and optimism for wellbeing (Peterson, 2000; Scheier & Carver, 1992).

Anna started counselling and in taking the sessions seriously, she put into practice at home the advice she had been given – for example, standing in front of a mirror and telling herself that she was beautiful. She started to feel better as the counselling progressed. She felt proud of herself to have decided to get help and take up the offer of free counselling. As described in her narrative account, Anna desperately desired more positivity and happiness to escape the dark place she had been in, and in order to experience more positive emotions, she approached her situation proactively by “faking to be happy”; she “put on the happy face” until she actually felt happier:

I think you have to look for it and you have to ... fake it till you make it, so like pretend like you're happy until ... like keep working on it ... you have to put effort in, even if it might be hard in the beginning. (1, 33:46)

Feeling better, Anna was able to apply herself to completing her schoolwork and achieve better educational outcomes. As a result of both positive changes, Anna eventually developed a positive attitude to school. She was able to change her approach to the dark place, and she gained confidence to improve her wellbeing by following her counsellor's advice. Max's outlook on his schooling changed the moment he realised that he wanted to change schools and he received his parents support to do that. His outlook on school changed immediately from "20% to 100%" as he described it. Although he did not have particular expectations of the new school, he was convinced it would be better than his old school in terms of caring for his wellbeing and thus would lead to him being more motivated to re-engage in learning and do well at school. Viewing his situation as resolvable and anticipating an end to the bullying he had endured, Max was able to approach his schooling journey positively again.

In similar vein to Max, Sabine's approach to her situation changed when she felt empowered to be in control of her schooling experiences and personal problems. It gave her a significant confidence boost. Knowing that she would not have to see the person who was bullying her on a daily basis immediately impacted positively on her wellbeing and enabled her to re-engage in learning at her new school and provided her with the opportunity to make new friends. Sabine's narrative account is pertinent to the understanding that students' needs for competency, relatedness and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000) must be met in order for engagement in learning to be effective. When facing personal problems at school, the notion of "feeling in control" of one's wellbeing and schooling journey appears crucial to student wellbeing and thus crucial to learning.

Kate and Patrick both realised that they had to change their approaches to their respective situations regarding their behaviour at school and their attitude to school in order to initiate a change for the better. For example, Kate came to appreciate her older friends' point of view:

I have a lot of friends that are in Years 11 and 12, so, like, they're really mature and you talk to them and they're, like, "Why are you wasting your time obsessing over that person, when you're clearly not friends with them anymore?" The more time you kind of spend with those older kids, the more you kind of realise that what you were doing was kind of irrelevant to you, like, to your study and all that. (1, 38:45)

Once she had managed to worry less and “obsess” less – for example, following her mother’s advice to “build a bridge and get over it” – Kate realised that she could focus on her schoolwork and gain satisfaction from being engaged in class. With her increased engagement, Kate managed to improve her grades quite quickly and developed a positive attitude to school. School became a more pleasant place to be when she began to experience positive emotions there rather than just worries and concerns. Similar to Kate, Patrick also realised that he needed to change in order for his situation to improve. After discussing his feelings and thoughts with his parents, Patrick decided to proactively work at developing a positive attitude to school and to appear “happier”, which was like Anna’s approach to ‘put on a happy face’: *“I tried to be happier and I tried to be more approachable and as people started approaching me, it made me a lot happier, so I genuinely felt those things instead”* (2, 3:33).

According to Amy’s account, both the conversations with her older siblings and with her mother, as well as her mother’s threat to ban her hobby, led to her being open to the idea of self-reflection and acknowledging that the approach she had taken towards her teachers previously had not been beneficial and therefore needed to change in order for her situation to improve. She decided to make a “fresh start” at school by reducing her concern at having conflicts with teachers and working on her behaviour and attitude towards her teachers. This quote characterises Amy’s new approach particularly well:

You only have school really once, so you don’t want to stuff it up. I think it was more like Mum and Dad as well because they said, “If you don’t put up school very well, then hunting and fishing and everything goes on hold.” So, that was a big factor of it. (2, 5:50)

Consequently, Amy stopped “arguing” with her teachers, which led to improvement in her grades and her wellbeing at school; she had prioritised her schoolwork rather than worrying about having conflicts with her teachers. Approximately six months after Ben’s turning point, when he decided to fully accept himself and his sexuality, a significant socio-political change occurred which was directly relevant to Ben – the 2017 same-sex marriage plebiscite in Australia. Its topicality emboldened him to publicly declare himself as gay. The successful Yes vote in the plebiscite had reduced his fear of coming out and made him “less scared”; it had also

made him less concerned regarding the threat of discrimination towards gay people and what his peers might think of him.

At the back of my mind I probably knew it didn't matter, but you see lots of hatred going around. If I had come out before this plebiscite stuff, I would have been more scared because of all the stuff online about gays – it has just blown up. (2, 20:10)

In contrast to what he had expected, the reactions from friends, peers and teachers were very positive. These reactions enabled him to start feeling good again within the school environment – for example, he again enjoyed being with his friends and not isolating himself. According to Ben, feeling good at school galvanised his re-engagement with learning: *“If you're not happy then it's hard to focus at school. It's probably one of the bigger things. And you can get quite distracted at times, just thinking about what other people might think”* (2, 4:42).

As mentioned previously, Lachlan's positive attitude occurred when he had the opportunity in Year 9 to choose some subjects that were of personal interest to him. In contrast to the other students, he did not modify his perspective on the structure of compulsory subjects in Years 7 and 8; however, in hindsight, he described how beneficial it would have been for him to do so and to not have waited until Year 9 to change his attitude to school. He stated that he had wished there had been someone at school who could have explained and emphasised the benefits of studying the compulsory subjects to him effectively so that he might have developed a positive attitude to school from the beginning of his secondary education in order to have achieved better educational outcomes sooner.

After applying a new perspective to their troubled situations, the eight students had given themselves a sense of their own empowerment to change their predicaments and feel in control of their destiny. With the application of this new perspective and the associated behaviour, the students' started to develop a positive attitude to school. The significant improvement to the students' wellbeing was directly linked to their positive attitude change – they were all “happier” at school and therefore they enjoyed being engaged in learning again. The data from my research study indicates that for student engagement in learning to occur, it is necessary for students to have hope (Snyder, 1994)

and optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1992) when progressing through their schooling journey.

Snyder et al. (2002) state that hope has been found to be an academic predictor and that optimism enhances student wellbeing and academic outcomes (Scheier & Carver, 1992). The constructs of hope and optimism align with positive psychology research in the field of education as well as with the notion of developing lifelong learners (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The students' narrative accounts of the experience of positive attitude change clearly address the three pillars of positive psychology: positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits and positive institutions such as schools. Having identified the resonant threads from the data that led to positive attitude change, it is evident that the threads address the importance of the three pillars, which is in accordance with Peterson (2006), who argues that positive school environments enable the development of positive personal traits in students, and thus enables the schooling experience to be filled with positive emotions.

Thread 5: Self-efficacy around emotional wellbeing. This thread stands in a complementary capacity to Thread 2: Support framework. It acts in this capacity in that it focuses on the individual and their capability to manage negative emotions independently of contextual support services available to the individual. Whereas the second thread focuses on the access to support services and the availability of support from significant others, this thread focuses on the need for the individual to practise self-efficacy to independently manage their negative emotions.

In line with Bronfenbrenner (2005), this thread indicates that the students sought to have an “active and purposeful role” when confronting the challenges in their personal development and were desperate to not be simply “propelled along the life course” (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 509) by negative external forces.

Don't worry, be happy – but how? The students' narrative accounts all clearly addressed the importance of managing negative emotions independently in order to have a sense of greater autonomy in handling their own wellbeing.

It became evident that schools should not solely focus on educating students on the preventative measures concerning student wellbeing and matters such as bullying and respectful relationships but also impart to students the knowledge and skills required to

manage difficult situations themselves, which is encapsulated in the term “self-efficacy around emotional wellbeing”.

The study’s data analysis shows that it is crucial for adolescents to have the knowledge and skills to handle negative emotions in order to stay engaged in learning. Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992) describe the research on how adolescents manage personal problems as “a compelling area of investigation” (p. 1009) as little is known about the coping mechanisms employed by adolescents in comparison to adults. I learnt that negative emotions were a key factor in students’ disengagement from learning and their low feeling of wellbeing at school. When the negative emotions were experienced on a regular basis or too intensely, and/or the students had dwelt on them for a substantial amount of time, it significantly affected the students within and external to the school environment.

It is evident from the narrative accounts that all the students struggled to deal with emotions such as fear, sadness, loneliness or rejection. Their inability to manage negative emotions effectively resulted in the students developing a negative attitude to school; they reached their personal breaking points and disengaged from learning without committing any wrongdoing of their own. The participating students did not break any school rules, did not cause trouble to get attention, or did not wantonly be disrespectful towards teachers or peers; instead, these students faced personal issues that remained unresolved for too long.

In applying the theoretical lens and the Person component of the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model, it became evident that the students displayed so called “developmentally disruptive dispositions”, which Bronfenbrenner describes as a negative acting “force” on the proximal processes, as they “actively interfere with, retard, or even prevent their occurrence” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 810) – for example, “feelings of insecurity, shyness, or tendency to avoid or withdraw from activity” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 810). Disruptive dispositions also include “impulsiveness, explosiveness, distractibility, inability to defer gratification, or ready resort to aggression and violence” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 810), which were not experienced by the students; however, overall, the data indicates, in line with Bronfenbrenner (2005), that the students’ inability to maintain control of emotions

interfered with their engagement in learning and thus allow for positive proximal processes to occur for learning to happen.

The students generally also possessed “developmentally generative dispositions”, such as curiosity and readiness, to defer immediate gratification in order to pursue long-term goals; however, once they had developed a negative attitude to school, these dispositions had been significantly diminished. Further, a person’s ability, experiences, knowledge, and skills are needed for the “effective functioning” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796) of the Process component; however, the students stated that they had the required personal resources to manage their situation.

Pertinent to this thread is Sabine’s experience. Sabine blamed her previous school for not equipping her with the skills to manage the bullying she had been experiencing, which made her feel helpless. Despite the fact that Sabine had reported that she was being bullied on a daily basis and that school staff members had assured her that they were working to “fix it”, the school did not give her “advice on what to do”. In not knowing how to manage the bullying, she concluded, “*I felt like I had no control in any of it*” (1, 22:24). This aspect links to the situation that is likely to be currently prevalent in schools: students are educated on how to prevent problems such as conflicts, bullying, disrespect and discrimination, but not on how to handle problems such as these when they *do* occur and detrimentally affect a student’s wellbeing and engagement in learning. For example, from the students’ narrative accounts, the question emerges of how personal negative emotions and worries that effectively create disengagement due to low wellbeing at school should be managed. How was Sabine expected to be engaged in learning when the bullying continued to occur after she had reported it?

Kate did not know how to deal with feeling lonely and jealous – for example, when her two former best friends made new friends without including her, which caused her stress and intensified her concerns about her friendships. Kate stated that she generally understood that worrying to some extent was a rather normal process of living: “*You can worry, but not feeling as worried about things, not letting things hang over you, stressing about things as much*” (1, 59:31) was a skill she was clearly lacking when the friendship fallout happened. It became clear from her narrative that she wished she had received support to develop the skills to manage her worries and concerns *and* stay concentrated on her schoolwork: “*If you feel happy ... you generally do better*” (1,

59:31), but how does an adolescent student manage to feel better when they perceive they are facing a personal problem such as a friendship fallout on their own?

Patrick did not state as such that he lacked support at school for his situation, but it is clear from his narrative account that he felt negative and did not know how to be more positive in class and at school in general. In hindsight he knew he should have “kicked himself in the butt”, and “reinforced a positive attitude” in himself to increase his engagement in learning, but what are the knowledge and skills that need to be taught in order for students to develop such an approach when the problem is occurring and not just in hindsight? Patrick believed he should have “kept smiling”, despite feeling lonely and sad at school, in order to reduce the negativity he perceived and what others might as well have perceived in his company. He sought to have “that big sense of positivity” but did not know how to get there.

Ben described himself as continuously “dwelling” on things and reported how that caused him distress at school. The question then arises as to what strategies could be taught to students to assist them to “worry less” and “dwell less” on negative aspects and, instead, work towards finding an approach to solve the problem at its origin. Worrying can have a detrimental effect on students’ wellbeing and engagement in learning as was evident in Amy’s experience. She stated how getting overly angry could “*just ruin everything, coz then your whole mindset is just gone and nothing is straight and it’s just not practical*” (2, 24:53). Unfortunately, Amy lacked strategies to keep a positive mindset and not let conflicts with teachers “ruin everything”, and she, too, was not educated on how to stay more focused on her work and manage teacher–student relationship issues more effectively without getting “overly angry”.

Despite students feeling supported, understood and cared for by significant others, such as family or friends, as identified in Sub-thread 2.2, students often lacked the capability to manage negative emotions themselves.

How to tackle “bad days” at school. Through positive attitude change, the eight students increased their engagement in learning and improved their wellbeing at school.

The experience of positive attitude change enabled the students to learn so-called significant “life lessons” and the concept of maintaining a positive attitude to school was found to be important to all students.

During the interviews I inquired directly regarding the students' approach to "bad days" at school by asking them what it was they would tell themselves in order to stay positive towards school and prevent disengagement from learning. To my surprise, all the students responded very confidently and rapidly in detailing to me their strategies for handling "bad days". Their descriptions of how they maintained a positive attitude indicate that they felt empowered to manage difficult situations in future without becoming disengaged from learning or experiencing significant distress at school. For example, Sabine stated, *"I'm pretty proud of knowing, like, when things aren't going as well as they should be and, like, being able to remove myself from, like, not good like situations, and, like, before like things get worse"* (1, 5:05) and emphasised the resulting problem-solving skill she developed from her experience of positive attitude change: *"Now I know that like I can turn anything that's negative, I can then like get myself to turn it into a positive and like, enjoy it"* (1, 22:03).

Anna reported that she was proud to know and be able to apply a strategy for "bad days" at school, such as surrounding herself with "positive" people to help her stay buoyant and distance herself from "negative people" whom she called "leeches" in that they had the ability to take positivity away from you when they were down themselves. She considered her approach to be effective: *"I think I have been pretty successful so far in changing my mind and being in a more positive place"* (1, 20:20). She was also proud that she understood how one has to prioritise one's own wellbeing before schoolwork in order to be prepared for learning and to be able to engage to the best of one's ability. The following quote from her is pertinent to the thread of self-efficacy concerning one's personal wellbeing: *"Think about yourself, a lot, even though, you know, school is important ... you do need to take care of yourself in order to have a positive mindset about school"* (1, 26:56).

In discussing "bad days", the factor of gratitude came into play for Max, who stated the following:

Every time I have a bad day, I tell myself I have it so much better than other people. There are people that don't even have half the stuff that I have, so I just need to be grateful for that" (2, 16:26).

He learned to keep negative experiences in perspective: *"You just gotta go through bad days. There are a lot of worst things going on in the world"* (1, 22:15), and

“You gonna hit bumps and realise, ‘Oh crap, what do I do here?’ It’s up to you to learn, work around stuff” and he goes as far as to conclude *“Best way to build a person is to let them fall and get back up themselves”* (1, 17:00). Max’s narrative account clearly illustrates the life lessons he learnt from the experience of positive attitude change.

Patrick refers to continuously aiming to maintain “a huge sense of positivity” that enables him to stay engaged in learning and stay well on “bad days”. Ben advised to “not stress about things”, as did Lachlan, and to always have something at school that *“can make you stay positive throughout the year”* (1, 53:08), referring to his involvement in the school theatre.

Kate was also confident that she could manage “bad days” after her positive attitude change by reducing and controlling her worries. She now understood that at school *“you can have really good days or bad days, and it always goes back to the medium”* (2, 31:58) and approached her day-to-day concerns more pragmatically so as to not let them impact on her schoolwork and her wellbeing. In a similar vein, Amy approached her school days with the notion of *“if it’s a bad day you have to keep going and push through it”* (1, 46:06), believing that *“with time it can get better”* (1, 46:06). She learnt to be more optimistic about her schooling journey, explaining that *“if you push through it, it can be better”* (1, 50:49) and confidently stated that *“if you have a positive attitude, you gonna be more happy ... so have a positive attitude to [school]”* (1, 50:49).

Student empowerment is crucial to student wellbeing. Considering the mechanisms of personal agency, “none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). Sabine’s experience best represents this point when she stated, *“I felt like I had no control in any of it”* (1, 22:24), referring to how the school dealt with the bullying that she reported. It is clear that Sabine wanted to have some agency, describing how the school could have given her *“advice on what to do, rather than just saying, ‘Oh, we’ll go and fix it.’ That kind of thing”* (2, 12:54).

The importance of self-efficacy in students is well expressed by the following quote from Bandura (1993):

People's beliefs in their efficacy influence the types of anticipatory scenarios they construct and rehearse. Those who have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides and supports for performance. Those who doubt their efficacy visualize failure scenarios and dwell on the many things that can go wrong. It is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt. (p. 118)

Every individual's capability consists of cognitive, social, motivational and behavioural skills that need to be "effectively orchestrated to serve numerous purposes" (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). As argued by Bandura (1993), and in line with the findings of this resonant thread of self-efficacy around wellbeing, the ability to manage negative emotions:

...can impair the quality of thinking and action. There is a marked difference between possessing knowledge and skills and being able to use them well under taxing conditions. Personal accomplishments require not only skills but self-beliefs of efficacy to use them well. (p. 118)

It is evident from the narrative accounts that the students lacked self-efficacy in being able to handle their emotional wellbeing. It was also apparent that the students only gained an understanding of how best to approach personal problems in hindsight after they had experienced positive attitude change. This thread leads to the conclusion that students will benefit from being educated on self-efficacy in order to be able to handle their negative emotions. "It requires a strong sense of efficacy to remain task oriented in the face of pressing situational demands and failures that have social repercussions" (Bandura, 1993, p. 120).

Being proud of positive attitude change to school. As stated in the literature review, "it's good to feel good" (Fredrickson, 2003, p. 330) for a range of reasons – for example, to enable engagement in learning, as stated by Ben: "*If you're not happy, then it's hard to focus at school*" (2, 4:42). The experience of positive attitude change seems to have taught the students several life lessons, all of which encompass skills and knowledge to manage negative emotions and difficult situations in varying degrees.

The narrative accounts of seven of the eight students speak clearly to the notion of feeling proud of the positive attitude change. The notion of pride is an element that emerged from the narrative accounts, with students describing positive attitude change as a personal achievement.

After her positive attitude change, Anna found herself in a “happier place”, and she credited her own actions with that success. She was proud of “*finally taking that step to see someone*” (2, 12:10) and arranging the appointment with the counsellor. She felt empowered because she had done “something” in an attempt to improve her situation: “*I think I am mostly proud that I actually put the time in to getting help coz it’s harder than you think to go and actually take the step to get help*” (2, 15:15).

Max was proud of his decision to change schools based on his desire to be true to himself: “*I’m really proud of myself that I was able to just be myself*” (1, 10:10) and “*I know that’s not exactly an achievement, but I am proud of myself ... making that change to just being myself in the real world*” (1, 9:43), which had been enabled through his change of schools. Despite Max stating, “*I don’t really take much credit for it because it wasn’t really me who, like, enforced the positive change on myself. It was the school that gave me a new environment*” (2, 2:06), he admitted to being “definitely proud” of initiating the change to transfer to another school after eventually being honest to himself of ‘not being okay’ at his previous school. He stated that he believed “*it’s definitely a big deal to find some sort of happiness at school*” (1, 25:00), and he was proud of the actions he took towards developing a positive attitude change in order to find happiness at a new school.

Patrick clearly articulated that he was proud of his positive attitude change and viewed it to be an achievement:

Coz it’s quite a struggle to have that big of an attitude change, it is a big struggle and it is a lot of hard work and you kind of have to dedicate yourself to trying to ... resolve the problem. (1, 32:37)

In similar vein to Patrick and Max, Ben also expressly stated that he was proud of his positive attitude change and elaborated that “*if I wasn’t proud, then I probably would still be like I was*” (2, 30:04), referring to himself as not “accepting” himself. Lachlan’s description of his experience of positive attitude change illustrates how he was content with himself after having reflected on his experiences and learnt from them. He stated that he was proud of “*just having the ability to change my mindset and attitude towards the school, and especially if I have a negative attitude towards school, I wouldn’t be doing so well. I wouldn’t be putting the effort*” (2, 26:36).

Kate's and Amy's experiences of positive attitude change differed from the other students in that both did not associate pride with the change, or view it as an achievement. Kate contrasted it with a certificate or an official award and explained how such an achievement was highly regarded at school but not so an attitude change. In her opinion, teachers would not even acknowledge positive attitude change because they would not have noticed it. She stated that *"they don't notice you hated school at the start of the year, and then by the end, they are your favourite teacher – they aren't gonna notice that"* (2, 33:32). Her perspective clearly indicates that there is the potential for improvement in student–teacher relationships and modifying the definition of what it is to be a successful student. Amy did not view her positive attitude change as a personal achievement, either, explaining that *"there are kids who went through a lot worse"* (1, 35:28) in secondary school.

In quite the opposite way to the other students, Amy considered her positive attitude change to be a "lucky thing" to happen to her, indicating that she was not taking any credit for it given her view that her conflicts with teachers were not significant when compared to other students' problems that keep them from engaging in learning. Despite not feeling particularly proud of their positive attitude change, Kate and Amy appeared to be very satisfied with their strategies to maintain a positive attitude to school.

Viewing Positive Attitude Change to School through the Theoretical Lens

In this section I discuss the theoretical lens based on the PPCT model that was applied to the research study to compare and contrast the ways and the extent to which the model helps explain the experience of positive attitude change to school, the students' perceptions of its impact on them and the influencing factors they describe. The discussion is structured around the four components of the model – Process, Person, Context and Time – which were outlined in Chapter 3.

As is evident from the narrative accounts, the experience of positive attitude change had been lived out by the participating students predominantly in the microsystem of the school environment. The forms of interactions between the individual students and the relevant microsystems were identified as proximal processes (Process), that had been influenced by the students' own characteristics (Person), the given

circumstances (Context) and the time required for positive attitude change to be lived out (Time).

Examining the experience of positive attitude change through the theoretical lens of the PPCT model enabled me to identify the role these four components played in the experience. Within the context of positive attitude change, two types of microsystem level factors were identified as particularly relevant: interactions with trusted others outside the school environment, which predominantly occurred in the form of conversations regarding personal problems and interactions (or lack thereof) with teachers or staff members at school. For all the eight students, the positive attitude change had been influenced predominantly by processes in their immediate environment – the microsystem – and/or changes in their personal characteristics as a result of self-reflection. Ben’s experience, however, shed light on a quite interesting and relevant aspect in the macrosystem of his ecological context – the same-sex marriage plebiscite and its impact on the media’s portrayal of the gay community’s standing in the Australian society.

It was the case for all students, except Lachlan, that the Time component was significant for positive attitude change in that the students needed to have reached their personal breaking points before they initiated some major action in their efforts to improve their personally troubling situations. The students also needed time for their wellbeing to improve in order for their attitude to school to transform to a positive one. Positive attitude change did not occur immediately, although Max and Sabine appeared to have experienced it quite soon once the decision had been made to change schools. Representative of the other students’ experiences regarding the Time component in relation to positive attitude change was Anna’s quote: *“it doesn’t happen overnight, sadly. I wish it did, but it takes time to work on it”* (1, 33:46).

In examining the experience of positive attitude change, the factors that influenced the positive change in the students refer to processes of talking openly about the personal problem and the troubling situation to a trusted other (Process), undertaking self-reflection and independent problem-solving approaches (Person) and/or altering school environments (Max and Sabine), or choosing particular subjects (Lachlan; Context). In addressing the research aim of this study, which was to gain an understanding of the experience of positive attitude change in order to enable teachers

and educators to support disengaged students who had a negative attitude to school, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological framework explains that one would not need to deviate too far from the individual and their immediate environment to understand, in this case, the eight participating students' development of a negative attitude to school and their experience of positive attitude change.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter I have examined the eight students' narrative accounts of positive attitude change in terms of resonant threads. I explored the threads of "Personal problems", "Support framework", "Reaction to hitting rock bottom", "Application of changed perspective" and "Self-efficacy around emotional wellbeing" as being pertinent to understanding the students' experiences of positive attitude change to school. The identified threads have been discussed in light of the reviewed literature and the theoretical lens.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8, I provide a summary of the research and findings and address the implications for practice and future research directions that have been revealed by my research.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Implications

In Chapter 7, I analysed and discussed the phenomenon that was under study, which was the experience of positive attitude change to school in adolescent students. I identified five resonant threads from the narrative accounts of positive attitude change and examined the lived experiences in relation to the relevant literature.

In this chapter, I provide the conclusions that have been drawn from my examination of the experience of positive attitude change, and I outline the original contribution to knowledge from my research study. I further address the resulting implications for practice and directions for future research.

The Three Major Outcomes

Your happiness and how you feel comes over what you learn and all that type of stuff. In order to have a happy future you have to be happy, and if you're not enjoying school, it doesn't really get you anywhere. (1, 41:10, Ben)

Adolescent students' attitudes to school and learning matter, and the stakes are high. This research study has made it clear that negative attitudes to school are associated with negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, disappointment and loneliness, which lead to low wellbeing at school that cannot be ignored. Perceived negativity at school is linked to low engagement and or complete disengagement from learning to the point where a student is absent from school, having fallen to the emotional and academic rock bottom due to their limited ability to manage negative emotions effectively and their inexperience to constructively approach personal problems.

In addressing the aim of this research, which was to gain an understanding of positive attitude change in order to help students who are displaying a negative attitude to school and are disengaged from learning, it became evident that emotional support within the school environment plays a significant role in the development of positive attitudes to school. Positive attitude change is further significantly associated with the successful resolution of personal problems and the provision of different perspectives on the matter

in hand. In addition, it is closely linked to students' self-efficacy in tending to their emotional wellbeing.

Positive attitude change to school is an important multidimensional construct and this study has made a major, substantive contribution to knowledge in that field. Positive attitudes to school are crucial in addressing adolescent students' disengagement and the students' narratives collected for this research study have strongly highlighted the multidimensional aspects and the complexity of this construct.

Further, this study made a methodological contribution by aligning the dimensions of the social constructionist epistemology with the theoretical lens, using Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (2005), and the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This alignment was substantial to the research aim of examining how the experience of positive attitude change to school is lived out by adolescent students.

The students' narrative accounts of positive attitude change indicate that the secondary school system is failing some of its students relating to its duty of care and commitment to enabling students to actualise themselves academically. The narratives have also revealed that the assumption cannot be made that a negative attitude to school equates necessarily with a negative attitude towards learning. The students involved in the study wanted to learn and it was important to them to do well at school, but their particular negative emotions that were associated with school severely hindered their engagement in learning and academic success at school and proved to be detrimental to their wellbeing. The students wanted to focus on their schoolwork, but in their negative emotional state they were unable to. One could surmise that the negativity at school "blocked" their engagement. However, once the students had experienced their positive attitude change to school, their learning journey became affirmative again, driven by their intrinsic motivation to achieve salutary educational outcomes. Up to that point, the students had proved to be extraordinarily resilient in managing their daily struggles within the school environment by not giving up on themselves as learners, and that needs to be acknowledged.

Three major conclusions can be drawn from this research. First, in order to address student disengagement, schools need to acknowledge the severity of the personal problems that adolescent students perceive they have and the associated impact it has on

their engagement in learning. Second, adequate support frameworks need to be established at school to address adolescent learners' needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Third, students need to be educated on self-efficacy in order to manage their emotional wellbeing. In the following sections, I elaborate on these three conclusions.

How can students' personal problems be managed at school? The circumstances that led the students participating in the study to develop a negative attitude to school was the occurrence of a personal problem that remained unresolved for a significant period of time. In the previous chapter, I argued the point that the impact of personal problems, as trivial as they may appear at times to the adult observer, should not be underestimated. The consequences of unresolved personal problems can be detrimental to students' educational outcomes and their wellbeing within and external to the school environment.

The notion of storm and stress (Hall, 1904), due to biological and hormonal changes, did not align with the participating students' experiences. Rather, the students experienced stress and turmoil in the form of strong feelings, confusion, frustration and a sense of hopelessness due to their lack of a skill set to manage their negative emotions within the secondary school setting. The eight students in this study who identified as ambitious, who wanted to do well at school, and who never portrayed signs of disrespect towards the institution or irrelevance towards the teaching and learning approach thereof, struggled to maintain their initially positive attitude to school due to the perceived complexity of their respective personal problems. If these so-called "good students" could not manage to overcome their personal problems whilst maintaining their efforts with regard to their schoolwork, then what kind of student *could*, if any?

My research is consistent with other research that has examined the affective component of student engagement, such as Lawson and Lawson (2013) and M. Wang and Holcombe (2010), who argue that emotional engagement is crucial for achieving positive educational outcomes because students' emotions affect their ability to focus on their schoolwork and thus be engaged in learning.

What does good support look like? In the introduction to this thesis, I referred to the idea of a “helping hand” being required to help disengaged students who had developed a negative attitude to school; however, the narrative accounts collected for this study indicate that the students did not experience any adequate “helping hands” at school when confronted with the challenging circumstances that had resulted from their personal problems. Instead, the students were disappointed with their respective school systems and felt let down by them. In order to prevent a downward spiral of negativity in students at school, emotional supports need to be proactively offered. Further research is needed to establish best practice for school support services for adolescent students, which would include identifying the appropriate teachers’ roles and responsibilities in providing those services.

The conclusions resulting from my findings are in line with the conclusions of the Victorian Government’s report into the effectiveness of student wellbeing programs and services (Victorian Auditor General’s Office [VAGO], 2010). Evidently, student wellbeing is lacking an adequate and “up-to-date” policy framework to comprehensively address adolescent students’ developmental and emotional needs, and there is a gap that needs to be addressed regarding “inadequate measurement of the effectiveness of student wellbeing programs and services” (VAGO, 2010, p. vii). In order to enhance emotional engagement, nurture positive attitudes to school and improve adolescent students’ learning, further research is needed to establish what help and support would be most suitable within the school environment, when it would be needed, and how it would be accessed and by whom. Examining current policy and practice, Powell and Graham (2017) found that “approaches to supporting student wellbeing are constrained by an ad hoc policy environment characterised by competing discourses and a consequential lack of clarity regarding how wellbeing is understood and best facilitated within the context of schools” (p. 213). This emphasises further the need for more research on student wellbeing to inform policy development.

How can students help themselves? A young person’s ecological environment is particularly complex due to the developmental aspects of adolescence and the structures of secondary school settings.

There is a potential misfit between students’ needs and the schooling framework. Therefore, self-efficacy in relation to emotional wellbeing is critically important to target

adolescent disengagement from learning. The students who participated in this study acknowledged themselves that they lacked the skills to manage their negative emotions effectively and solve their personal matters efficiently enough to limit the potentially detrimental impact of such matters on their learning and wellbeing. The students reported they did not feel in control of what was happening.

If simplistic deficit views of adolescents are to be challenged and eclipsed by a serious focus on identifying and meeting adolescents' needs to flourish socially and academically, then education on self-efficacy in order to nurture emotional wellbeing is essential. Students need to feel empowered to overcome their personal challenges. Personal problems at secondary school can make or break "good students"; left unresolved they can significantly hinder the development of lifelong learners through the development of negative attitudes to school. Students need to be educated, trained and scaffolded in learning how to solve problems in their personal lives, and to be their own best "helping hand", in case no other "hand" is offered.

Positive Attitude Change to School Is the Goal

The experience of positive attitude change to school is a transformative event that has a significant impact on student engagement and wellbeing. What enabled positive attitude change to occur in the students involved in this study was the presentation of new perspectives on their respective personal problems by trusted significant others. The students needed to seek out help in order to gain a new perspective. Their narratives did not reveal whether the attitude change had resulted from persuasion, based on receiving a significant message about school (Bohner & Dickel, 2011), or cognitive dissonance, referring to the students holding incompatible beliefs regarding school (Festinger, 1957). Instead, the narratives highlighted the complexity of attitudes, the process of attitude change and the associated influencing factors.

Whilst teachers and educators may not be capable of preventing students from hitting rock bottom in regard to their wellbeing and engagement levels, it may be possible to limit the severity of the breaking point through timely identification of students who had developed negative attitudes to school and implement suitable interventions. Such interventions would need to focus on acknowledging the perceived severity of the personal problem, determine the student's skill set to address the problem,

encourage their sense of empowerment – the feeling of being in control of the situation and the problem-solving process – and provide a different perspective on the matter. Interestingly, Max stated from his experience that the “*best way to build a person is to let them fall and get back up themselves*” (1, 17:00); however, considering the duty of care teachers have towards their students, “letting them fall” too heavily could be viewed neglectful, whereby a calculated experience of “falling” may be to the greater benefit of the student’s personal development. Either way, the factor of “getting back up by oneself” requires a supportive environment, and the assumption then arises that the lower the bottom, the longer the recovery, and thus a timely intervention is crucial to reduce disengagement from learning and negativity towards school.

Students facing personal problems need to have access to someone who is approachable and equipped to give appropriate advice to them in their times of trouble. It was beyond the scope of my research study to identify what the shape and format of that appropriate advice and training should be; however, it is clear from the students’ narrative accounts that the provision of a new perspective on their problems significantly influenced their wellbeing by enabling objectivism and optimism to come to the fore. Students need to have someone to reason with when deciding what action to take to improve their circumstances at school. This is not to say that schools need to have all the answers to solve the personal problems of their adolescent students; however, the findings imply that schools should be active enablers of positive attitude change. In considering the current educational reforms, the focus appears to continuously be on improving aspects such as teaching instruction in order to increase student engagement in learning. The research findings from this study, however, coherently suggest that student wellbeing needs to be the focus when approaches are being developed that target disengagement in adolescent students.

In addition, the insights gained from the students’ lived experience of positive attitude change in this study may prove useful for the examination and evaluation of student wellbeing programs and initiatives that address youth mental health, bullying, friendship issues, and student–teacher relationships in order to enhance the development of resilience and problem-solving skills in adolescent students. Addressing such programs and initiatives was beyond the scope of my research study, but the study does suggest future research should be undertaken to consider the ways in which schools can educate and counsel students on how to cope with the stress that may result from any

personal problems they might be experiencing within and external to the school environment. My research findings emphasise the seriousness and impact of so-called teenage issues and worries, and has highlighted the consequences of such issues remaining unresolved or not being accommodated for.

This research has contributed to re-shaping the thinking regarding adolescent students' engagement in learning and the relevance of positive attitudes to school. The study concludes that more needs to be done to address student wellbeing at school in order to enhance their engagement in learning. This examination of the experience of positive attitude change is critical to the future understanding of student engagement processes, student wellbeing and positive social and academic outcomes for adolescent students. The findings from this study regarding positive attitude change have important implications for policy and practice that target student disengagement in secondary schools. This was a small-scale study that had eight participants. For future research a larger-scale study is required to determine whether, and to what extent, this research resonates in other contexts.

The study found that the experience of positive attitude change to school is multidimensional given that there are internal and external factors that affect such a change. The conclusion, therefore, is that the school environment in which an adolescent student is dealing with personal problems, and the student's own knowledge and skills to manage such personal problems, effectively has a significant impact on the student's engagement levels.

The relevance of these findings to policy and practice is that secondary schools need to ensure that emotional engagement is a central consideration of initiatives to address student disengagement. A positive attitude to school is a crucial factor for students to be emotionally engaged and for improvement to occur in student wellbeing. Schools need to ensure that students feel cared for and supported when they are confronting personal problems as well as proactively offering support instead of waiting for students to reach out for help. The "helping hand" should be mandatory, not an option, as being offered it in a transparent and timely manner can have a significant positive impact on students' academic outcomes. It can further limit the "downward spiral" (Fredrickson & Kurtz, 2011, p. 36) in student wellbeing.

As the prevalent thinking concerning teaching and learning has become student centred, this research has demonstrated that the school framework for emotional engagement needs to follow suit and genuinely become student centred as well. As mentioned earlier in the quote by Larson (2002), and in alignment with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (2005), "while societies affect adolescents, adolescents also affect societies ..." (p. 26), and today's adolescent students will become a reflection of our efforts to support them in difficult times during their schooling journey in the way they will support others and show understanding for the wellbeing of others around them. It is imperative, therefore, that policies are in place that reflect a thorough understanding of students' needs for support in relation to their emotional engagement and facilitate the offering of a helping hand by teachers and others within the school environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethics Approval and Final Report from Federation University Australia

Approval

Human Research Ethics Committee



Principal Researcher:	Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg
Other/Student Researcher/s:	Miss Sylwia Wojtaszek
School/Section:	Faculty of Education and Arts
Project Number:	A16-070
Project Title:	Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School.
For the period:	02/06/2016 to 20/03/2018

Quote the Project No: A16-070 in all correspondence regarding this application.

Please note: Ethics Approval is contingent upon the submission of Annual Progress reports and a Final report upon completion of the project. It is the responsibility of researchers to make a note of the following dates and submit these reports in a timely manner, as reminders may not be sent out. Failure to submit reports will result in your ethics approval lapsing

REPORTS TO HREC:

An Annual report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
2 June 2017

A Final report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
20 April 2018

These report forms can be found at:

<http://federation.edu.au/research-and-innovation/research-support/ethics/human-ethics/human-ethics3>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fiona Koop".

Fiona Koop
Ethics Officer
2 June 2016

Please see attached 'Conditions of Approval'.

Office Use Only				
RM	Sig Dates	Shared Drv:	Matrix	Notes:

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

1. The project must be conducted in accordance with the approved application, including any conditions and amendments that have been approved. You must comply with all of the conditions imposed by the HREC, and any subsequent conditions that the HREC may require.
2. You must report immediately anything which might affect ethical acceptance of your project, including:
 - Adverse effects on participants;
 - Significant unforeseen events;
 - Other matters that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
3. Where approval has been given subject to the submission of copies of documents such as letters of support or approvals from third parties, these must be provided to the Ethics Office before the research may commence at each relevant location.
4. Proposed changes or amendments to the research must be applied for, using a '**Request for Amendments**' form, and approved by the HREC before these may be implemented.
5. If an extension is required beyond the approved end date of the project, a '**Request for Extension**' should be submitted, allowing sufficient time for its consideration by the committee. Extensions cannot be granted retrospectively.
6. If changes are to be made to the project's personnel, a '**Changes to Personnel**' form should be submitted for approval.
7. An '**Annual Report**' must be provided by the due date specified each year for the project to have continuing approval.
8. A '**Final Report**' must be provided at the conclusion of the project.
9. If, for any reason, the project does not proceed or is discontinued, you must advise the committee in writing, using a '**Final Report**' form.
10. You must advise the HREC immediately, in writing, if any complaint is made about the conduct of the project.
11. You must notify the Ethics Office of any changes in contact details including address, phone number and email address.
12. The HREC may conduct random audits and / or require additional reports concerning the research project.

Failure to comply with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* and with the conditions of approval will result in suspension or withdrawal of approval.

Annual/Final Project Report

Human Research Ethics Committee

Please indicate the type of report	Annual Report (Omit 3b & 5b) X Final Report
Project No:	A16-070
Project Name:	Positive Attitude Change to School – Narrative Inquiry into Adolescent Students’ Lived Experiences
Principal Researcher:	Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg
Other Researchers:	Ms Sylwia Wojtaszek
Date of Original Approval:	2017
School / Section:	School of Education
Phone:	53279716
Email:	r.brandenburg@federation.edu.au

Please note: For HDR candidates, this Ethics annual report is a separate requirement, in addition to your HDR Candidature annual report, which is submitted mid-year to research.degrees@federation.edu.au.

1) Please indicate the current status of the project:				
1a) Yet to start				<input type="checkbox"/>
1b) Continuing				<input type="checkbox"/>
1c) Data collection completed				x
1d) Abandoned / Withdrawn:				<input type="checkbox"/>
1e) If the approval was subject to certain conditions, have these conditions been met? (If not, please give details in the comments box below)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		x <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Comments:				
1f) Data Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Not yet commenced	<input type="checkbox"/> Proceeding	X Complete	<input type="checkbox"/> None
1g) Have ethical problems been encountered in any of the following areas: Study Design	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		x <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Annual/Final Project Report

Human Research Ethics Committee

Recruitment of Subjects	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Finance	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Facilities, Equipment	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
(If yes, please give details in the comments box below)		
Comments: N/A		

2a) Have amendments been made to the originally approved project?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
2b) If yes, was HREC approval granted for these changes?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Provide detail: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes Application for Amendment to an Existing Project <input type="checkbox"/> Yes Change of Personnel <input type="checkbox"/> Yes Extension Request
<input type="checkbox"/> No	If you have made changes, but not had HREC approval, provide detail as to why this has not yet occurred:
2c) Do you need to submit any amendments now?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes Application for Amendment to an Existing Project <input type="checkbox"/> Yes Change of Personnel <input type="checkbox"/> Yes Extension Request * NB: If 'Yes', download & submit the appropriate request to the HREC for approval: Please note: Extensions will not be granted retrospectively. Apply well prior to the project end date, to ensure continuity of HRE approval.

3a) Please indicate where you are storing the data collected during the course of this project: (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.2.2, 2.5 – 2.7)
The data is kept in locked filing cabinets in the School of Education, and access to computer files is available per password only for PR and Ms Wojtaszek.
3b) Final Reports: Advise when & how stored data will be destroyed (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.1.1)
As per the HREC Approval, the data will be not be disposed of after 5 years as it may be accessed for research studies that link to this data. It is the Principal researcher's responsibility to securely manage this data that will be disposed of by the Principal Researcher. The PR will inform the HREC when this data has been disposed of.

Annual/Final Project Report

Human Research Ethics Committee

4) Have there been any events that might have had an adverse effect on the research participants OR unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project?

x No

Yes * **NB: If 'yes', please provide details in the comments box below:**

Comments: N/A

5a) Please provide a short summary of results of the project so far (no attachments please):

The quantitative analysis took place with one part of the collected data and was presented at the university's HDR conference in 2018 (oral presentation and poster presentation). In addition, a qualitative analysis of the second part of the collected data took place and was presented to the school where the research was conducted at. Five themes have been identified from eight interviews with students who experienced a positive attitude change to school. The themes were analysed and discussed in light of relevant literature predominantly in the field of student engagement.

5b) Final Reports: Provide details about how the aims of the project, as stated in the application for approval, were achieved (or not achieved). (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research 4.4.1)

The research aim was to examine how the experience of positive attitude change to school is lived out by adolescent students. Narrative inquiry methodology has been applied in order to provide a detailed description of students' lived experiences and generate knowledge to fill the existing gap of how such an experience manifests itself. Eight student narratives displayed in the thesis provide a detailed insight into the experience under study.

6) Publications: Provide details of research dissemination outcomes for the previous year resulting from this project: eg: Community seminars; Conference attendance; Government reports and/or research publications

Please see 5a)



7) The HREC welcomes any feedback on:

- Difficulties experienced with carrying out the research project; or
- Appropriate suggestions which might lead to improvements in ethical clearance and monitoring of research.

Annual/Final Project Report

Human Research Ethics Committee



8) Signatures			
Principal Researcher:		Date:	13/05/2019
	Print name: Robyn Brandenburg		
Other/Student Researchers:		Date:	13/05/2019
 Print name: Sylwia Wojtaszek		
 Print name:	Date:	

Submit to the Ethics Officer, Mt Helen campus, by the due date:
research.ethics@federation.edu.au



2016_003099

Miss Sylwia Wojtaszek
Faculty of Education and Arts
Federation University Australia
Office E101, Building E, Mt Helen Campus
BALLARAT 3353

Dear Miss Wojtaszek

Thank you for your application of 2 June 2016 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools titled *Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.
2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.
5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education Training in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.

I wish you well with your research. Should you have further questions on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Insights and Evidence Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Joyce Cleary
Director
Insights and Evidence

08/08/2016

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

PROJECT TITLE:	Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School
PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:	Sylwia Wojtaszek, PhD Student
OTHER/STUDENT RESEARCHERS:	Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg, Principal Supervisor

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD) STUDY

Your child has been invited to participate in a PhD study by Sylwia Wojtaszek, from Federation University (supervised by Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg), relating to examining success criteria for positive attitude change towards school and strategies to maintain a positive attitude.

Please read this Plain Language Statement carefully. If you have any questions about the project, please contact the project leader (contact details available at the end of this form).

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is about adolescent students' attitude towards school. Attitude can be described as "liking or disliking" something, and this study plans to examine your child's attitude to school, learning, and education in general. We all might know someone from high school, who used to have a really negative attitude to school, disliked everything about school, and then managed to change his or her attitude and consequently did better at school, and reached personal goals. The aim of this study is to better understand those students, who experienced a positive attitude change towards school. I want to find out what makes or influences students to change their attitude. In addition, I am interested in learning how students manage to stay positive towards school. The knowledge gained from this research will be used to develop resources and advice to help teachers, parents and your child's peers to guide and support students towards gaining and maintaining a positive attitude towards school.

Your child as a Year 10 student is the focus for this research, as they are in the final year of compulsory schooling, and it is during this time that they are expected to make decisions regarding their future. I believe attitude to school plays an important role in your child's success as a learner and that is why I want to learn more about your child's approach to school work and all that comes with it.

WHAT AM I ASKING OF YOUR CHILD?

Usually, studies such as this one use questionnaires only, but I would like to do interviews as well and ask students to record their thoughts as an audio diary. This is a creative way to listen to students' experiences and understand what is important to them. This study has four parts:

- 1) I plan to give all participating Year 10 students an online questionnaire about their attitude to school.
- 2) 10 to 14 students will then be chosen for the second part of the study. Those students will be invited to an interview with me to talk about their thoughts, experiences, and feelings in regard to school.
- 3) I also want to ask those 10 to 14 students to create audio diary entries fortnightly, e.g. 6 entries within a school term, to better understand how those students manage to keep a positive attitude.
- 4) After the audio diaries have been done, and I analysed them, I will invite those 10 to 14 students once again to a second interview to talk about my findings of the study, and learn more from the students about their positive attitude change. This is the last step of the study.

Plain Language Information Statement

The questionnaire will take approx. 10-15 minutes to complete and will be done online in class. The first interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes, and take place on school grounds during or after class. The information your child provides in the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, which means what your child says will be written up and your child will get a chance to check the transcript. The audio diary entries can be created from home and should be 3-5 minutes long, and your child will be asked to upload them to a secure internet platform. I will arrange recording devices for the participating students. The second interview will take approx. 20-30 minutes and take place on school grounds during or after class.

Participation in any research project is voluntary. If your child does not wish to take part, the child is not obliged to, and the refusal requires no explanation. The decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect the child's academic results or experience at school in any way. The child is entitled to withdraw his/her consent and discontinue participation at any time until data is processed without prejudice. The participation in this study does not include reimbursement.

If your child would like to participate in this study and you agree to the participation, please respond by signing the attached parent/ guardian consent form, and forward it to your child to sign the student part. The signed consent form needs to be brought back to school by your child for Monday 2016.

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS STUDY

There are minimal risks anticipated from participating in this study. Although the risk to participants is minimal, there is always the possibility that participating in the study might give rise to negative feelings or discomfort. If your child requires counselling services, please contact the school counselling service on (03) or visit them in room ... building If your child requires afterhours counselling services, please contact Kidsline on 1800 55 1800 and or Lifeline on 131 114.

PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Due to the nature of the questionnaire identifying potential participants for the interviews and audio diaries depending on their answers, the questionnaire needs to be identifiable; however, all data from the interviews and the audio diaries will be de-identified – this means your child will be assigned a code in place of his/her name. This ensures that whatever your child tells me will be reported anonymously. Data from this project will be stored on password protected computers and locked filing cabinets in the secure offices at Federation University. In line with university protocol, data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years and will be destroyed following strict university shredding and document destruction guidelines. Subject to legal requirements, any information obtained in connection with this project that could identify your child will remain confidential. Only the principal supervisor and I will have access to the data. In relation to the sharing of information publicly (for example in publications or at conferences), all collected data will be confidential and no identifying information will be used in any publication arising from the research (this may include the final report, journal articles, and conference presentations). Due to the small sample size for the second part of the study following the questionnaire, there may be implications for privacy; however, results be reported as success criteria for a positive attitude change, and strategies to maintain a positive attitude, not as individual experiences which may affect the anonymity of participants.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

This study follows the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to participate in human research studies. The ethics aspects of this research study have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Federation University.

Plain Language Information Statement

If you have any questions, or you would like further information regarding the project titled ***Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School***, please contact the Principal Researcher Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg of the School of the School of Education and Arts:

PH: +61 3 5327 9716

EMAIL: r.brandenburg@federation.edu.au

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the Federation University Ethics Officers, Research Services, Federation University Australia,

P O Box 663 Mt Helen Vic 3353 or Northways Rd, Churchill Vic 3842.

Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, (03) 5122 6446

Email: research.ethics@federation.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D

Plain Language Information Statement

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND ARTS

PROJECT TITLE:	Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School
PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:	Sylwia Wojtaszek, PhD Student
OTHER/STUDENT RESEARCHERS:	Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg, Principal Supervisor

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study in the field of Education. I am a PhD student from Federation University (supervised by Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg), and I am very interested in adolescent students' attitudes towards school.

Please read this Plain Language Statement carefully. If you have any questions about the project, please contact the project leader (contact details available at the end of this form).

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ALL ABOUT?

This study is about adolescent students' attitude towards school. Attitude can be described as "liking or disliking" something, and this study plans to examine your attitude to school, learning, and education in general. We all might know someone from high school, who used to have a really negative attitude to school, disliked everything about school, and then managed to change his or her attitude and consequently did better at school, and reached personal goals. The aim of this study is to better understand those students, who experienced a positive attitude change towards school. I want to find out what makes or influences students to change their attitude. In addition, I am interested in learning how students manage to stay positive towards school. The knowledge gained from this research will be used to develop resources and advice to help teachers, parents and your peers to guide and support students towards gaining and maintaining a positive attitude towards school.

You as a Year 10 student are the focus for this study, as you are in your final year of compulsory schooling, and it is an important time for you to think about your future. I believe your attitude to school plays a big role in your success as a learner and that is why I want to learn more about how you approach your school, the school work and all that comes with it.

WHAT AM I ASKING OF YOU?

Usually, studies such as this one use questionnaires only, but I would like to do interviews as well and ask students to record their thoughts as an audio diary. This is a creative way to listen to students' experiences and understand what is important to them. This study has four parts:

- 1) I plan to give all participating Year 10 students an online questionnaire about their attitude to school.
- 2) 10 to 14 students will then be chosen for the second part of the study. Those students will be invited to an interview with me to talk about their thoughts, experiences, and feelings in regard to school.
- 3) I also want to ask those 10 to 14 students to create audio diary entries fortnightly, e.g. 6 entries within a school term, to better understand how those students manage to keep a positive attitude.
- 4) After the audio diaries have been done, and I have analysed them, I will invite those 10 to 14 students once again to a second interview to talk about my findings of the study, and learn more from the students about their positive attitude change. This is the last step of the study.

Plain Language Information Statement

The questionnaire will take approx. 10-15 minutes to complete and will be done online in class. The first interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes, and take place on school grounds during or after class. The information you provide in the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, which means what you say will be written up and you will get a chance to check the transcript. The audio diary entries can be created from home and should be 3-5 minutes long, and you will be asked to upload them to a secure internet platform. I will arrange recording devices for the participating students. The second interview will take approx. 20-30 minutes and take place on school grounds during or after class.

Your participation in any research study such as this one is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to, and you do not need to explain why. Your decision will not affect your school results or your experience at your school in any way. You can remove your agreement and stop participation at any time until the results are finalised. At any time you are free to choose not to answer questions. Some questions may seem personal and private; however, whatever you share with me will be very valuable to this study and will help me understand your attitude to school a better way. All contact with you will be through your school email address. The participation in this study does not include reimbursement.

If you would like to participate in this study, please sign the student consent form, and ask your parents or guardians to sign the parent consent part and give them the Plain Language Statement for Parents/Guardians to learn about the study. Please bring the signed consent form back to school with you for Monday 2016. Your teacher will collect it from you.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS CONNECTED WITH THIS STUDY?

There are minimal risks expected from participating in this study. Although the risk to participants is minimal, there is always the possibility that you experience negative feelings when talking about your approach to school. If you need someone to talk to, e.g. counselling service or follow-up support, please contact the school counselling service on (03) or visit them in room ... building If you need afterhours support, please contact Kidsline on 1800 55 1800 and or Lifeline on 131 114.

HOW WILL I DEAL WITH YOUR INFORMATION?

Usually, questionnaires can be done without putting your name on them, but because I need to contact 10 to 14 students to invite them to the interview, I will need your student identification number on the questionnaire. All data from the students participating in the interviews and the audio diaries will be de-identified. This means you will be assigned a code in place of your name. This makes sure that whatever you tell me will be reported anonymously. Data from this study will be stored on password protected computers and locked filing cabinets in the secure offices at Federation University, Ballarat. In line with university protocol, data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years and will be destroyed following strict university shredding and document destruction guidelines.

Any information given by a student during this study will remain confidential, but is subject to legal limitations. This means that I have to disclose information by law, if the need arises by law. Only the principal supervisor and I will have access to the data. In relation to the sharing of information publicly (for example in publications or at conferences), all collected data will be confidential and no identifying information will be used in any publication from the research (e.g. conference presentations, journal articles or my PhD report will not contain your name or anything that links directly to you). The small sample size of 10 to 14 students for the part following the questionnaire, could affect your privacy; however, the results of this study will be presented as factors leading to a positive attitude change, and as strategies to keep a positive attitude; not as personal experiences which may affect the anonymity of participating students.

Plain Language Information Statement

ETHICAL STANDARDS

This study follows the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to participate in human research studies. The ethics aspects of this research study have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Federation University.

If you have any questions, or you would like further information regarding the project titled ***Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School***, please contact the Principal Researcher Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg of the School of the School of Education and Arts:
PH: +61 3 5327 9716
EMAIL: r.brandenburg@federation.edu.au

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the Federation University Ethics Officers, Research Services, Federation University Australia,
P O Box 663 Mt Helen Vic 3353 or Northways Rd, Churchill Vic 3842.
Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, (03) 5122 6446
Email: research.ethics@federation.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D

Consent Form



PROJECT TITLE:	Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School
RESEARCHERS:	Sylwia Wojtaszek, PhD Student Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg, Principal Supervisor

Consent – Please complete the following information:

I, of (school name)

 hereby consent to participate as a subject in the above research study.

The research study in which I am being asked to participate has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that all information I provide will be treated with the strictest confidence (but remains subject to legal limitations) and data will be stored separately from any listing that includes my name. Study results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic Journals.

- *I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from it will not be used.*
- *once information has been processed it is unable to be identified, and from this point it is not possible to withdraw consent to participate*
- *I agree to be identifiable in the questionnaire through my student identification number, to be invited for further participation in the study, if I suit the sample population*
- *I agree to the audio recording of the interviews and the diary entries*
- *I understand the small sample size can have implications for my privacy and anonymity*

SIGNATURE: **DATE:**

Consent of Parent/Guardian:

I,, parent/guardian of (minor's name)
 of (school name)
 hereby consent to (minor's name) participating in the
 above research study.

SIGNATURE: **DATE:**

Appendix F – Modified School Life Questionnaire

Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School 2017

Welcome!

Dear Year 10 student,

You have been invited to complete this online survey in order to investigate your attitude and approach to school. All Year 10 students in your school have been invited to participate.

This survey is part of the research project "Adolescent Students' Attitude towards School" which is being conducted by me, Sylwia Wojtaszek, as part of my PhD study at Federation University, Ballarat.

Participation is on a voluntary basis, and you may choose not to answer questions, or withdraw from the questionnaire at any point in time during its duration. This survey is completely confidential (but not anonymous), and your decision to participate or not will only be known to me and my supervisor and will not affect your school work in any way.

The completion of it will take approximately 10 minutes. The survey requires your student identification number, as described in the Plain Language Information Statement, as participants need to be identifiable to potentially be invited for the second part of the study.

This survey will ask you questions about you and your school experience. Please state your agreement to the given statements about your school, your teachers and yourself by ticking the appropriate box, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5).

If you have any queries about the research please contact me via my supervisor Associate Professor Robyn Brandenburg (r.brandenburg@federation.edu.au).

*** 1. Please enter your student identification number so you can be contacted regarding the second part of the study, which consists of interviews and audio recordings.**

Each statement follows the phrase "My school is a place where ..."

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

For each statement indicate whether you

'strongly disagree' (1), 'disagree' (2), 'are neutral' (3), 'agree' (4) or 'strongly agree' (5)

2. teachers treat me fairly in class

strongly disagree

strongly agree

3. I feel proud to be a student

strongly disagree

strongly agree

4. the things I learn are important to me

strongly disagree

strongly agree

5. people look up to me

strongly disagree

strongly agree

6. I feel depressed

strongly disagree

strongly agree

7. I feel it's easy to get to know other people

strongly disagree

strongly agree

8. I really get involved in my school work

strongly disagree

strongly agree

9. I like learning

strongly disagree

strongly agree

10. I get enjoyment from being there

strongly disagree

strongly agree

11. other students are very friendly

strongly disagree

strongly agree

12. I feel restless

strongly disagree

strongly agree

13. teachers give me the marks I deserve

strongly disagree

strongly agree

14. I have acquired skills that will be of use to me when I leave school

strongly disagree

strongly agree

15. I always achieve a satisfactory standard in my work

strongly disagree

strongly agree

16. other people care what I think

strongly disagree

strongly agree

17. teachers take a personal interest in helping me with my school work

strongly disagree

strongly agree

18. I am treated with respect by other students

strongly disagree

strongly agree

19. mixing with other people helps me understand myself

strongly disagree

strongly agree

20. I feel lonely

strongly disagree

strongly agree

21. the things I learn will help me in my adult life

strongly disagree

strongly agree

22. I know people think a lot of me

strongly disagree

strongly agree

23. I know how to cope with the work

strongly disagree

strongly agree

24. teachers help me to do my best

strongly disagree

strongly agree

25. I get upset

strongly disagree

strongly agree

26. I am given the chance to do work that really interests me

strongly disagree

strongly agree

27. I know I can do well enough to be successful

strongly disagree

strongly agree

28. the things I am taught are worthwhile learning

strongly disagree

strongly agree

29. I feel important

strongly disagree

strongly agree

30. teachers are fair and just

strongly disagree

strongly agree

31. I am a success as a student

strongly disagree

strongly agree

32. I really like to go each day

strongly disagree

strongly agree

33. I learn to get along with other people

strongly disagree

strongly agree

34. I feel worried

strongly disagree

strongly agree

35. the work I do is good preparation for my future

strongly disagree

strongly agree

36. I feel proud of myself

strongly disagree

strongly agree

37. other students accept me as I am

strongly disagree

strongly agree

38. I have learnt to work hard

strongly disagree

strongly agree

39. I get on well with the other students in my class

strongly disagree

strongly agree

40. I find that learning is a lot of fun

strongly disagree

strongly agree

41. teachers listen to what I say

strongly disagree

strongly agree

42. Please use this space to write down any other things at school that make a difference to the way you feel when you are there.

Additional Statements

43. My primary school experience was a good one

strongly disagree

strongly agree

44. I had a positive attitude to school and learning in primary school

strongly disagree

strongly agree

45. I believe my transition to secondary school was good

strongly disagree

strongly agree

46. I have a positive attitude to school

strongly disagree

strongly agree

47. I know what affects my attitude to school

strongly disagree

strongly agree

48. I get support at home for my learning

strongly disagree

strongly agree

49. I take advantage of the support services offered at school

strongly disagree

strongly agree

50. I feel like I can control my attitude to school

strongly disagree

strongly agree

51. I know how to develop a positive attitude to school

strongly disagree

strongly agree

52. I know who to seek help from when my attitude turns negative towards school work and learning

strongly disagree

strongly agree

53. I know which career pathway I want to take

strongly disagree

strongly agree

54. My school helps me develop goals for my future

strongly disagree

strongly agree

55. I have a stable and supportive group of friends

strongly disagree

strongly agree

56. My friends generally have a positive attitude to school and learning

strongly disagree

strongly agree

Read the following text and then proceed to statement number 57 about your approach to school and indicate whether you agree or disagree that the statement is correct in your case, or whether you don't know, by ticking the appropriate box.

Attitude can be described as "liking or disliking" something, and this study plans to examine your attitude to school, learning, and education in general. We all might know someone in high school, who used to have a really negative attitude to school, disliked everything about school, and then managed to change his or her attitude to a positive attitude towards school and consequently did better at school, reached personal goals and understood the value of education for his or her future. This would be called a positive attitude to school change.

* 57. During secondary school, I experienced a positive attitude change. I have changed my attitude to school, from having a negative attitude and disliking most aspects of school, to having a positive attitude and wanting to do well at school.

- Disagree
- Agree
- Don't know

58. If you answered 'Agree', please describe in the text field below what you think had influenced your attitude to school to be more positive.

If you ticked the box 'Don't know', please explain why you did so in the text field below.

If you ticked the box 'Disagree', ignore the text field below.

Thank you for completing this survey!

As part of my PhD study 10 to 14 interviews are planned to further explore some of the themes emerging from the questionnaire. In addition, those 10 to 14 participating students will be asked to create audio diary entries, as described in the Plain Language Information Statement.

If the analysis of this survey answers identifies you as a possible candidate for the second part of the study, I will contact you through your school email to arrange an interview. Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose to opt in or out of the interviews.

Have a good day!

Regards,
Sylwia Wojtaszek

Appendix G – Interview Questions

Interview Round 1:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, e.g. your hobbies and interests
2. How is school going?
3. What do you like/ dislike about school?
4. What would you say have been the highlights/ low points of your schooling so far?
5. Is Year 10 different to the previous years, and if so, how?
6. What are you particularly proud of achieving?
7. Rate school on a scale of 1–10, and explain why it is not a 10/10, 9/10 ...
8. What is school, in your own words, and what is its purpose?
9. Does school have to be fun for you to be engaged in learning?
10. Discuss statement “School should be more like real life”
11. Are you familiar with the term “lifelong learning”?
12. Referring to the survey and specifically to the question to self-reporting an attitude change to school: What can you tell me about your attitude change to school?
13. Describe your attitude and its impact on your school work before the attitude change
14. Did you have any fears when you had the negative attitude to school?
15. What do you think triggered the attitude change?
16. How is your attitude different now?
17. Have you ever spoken about the change in particular with someone?
18. How would you describe what an attitude to school is?
19. Does an attitude to school differ from an attitude to life?
20. Will the positive attitude change to school have an impact on your future somehow?
21. Why do you think do some students develop a negative attitude to school?
22. Discuss what schools can do to nurture a positive attitude to school
23. Does your school do enough to support a positive attitude?
24. If schools could do one thing better regarding students’ attitude, what should that be?
25. What is the key to having a positive attitude to school and maintaining it?
26. If you were a teacher what attitude to school would you say is ‘perfect’, desirable?
27. If you could tell your primary-school self something about attitudes to school, what would it be?
28. A bit of a funny question: if you were an animal, what animal would do you think you would be?
29. Questions related to the survey results in general, e.g. Does it surprise you that ... % of student in Year 10 agree/ disagree with the following statement?

Interview Round 2:

1. How would you summaries your attitude change?
2. Who would you say provided the best support for you and was most influential in the attitude change? If there was to be an award ceremony for the most relevant people to your attitude change, who would we see on stage, and in what order of importance?
3. Questions to individuals mentioned in #2, e.g. What did the support person do or say in particular?
4. If not for the support from ..., would you have remained negative towards school?
5. How do you motivate yourself on 'bad days'?
6. What advice, based on your experience of a positive attitude change to school, would you give to the school principal?
7. How was life apart from the 'conflict'/ personal problem?