Disadvantaged locations and transition: Lived lives of students demonstrating resilience

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Abstract

Little is actually known about the lived lives of Victorian young people residing in socioeconomically disadvantaged situations who are able to handle a range of difficulties, complete secondary schooling and continue to university, vocational studies or employment. Capturing information through the voices of young people who are demonstrating resilience as they progress through post-compulsory school years as well as information from school personnel and community agents enables an understanding of social relationships and structural arrangements that are significant in young people's lives. The study reported in this thesis answered *what biographical experiences shape the trajectory of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition*.

The current study explored the lived lives of 18 students who had four things in common: school personnel considered that they were demonstrating resilience; all were of post compulsory school age; all were undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Education; and all resided and attended public education institutions in locations that Vinson (2007) found to be disadvantaged. Students were facing mental health issues, drug abuse, homelessness, parenthood, and estrangement from family and school with many dependent on welfare. This study took place at four sites (three publically funded secondary schools and one Technical and Further Education institution) across three diverse socioeconomically disadvantaged Victorian locations (a suburb of Melbourne; a suburb of a regional town located 80 kilometres from Melbourne; and a country town located 150 kilometres from Melbourne).

Resilience and transition were explored using a social ecological approach to capture an understanding of cultural and contextual determinants across sites. Theoretically this research drew upon Bourdieu's thinking tools (habitus, social capital and fields) to review the resources, systems and structures critical to agency. Students' experiences were captured over 19 months via: in-depth semi-structured interviews; completion of eco social network maps detailing significant social

relationships; and responses to the Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL 8) instrument providing quantitative indications of physical and mental wellbeing. Complementing student data were semi structured interviews with 28 school staff and three Local Learning and Employment Network (LLENs) executive officers to explore 'within' school, 'out of school' and 'interagency' activity that supported resilience during a time of transition. The analysis indicated the significance of social relationships together with a range of community, institutional and social supports critical to students' sense of agency.

List of acronyms

ABS	Australian bureau of statistics
ATAR	Australian tertiary admission rank
AQoL	Assessment of quality of life
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEECD	Department of education and early childhood development
ENTER	Equivalent national tertiary entrance rank
ESNM	Eco Social Network Map
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
LLEN EO	Local Learning and Employment Network executive officer
MSS	Metro secondary school
NPO	Not for profit organisation
PLS	Plain language statement
RSS	Regional secondary school
RTO	Registered training organisation
RUSS	Rural secondary school
SBAT	School based apprenticeships and traineeships
SCP	School contact person
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VCAL	Victorian certificate of applied learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETiS	Vocational Education and Training in schools

WLC   Workplace learning contract

WO   Welfare officer

CHAPTER ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

1.0   Introduction

As a lover of life stories it is easy to name well known Australian people who have overcome significant challenges. One of my favourites is Neville Bonner, an Indigenous Australian who endured much hardship including limited access to education, homelessness, his father's desertion, racism and extreme poverty. He went from living on remote, deprived mission settlements in Queensland and New South Wales to becoming the first Indigenous member of Australian parliament in 1971; nine years after Indigenous Australians were granted the right to enrol to vote in all federal elections (Burger 1979). Bonner's story brought into national focus the hidden plight that his race endured and in doing so assisted in advancing the rights of Indigenous Australians. His biography, written by Burger (1979), detailed the interplay of several concentric features that worked towards creating and then maintaining his successful political career. These included personal, familial and social factors such as: his disposition to navigate to and engage with a wide range of people from various backgrounds; his grandmother's emotional and physical support and insistence on properly spoken English; a local school who dared break the rules of the time and allowed him to attend to learn how to read and write; the opportunity to embrace the political arena due to changes in government policy; and the collaborative efforts of many influential and well-connected people who mentored him in how to play the 'politics' game. Bonner adapted to the requirements for a political career however his resourcefulness was dependent on resources being in place.

I have commenced with Bonner's story to highlight the direction of this thesis. Bonner's life was challenged by adversity yet in his lived life social supports, political structures and accessibility of resources aided the shaping of his trajectory towards a political career. This thesis is about ordinary young people facing extraordinary challenges and despite their difficulties they were doing well. Just like Bonner, these young people made decisions about their lives, and their thinking and actions were continuously influenced and recreated through their biographical experiences. This is a thesis about resilience and transition which gives due

consideration to young people's social context and cultural backgrounds to fully appreciate features that shaped their lives. The study reported in this thesis investigated resilience and transitions from a socio-ecological perspective and in doing so acknowledged the inter-connectivity between people as well as that between people and their environments.

In this chapter I start by briefly detailing empirical work that has reviewed poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage in Australia. I next discuss the rationale and significance of the current research followed by an overview of the current research. I then provide a brief insight as to why this study was particularly meaningful for me to undertake. I briefly introduce the Bourdieuian theoretical tools used as a framework for the current research. This is followed by an introduction to the structure of subsequent chapters and the concluding summary.

1.1 Images of Australia

To some readers the notion of disadvantage across Australia may sound odd. Particularly when in 2010, which is when data collection commenced for this research, a global recession devastated the economies of the United States of America, Britain and many European countries. However, Australia as a nation enjoyed considerable wealth (United Nations Development Program 2010). In fact, in 2011 Australia experienced a skills shortage across many industries (Department of Immigration 2011). Whilst not completely untouched by what happened around the world the financial crisis did not eventuate as dramatically across Australia as it did in other parts of the world. During 2010 and 2011 unemployment remained relatively low at five per cent of the total employable workforce and the Australian mining industry was booming and gearing towards record profits (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011a; ABS 2013a; Stutchbury 2011). Additionally the Australian federal government responded to the global financial crisis by investing considerably in major infrastructure works including school building projects to sustain jobs in the construction building industry (Swan 2009). Indeed, Australia

appeared to be living up to the reputation of being '*The Lucky Country*' [1] (Horne 1964).

Sadly, good fortune across Australia is not experienced equally. Studies have shown that socioeconomic disadvantage is prevalent in Australia and has been for many years (Henderson, Harcourt & Harper 1970; Harding & Szukalska 2000; Vinson 2004, 2007) as in other affluent economies (Raffo et al. 2010). The first major investigation examining disadvantage in Australia was conducted by Henderson and colleagues (Henderson, Harcourt & Harper 1970) in the late 1960s and was framed by looking at the level of family income and the cost of living. At that time almost eight per cent (%) of the population were estimated to be experiencing poverty. This comprised of those who relied on welfare benefits, mainly the aged, widowed, invalid, sick, unemployed and newly arrived immigrant groups. In 2000, the Smith Family, an Australian not for profit organisation, in collaboration with the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (Harding & Szukalska 2000), estimated that one in seven people were living in poverty and those most likely to be in poverty included: welfare recipients, sole parents, the unemployed and low income earners. Moreover it was found that having a job no longer guaranteed that a person or a family was not experiencing poverty (Harding & Szukalska 2000). For instance, by 2006 the number of working poor had increased to 389,600, an increase of 9.4% since 2003 (Australian Council of Social Services 2010).

However, inadequate income was not the only limiting factor that perpetuates disadvantage. People residing in poorer socioeconomic locations were less likely than people in advantaged areas to have social resources to call upon when experiencing under or un-employment, social isolation, homeless and serious health problems (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010, Curtis and McMillian 2008; Pierson 2001; Price-Robertson 2011). For instance, in two consecutive Australian studies by Vinson (2004, 2007) social disadvantage could be pinpointed to particular postcodes.

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[1] Robert Horne's usage of the 'The Lucky Country' was a pun by the author noting that Australia was rich in an abundance of natural resources however lacking in political astuteness.

Many people residing in these locations lacked supportive social capital as intergenerational poverty had reduced networks into employment.

1.2   Rationale and significance of the current research

The welfare of young people facing hardships and the role that education and communities can play to support disadvantaged youth has been featured in academic and political writings since colonisation. For instance, Linz's (1938) examination of public records dating back to the 1850s showed that much political discourse focused on education as the vehicle to mitigate social disadvantage. In recent times, academic papers by Smyth (2010), Lamb and Mason (2008) as well as publically commissioned reports led by Connors (Victoria Department of Education, Employment & Training (DEET) & Connors 2000), Kirby (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000) and Gonski (DEEWR 2011b) have reviewed the distribution of educational and social resources across disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged locations and the impact on student outcomes.

The importance of reviewing and analysing the issue of disadvantage should not be discounted seeing it is only through such examination that concerns are brought to the surface of government agendas and public debate. However, it was only in more recent times that the Australian Government commenced asking questions as to why some people facing hardships thrive whilst others do not (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2009, 2010). Vinson (2004, 2007) clearly demonstrated that socioeconomic disadvantage is geographically concentrated but little is actually known about people residing in these 'disadvantaged' neighbourhoods who enjoy wellbeing over a lifetime. Many people from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to handle a range of difficulties and become active, healthy citizens. With this in mind, research moving beyond explaining the difficulties facing youth to exploring resilience sets in motion the opportunity to unravel and understand agency and structures that underpin wellbeing.

Of particular significance are the choices that young people make during a time of transition such as the final year of secondary level education to life post school. These choices impinge on their future capacity for earning an income and securing

the benefits that access to money is able to offer. Capturing information on young people demonstrating resilience as they progress through post-compulsory education into employment or further education or other destinations enables an understanding of: the social relationships and structural arrangements that are significant in students' lives; the range of resources within social contexts that enable resilience during a time of transition; the way that community agencies collaborate to provide support; and political, social and economic factors that impact on resilience and transition. Research reviewing the lived lives of students residing in disadvantaged locations who are seen to be doing well, particularly during a time of transition, provides insight into what is working within their lives and within their communities that could be of benefit to policy makers, schools, youth workers, parents and others affiliated with promoting resilience and successful transitional outcomes. The importance of this study is evident in the potentiality it brings to plan and implement strategies to strengthen opportunities for youth who may be disillusioned and/or disenfranchised about life chances.

1.3   What is this study about?

The study of resilience is not new, and, as will be reviewed in the following chapter, the concept of resilience has been an area of empirical research and theoretical debate since the 1970s. Rutter and Garmezy have been attributed (Hauser, Allen & Golden 2006; Waxman, Gray & Padron et al. 2004) as forging work in resilience and their separate works were inspired through their clinical observations of young people who did not exhibit adversity despite being exposed to familial psychopathology. The pioneering work of Garmezy and Rutter positioned resilience as stemming from an internal locus of control evident as a positive self-concept, achievement orientated persona and cognitive ability (Rutter 1979, Garmezy 1971, 1974). As studies into resilience continued the approach to explaining resilience shifted; researchers conceived that resilience was not a static personality trait since people adopted approaches of resilience in some aspects of their life but not others (Hauser et al., 2006; Masten & O' Dougherty Wright, 2009; Rutter, 2006; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Additionally it was found that young people who overcame childhood adversity and continued on to lead fulfilling lives had more favourable environmental factors and personal resources in their lives than their

peers who did not fare as well (Howard & Johnson 2000 a & b; Masten & O'Connor, 1989; Ungar 2004 a & b, 2008, 2010, 2012).

Although the current thinking about resilience has moved from solely focusing on internal factors it is claimed that this shift has not been fully reflected in research methodologies (Teram & Ungar 2009). Ungar (2012, p.14) argued for research to move to an 'ecological understanding of resilience' exploring the 'person-environment interactions'. Unger (2012, p.27) emphasised that '...research should focus on individuals and fully explore the ecologies that shape the opportunities they experience for positive development'. The current research explored resilience during a time of transition through the voices of students complemented by interviews with teachers, principals, welfare workers, chaplains and community-based personnel. Hence an in-depth analysis of agency, social relationships and structural arrangements that shaped the trajectory of students was possible.

The current research answered the following question: *What biographical experiences shape the trajectory of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition*?

The research reviewed the experiences of 18 students who were demonstrating resilience to better capture and understand the shaping of their individual trajectories during a time of transition out of secondary school. The focus was on the practice of everyday life allowing for an exploration of choices and the influencing factors that shaped resilience and transition. The study provided valuable information about the structural arrangements across differing social contexts, the mobilisation of resources and the ways in which pathways were negotiated.

The students who participated in this study had four things in common: school personnel considered they were demonstrating resilience; all were of post compulsory school age; all were undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE); and all resided and attended public education institutions in locations that Vinson (2007) found to be disadvantaged. This study took place at four sites (three publically funded secondary schools and one Technical and Further Education

institution (TAFE)) across three diverse disadvantaged Victorian locations (a suburb of Melbourne; a suburb of a regional town located 80 kilometres from Melbourne; and a country town located 150 kilometres from Melbourne). These were locations that continued over time to have had lower than average school completion rates in Victoria (Department of education and early childhood development (DEECD) 2009, 2010b, 2012b). The Victorian context provided a rich source of information given the ethnic diversity of the population and entrenched pockets of disadvantaged communities.

As a snippet of what the current research is about I would like to briefly introduce a young man of Albanian descent. Will was a 17 year old student who had lived a life of being shunted 'from parent to parent, from house to house' (Will's words). He talked about being a victim of racism and a life of having to support himself financially and having to cook and clean from an early age. While completing the final year of secondary education he was not residing with either parent. He noted that trying to do well in school and being completely independent was hard. Will wanted a future that offered the opportunity to care for his own family, purchase a house and to live what Will referred to as *a normal life*. Will remained engaged in schooling despite living independently, and, as will be discussed later in this thesis (Chapter Seven) critical to Will's agency were a range of social, community and policy driven resources.

As the bricoleur of this research I used qualitative and quantitative tools to create an understanding of resilience during a time of transition such as narrative inquiry, eco social network maps (ESNMs) and the assessment of quality of life survey (AQoL 8D) all of which are comprehensively detailed in Chapter Five. As noted by Blackmore and colleagues (2003) biographies are useful in understanding young people's pragmatism and how their choices are positioned by their culture as well as their material and social realities. Following this advice I used narrative inquiry guided by semi-structured interviewing techniques and ESNMs (whereby students plotted significant social relationships and structures) to capture students' biographical stories. I found students were very good at articulating difficulties, tribulations and strategies to mitigate difficulties. Their stories were enlightening and

informative. As detailed in this thesis amongst this group of students were an array of significant differences in cultural backgrounds as well as the number of difficulties faced by individuals. Students talked about a range of issues such as: dealing with depression; suicide attempts; sexual orientation; drug usage; experiencing homelessness; being bullied; physical disabilities; estrangement from parents; limited family income; dilemmas facing refugees; being parents; and accessing educational resources. The AQoL 8D measured students' mental and physical health.

Of the 18 students that commenced the study, 17 students remained involved throughout their VCE year. Shortly after VCE results became available (hence after students ceased attending classes) I was able to connect with15 of the 17 students. Eight months post VCE, 10 students participated in interviews. Complementing young people's narratives were interviews with 28 school staff and three executive officers (one from each location) managing Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN). These interviews provided the vehicle to further explore how different schools and community structures collaborated to assist students and to investigate the role that State and Commonwealth policy decisions played in the production of resilience and transition outcomes.

1.4 Personal Meaning

In defining ontology Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 333) write:

> **Ontology**: refers to the study of being, and is concerned with the state/nature of the world; with questions of what exists, and what relationship exists between the world and our human understandings and interpretation of the world.

Our human understandings are coloured by our own experience and in my case this experience now extends over many years. The assembly of factors that make up my lived life are plentiful and thrown into the biographical mixture are educational, social, political, familial, cultural and contextual experiences that shaped my pathway towards this study of resilience and transition.

I grew up in the western suburbs of Melbourne in an area, which was then, and still is today considered disadvantaged by eminent researchers such as Vinson (2007). I am amused by comments from those (mainly colleagues) who grew up in affluent suburbs suggesting that due to my childhood address life must have been tough. I

grew up in a family that encouraged success in whatever was pursued and my parents were always on hand providing support in whatever way they could. The reality of my experience was that many people in my community enjoyed good health, enjoyed family life and social relationships, retained employment, paid off mortgages and took pleasure in participating in a range of community activities. The label of 'disadvantage' solely due to location did not apply. Life was not lavish but neither was it a struggle. Success was experienced in many aspects of work and/or personal lives. Many of us did well at school. However, few completed secondary school and going to university was rare.

That is not to say that all was rosy for all people and the reality of difficulties facing young people became apparent to me more so in my professional roles as a youth worker, child protection worker and educationalist. There were people in the western suburbs who experienced difficulty, where money was an issue and where young people left school early not out of choice but to supplement the family income or support themselves. For over twenty years I worked with numerous young people across Melbourne suburbs as well as in a Victorian regional town and due to the nature of my various roles I encountered many young people who confronted hardship almost on a daily basis. At times young people did not have access to basic commodities including food, adequate clothing, shelter and/or parental support. I came across young people who were abandoned by their parents and placed into community care, others who were victims of abuse and others whose families struggled to make ends meet. I knew these young people by name. I knew their stories. Bureaucratically these young people remained invisible; merely documented statistically to oblige administrative requirements for funding or reporting purposes (address, the type of welfare payment, level of education, ethnicity; disability; place of birth; marital status; age; date of entry and exit within courses or welfare institutions). But these young people were very important to us (the teachers and welfare workers) for we saw them on an almost daily basis, knew the difficulties they faced and also saw many flourish.

For young people residing in rudimentary circumstances life can be harsh and opportunities to participate fully in life are more difficult. From my personal and

professional experiences I understood the importance of context, resources, relationships and, support as well as the impact of government policies that led me to this point. I am aware that my experiences have greatly influenced my passage to undertaking this doctoral study and through this awareness I very much appreciate that people have their own story to tell. Each person has his or her own biography and it is through acknowledging that each person is different that I bring to this research an objective approach. In exploring young people's journeys I am mindful of not determining in advance the meaning of positive life choices and outcomes since the meaning of positive transitional outcomes will differ for each individual.

1.5   Theoretical Framework

Theoretically my PhD draws on the work of Bourdieu who proposed a "*constructivist structuralism* or *... structuralist constructivism"[2]* (Bourdieu' 1990a, p. 123) methodology to transcend the dualism of agency-structure and overcome what he considered as the false dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). As explained by Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002 p. 36),

> Bourdieu...insists that practice is always informed by a sense of agency (the ability to understand and control our own actions), but that the possibilities for agency must be understood and contextualised in terms of its relation to the objective structures of a culture.

Bourdieu (1984) held that people's actions simultaneously shape and were shaped by their social world; and Bourdieu (1990b) argued that practices were the product of habitus and capital within a given field. The current research used Bourdieu's (1986) thinking tools of field, habitus and social capital to review the resources, systems and structures critical to agency. Through Bourdieuian thinking tools this research considered and analysed activity across school sites; thoughts, perceptions and expressions that engendered agency (how dispositions are incorporated into habitus); and social connections relevant to resilience during a time of transition (social capital mobilised to gain outcomes). I have reserved my review of Bourdieuian thinking tools used within the current research until Chapter Three.

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[2] Italics used in text

1.6   Structure of this thesis

Following this introductory chapter are ten chapters. The next three chapters review research, theory and policy relevant to a study of resilience and transition. Chapter Two reviews theoretical and empirical work afforded to studies of resilience. The first generation[3] of resilience work, which commenced in the 1970s from the field of psychology, focuses on innate characteristics of the young people who did not exhibit malfunctioning behaviour although exposed to familial psychopathology, dysfunctional environments, low socioeconomic status and/or troubled families (Rutter, 1979; Garmezy, 1971). The second generation of resilience studies includes social relationships and environmental factors in addition to personal attributes. The third generation of research reviews social ecological perspectives that position research of resilience from a contextual and cultural perspective.

Chapter Three reviews Bourdieuian (1989) theory of subjectivism and objectivism; and the theoretical tools of field, habitus and social capital. Highlighted within this chapter is Reay's (1995, 2004) work where she has used Bourdieuian concepts in studies of resilience and transition. Concepts of social capital and habitus are reviewed to provide an insight as to how networks and links can be utilised to contribute to positive outcomes for the individual, group and community alike, and to build on other forms of capital. I also review the limitations and opportunities open to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to extend social capital and conclude by discussing how Bourdieu's theoretical tools work towards furthering a study of young people during a time of transition.

Chapter Four reviews the political ecology relevant to formatting structures that support young people of post compulsory school age. I commence this chapter by reviewing two independently commissioned (Victorian) ministerial reports drafted by Kirby (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000) and Connors (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000) that I regard as the foundation stones for education reform in the new millennium. Stemming from these reports were recommendations that framed the role of schools as community hubs and positioned the need for schools to be

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[3] In this respect, I am using the word 'generation' to refer to the 'production' of studies as opposed to bracketed time period.

conduits for interagency collaboration so that students could better access services to support and sustain resilience. In this chapter, political strategies to sustain young people in education until Year 12 are explained and reviewed. As will be discussed VCE is one of the options that students have to complete Year 12. In essence, this chapter covers: the role of Local Learning and Employment Networks which is a uniquely Victorian approach to aid retention until Year 12 and support transition; the meaning of Year 12; and a range of State and Federal policies and changes to the Acts that are positioned to sustain young people in school. Towards the end of the chapter I review partnership models between schools and agencies that work and those that have failed.

Chapter Five details the methodology used for the research reported in this thesis and the approach undertaken for analysing data. The tools used to gather data included semi-structured questions, eco social network maps and an instrument to measure the quality of life. These tools and the rationale behind the research approach are explained in the chapter. The rationale behind participant selection and locational details are also overviewed.

As detailed in Chapter Five, while data I collected contributed to the ARC study the methodology was particular to the needs of my research question. This included introducing into the study students who were completing VCE at a regional TAFE. TAFE is an alternative to mainstream education and including TAFE participants meant that young people who chose an alternative to secondary schooling were given a voice whereas they often disappear from school-focused analysis. Additionally I increased the age of the participants. By increasing the age young parents who were completing VCE at a secondary school were also included. The ARC Linkage project targeted students aged between 15 and 19 years; the target age for my doctoral studies were students aged between 16 to 28 years.

Chapter Six is the prelude to the following four chapters. In chapter Six I detail results of the instrument used to measure the quality of life and the difficulties facing young people across sites. Patterns of commonalities that emerged from interview data when grouped together formed the seven themes that I titled: 'Social

connectedness'; 'VCE is insufficient'; 'School a safe haven'; 'Success equals wellbeing'; 'Money matters'; 'Collaborative synergies aid resilience and transition'; and 'LLEN an unidentified strategic linchpin'. A description of each theme is given with examples from interview data to highlight connections.

Chapters Seven to Ten review the lived lives of young people who participated in this research. The interviews with school personnel and LLEN executive officers are also highlighted. Experiences are diverse across sites and to do justice to young people's experiences a chapter is devoted to each site. Chapter Seven is devoted to the Metro cohort where all students identified with ethnic minority backgrounds. TAFE students are highlighted in Chapter Eight. TAFE students struggled with fitting into the secondary school system however the structures in TAFE and access to resources keep students connected in schooling. Chapter Nine is dedicated to the Regional secondary school cohort where the experiences of young mothers and one male student are reviewed. Finally, Rural students' lived lives are reviewed in Chapter Ten. The outcomes from eco social network maps are presented in each chapter.

Chapter Eleven is the concluding chapter which I titled 'Lessons Learnt'. My hope is that the knowledge gained through reading this thesis is educationally productive and that those who source this thesis are informed by the findings. In this final chapter I highlight important findings that are extracted from throughout the thesis and note recommendations to be considered. I acknowledge the limitations of this research and provide a suggestion for future research.

1.7   Conclusion

There are probably many reasons why young people agree to participate in research studies. Some do so to oblige a request whereas others may want to be heard. Eighteen young people participated in interviews and each brought with them unique stories. They knew that their voices would be taped and were aware of the type of questions that would be asked. They also knew through reading the plain language statement that this was a study that was exploring resilience in disadvantaged locations; a study interested in understanding their experiences and tracking their

pathways over time. They candidly discussed issues that impacted on their lives. They also discussed what worked towards developing and maintaining their resilience. These young people allowed me to enter into their private sphere and delve into personal issues.

The focus of the research in this thesis is on the practice of everyday life during a time of transition allowing for an exploration of factors that govern choices and outcomes. Research exploring different school cultures, students' agency, support structures, and community environments as reported in this thesis provides an understanding of how social, educational, community and personal mechanisms come together to assist resilience and journeys into further education or employment post-secondary level schooling. In terms of the current research the position being undertaken is that resilience requires young people to have the agency to seek out resources for wellbeing and that agency requires that structures and resources are in place to develop that resourcefulness. Resilience is not solely related to being a product of environmental circumstances nor is it solely related to individual capacity. There is no denial that cognition comes into play to seek out resources for resilience however the shaping of agency is regarded as continuous throughout life and has much to do with social and physical resources that are available.

CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

2.0   Introduction

 'Resilience' is an area of research that seeks to understand why is it that some people from disadvantaged backgrounds do better in life than others. This paradigm has been explored through many fields including sociology, health sciences and psychology, each adding richness to literature that furthers thinking and opens up debates regarding this concept. The purpose of this chapter is to review and analyse theoretical and empirical work that has guided resilience studies. The current chapter commences by examining how personal qualities have been considered. This is followed by a review of social relationships and environmental factors and how these features support and/or hinder resilience. The interpretation of risk and success is considered next. I conclude this chapter by focusing on social ecological studies of resilience. This chapter is the first section of a three part literature review. It is followed by two additional chapters, one that specifically focuses on Bourdieuian theoretical tools, and the other on policy frameworks designed to support resilience and transition.

2.1   Personal qualities

The concept of resilience has been an area of empirical and theoretical work for over forty years and two early contributors to this area of research are Garmezy and Rutter. Garmezy's (1971, 1974) and Rutter's (1979) pioneering studies examined resilience by focusing on young people who were socially and mentally well-adjusted although they faced exposure to dysfunctional environments, low socioeconomic upbringing and/or troubled families. Garmezy's early research pursuits led to Project Competency, a study of 205 children and their families residing in the United States of America who were recruited in the late 1970s from an urban school district and followed for more than 20 years with 90 per cent retention rate (Masten, Best & Garmezy 1990; Masten & Obradovic 2006; Masten & Tellegen 2012). Rutter's (1979, 1989) ten-year study took place on the Isle of Wight and inner city London where he focused on 125 children whose parents suffered mental illness. He found that over the years many of these children were relatively

well adapted and did not succumb to adverse environmental conditions. Rutter's (1985) work clarified that resilience was not coping through avoiding a situation; resilience meant facing adversity.

Inferences drawn from early studies were that static personality traits (such as intelligence, cognition, self perceptions, temperament and self esteem) played a significant role in promoting resilience (Garmezy and Rutter 1983; Garmezy 1991, 1993; Garmezy, Masten & Tellegen 1984; Rutter 1979). These traits were regarded as being bio-genetically determined and the suggestion that environmental factors played a role in shaping resilience was vehemently discounted. For instance, Garmezy (interview with Rolf 1999, p. 11) when asked to discuss processes that supported resilience argued that

> ...we recognize temperament differences in the infant and the child-where do they come from? They can't come from environmental factors...I would not retreat from the critical importance of bio-genetics to try to understand this phenomenon. The good part of bringing in genetics in this way is there is no such thing as "good genetics" for the middle class and "bad genetics" for the lower class because there are too many kids that escape from their low class environments. So if you're going to accept genetics you're going to have to turn, and I think you should, to where the powerful biological factors are playing a role here - interaction with the environment.

As studies progressed the approach to exploring and explaining resilience altered. Whilst acknowledging that personal qualities such as emotional and cognitive characteristics played a role in resilience, discussions appeared in literature challenging individual characteristics as the sole factor for resilience. Benard (1991 p 3) wrote that "...personality and individual outcomes are the result of a transactional process with one's environment...[and]... interventions require creating positive environmental contexts – families, schools and communities that, in turn reinforce positive behaviours". At about the same time as Benard expressed these views concerns emerged that an emphasis solely on internal traits lead to relying too heavily on interventions aiming "…at changing the individual, when it may be more efficient and economical to create settings that help[ed] youth compensate for or protect themselves against risk" (Zimmerman & Arunkumar 1994, p. 11). Other researchers found that young people demonstrated resilience in some aspects of their lives and not others (Burack et al. 2007; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker 2000). For

instance, young people facing significant adversities who were academically successful were found to be socially incompetent (Burack et al. 2007; Luther et al. 2000). Hence competence in one domain did not mean positive adaptation across all areas of life. As research evolved a strong body of evidence accumulated noting the importance that social relationships and environmental arrangements played in negating adversity and the notion that a static personality trait underpinned resilience was overwhelmingly dismissed (Garmezy 1991; Resnick 2000, Howard & Johnson 2000 a &b; Burack et al. 2007; Cicchetti & Garmezy 1993; Hauser et al. 2006; Masten, Best & Garmezy 1990; Masten et al. 1999; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker 2000; Masten & O' Dougherty Wright 2009; Rutter 1990, 2000, 2001,2006; Zimmerman & Arunkumar 1994; Ungar 2004b, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012).

Studies connecting the role of neural activity and/or genetics effects with environmental factors still continue in the new millennium (Cicchetti & Blender, 2006; Kim-Cohen & Gold, 2009; Kim-Cohen et al. 2004; Feder, Nestler & Charney, 2009). Masten and O'Dougherty Wright (2009) use the term 'executive functions' as a heading for this type of research. They explain executive functions as neural circuitry processes located in the frontal lobe regions in the human brain. Executive functions are related to controlling behaviour and include "memory, selective attention, inhibiting a dominant response in favour of a more adaptive response, delay of gratification, and related self-control capabilities that develop in tandem with brain maturation" (Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2009, p. 226). The intent of this type of research is to discover whether executive functions accompany brain maturation that are malleable at particular periods of child development and whether exposure to environmental experiences during particular phases of development impact on resilience (Masten &O'Dougherty Wright 2009). As summed up Feder, Nestler and Charney (2009, p.457):

> Beginning in development, an individual's genes and their interaction with environmental factors (and perhaps with stochastic epigenetic events) shape neural circuitry and neuro chemical function that are expressed in an observable range of psychological strengths and behaviours characteristic of resilient individuals.

The phenomena of resilience presented in terms of phenotypes, biological processes, genetic makeup as well as environmental factors (Rutter 1985; Masten & Coatsworth 1998; Feder, Nestler & Charney 2009) is problematic seeing it remains ambiguous as to whether mechanisms to deal with adversity should focus on biological factors or environmental features. As emphasised by Ungar (2013, p. 257),

> ...the problem with never naming which side of the Individual x Environmental interactional process is most important to resilience is that a critically important question is left unanswered with regard to how the theory of resilience can inform intervention.

As will be reviewed throughout this thesis, human life is complex. Reducing resilience to neural mechanisms and genetic factors negate acknowledging the impact that social environments have on shaping conditions that produce resilience. There is no denying that people demonstrating resilience display autonomy, a sense of direction, high self-esteem, self-control, commitment to learning and positive temperament (Howard & Johnson 2000b; Benson 2003; Edwards, Mumford & Serra-Roldan 2007; Gore & Eckenrode 1996; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright 2009). On the other hand, those who do not demonstrate resilience but are exposed to similar environmental circumstances appear powerless, lack confidence and are less enthusiastic about their future (Howard & Johnson 2000b). However, as noted in the previous chapter, and as I argue throughout this thesis, resilience requires that young people set in motion the agency to steer towards resources that promote wellbeing. Critical to developing this kind of agency are social and institutional structures that shape the nature of resources and possibilities for the production of resilience. My view therefore supports Ungar's (2013, p. 262) stance that "nurture trumps nature" in facilitating dispositions towards resilience and that "it is not as much an individual construct as it is a quality of the environment and its capacity to facilitate growth" that produces resilience.

2.2   Factors assisting the production of resilience

Many studies of resilience report the interplay of personal dispositions, social relationships, and community structures operating to form protection against adversity and strengthen the production of resilience (Howard & Johnson 2000b;

Benson 2003; Edwards, Mumford & Serra-Roldan 2007; Gore & Eckenrode 1996; Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch & Ungar 2005; Liebenberg & Ungar 2009; Masten & O'Connor 1989; Masten 2001; Masten 2009; Oswald, Johnson & Howard 2003; Resnick 2000; Russo & Boman 2007; Sanders & Munford 2007; Scales 2000; Schoon & Bynner 2003). In this section of this chapter I will focus only on two of these factors, namely, social relationships and community structures. Dispositions will be discussed in the next chapter from a Bourdieuian perspective. Supportive relationships are found within families and social environments. Supportive families feature characteristics that work to enhance wellbeing such as caring, consistent parenting and secure attachments. Supportive relationships located within social environments are those that provide opportunities for mentoring and extending networks of support. Community structures include neighbourhoods, schools and organisations that encourage and promote salient requirements for resilience such as: adaptive behaviour; a sense of belonging to a community; feelings of safety and security; opportunities to develop relationships; and opportunities to be effective in one's environment.

2.2.1 Parents and family

Young people want parents (or caregivers in the absence of parents) to be involved in their lives even though they may be at a stage of life where networks are expanding (Mission Australia 2013; Pinkerton & Dolan 2007; Ungar 2004b; Turner 2001; Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch & Ungar 2005; Cuervo and Wyn 2012). Often parents and families are a port of call for advice and support before teachers, counsellors, the Internet or other community-based persons such as doctors or church ministers (Mission Australia 2010). Studies report that youth prosecuted for criminal behaviour have a better chance of strengthening resilience to mitigate future offending when parents or caregivers remained engaged (Turner 2001; Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch and Ungar 2005; Ungar 2004b). For instance Turner (2001) in his research with youth whom he referred to as 'delinquent' and linked to correctional institutions, found that young people were less likely to re-offend when parents provided a caring and supportive environment, greater levels of supervision, consistent rules and imposed consequences for anti-social behaviour. Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch and Ungar (2005) reported similar findings. Ungar (2004b p. 25) in his work with youth

who became involved with "youth workers, correctional officers, mental health workers, social workers" also found that youth who remained in contact with parents were more likely to demonstrate resilience. He concluded that the intergenerational experience with parents was an "important source of support, for self-constructions, as resilient" (Ungar 2004b, p. 25).

In terms of schooling and advice about the future, a study by Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2002) found that mothers were ranked highly by students as being guiding sources on educational and vocational pathways. Jeynes (2004/2005) who explored academically successful young people from disadvantaged backgrounds noted involvement by parents in their children's secondary school as correlating positively with educational outcomes across different ethnic populations. Other studies found that parents were important influences in whether young people from disadvantaged backgrounds continued at school at post-compulsory levels (Howard & Johnson 2000 a & b; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman 2002; Jeynes 2004/2005; Demie 2005).

2.2.2   Schools and teachers

Young people want teachers to be fair, to have a sense of humour, to listen and be respectful and to set high academic standards (McCluskey 2008). They also want schools to be safe environments free from intimidation (Bottrell 2007), places providing opportunities to develop friendships (Lessard et al. 2014) and institutions sufficiently resourced so that learning can take place (Fine 1991; Fine et al. 2004). Simply put, school is a rewarding experience when key ingredients such as social inclusiveness, good teachers and access to relevant curriculum and equipment are in place (Blackmore 2009; Howard and Johnson 2000a &b).

For some young people, especially those who for some reason do not live in a secure home environment, being at school means experiencing some form of stability and order in what may be a chaotic life. Gilligan's (2007) review of several studies undertaken in Australia, England, Sweden, Denmark, USA and Canada found that schools which were rated highly by youth in care included environments that academically challenged them, espoused routine and provided them with a chance to change lifestyles. As cited by Gilligan, one student articulated, "School was the only

place I felt at home" (p. 139). Such schools offset the difficulties faced in everyday life. For young people in care being at school was more than an institution providing the opportunity to learn. It was a place where resources, such as teachers, offered support and practices within the system worked to develop resilience.

Other studies that focused on students residing in disadvantaged circumstances found that teachers, curriculum and feeling safe at school played a significant role in the production of resilience. For instance, Howard and Johnson's (2000b) study revealed that schools, which promoted academic competence as well as attended to students' social and emotional needs provided opportunities for students to develop resilience. Their study involved interviewing 71 young people (aged between 13 and 16 years), from five different secondary schools (2 in rural areas, 2 in disadvantaged metropolitan areas and one catholic private metropolitan area) across South Australia. They wrote that 'Schools that [were] safe, positive and achievement-orientated helped develop a sense of purpose and autonomy and promote[d] connectedness' (p. 2). A viewpoint also articulated by Blackmore (2009, p. 13) who emphasised "schools need to be places where students feel they belong, where they get a sense of achievement, recognition and a feeling of connection". Howard and Johnson (2000b) also found that young people demonstrating resilience could name specific teachers whom they regarded as being supportive and that "the same teachers' names cropped up time and time again as people the respondents [secondary school students] valued and respected" (p. 4). These were teachers whom young people felt took an interest in them and were comfortable in seeking out to discuss their problems. Other studies also noted the importance of teachers in retaining students at school. For instance, a study by Harker et al. (2003) reviewing the outcomes of young people in residential or foster care in the United Kingdom reported that 50% nominated teachers as a source of support for their educational progress. In Australia, Semo and Karmel (2011) found that students' engagement with teachers as the second most important aspect that retained them at school; the first being the opportunity to participate in a diverse range of extra-curricular school based activities.

In terms of extra-curricular activities Semo and Karmel (2011) noted that young people who participated were more likely to remain in education post the compulsory leaving age regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds. Semo and Karmel concluded that engaging in extra-curricular activities extended students' school-based social and supportive networks hence broadening the range of school peers upon whom students could call for help or encouragement (Semo & Karmel. Other than cursorily mentioning sports and drama Semo and Karmel (2011) did not specify other types of extra-curricular activities.

In separate studies Creswell and Underwood (2004) and Demie (2005) wrote about schools in disadvantaged locations generating interest in cultural activities such as visiting museums, art galleries, attending musicals and how participation by students correlated positively with academic outcomes. Creswell and Underwood reported that metropolitan students from disadvantaged areas who participated in cultural activities had better reading skills at age 15 than their regional and rural counterparts who were disadvantaged through distance.

Demie (2005) found that intensive and planned initiatives across schools clusters located within a highly disadvantaged area resulted in students attaining better grades in Year 12 when compared to the national average. In Demie's study students participated in school-based culturally determined (by parents/family) extra-curricular activities as well as organised activities offered outside of the local community. (Demie's study and findings are discussed further in Chapter Four when interagency is reviewed). However, the provision of cultural and/or extra-curricular opportunities by school is not an automatic pathway in developing resilience. As noted in a British study, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely than advantaged young people to participate in formally organised extra-curricular activities for a number of reasons including the cost of the activities or undertaking family responsibilities such as cooking and childcare whilst parents are at work (Muschamp et al. 2009). Planning the curriculum, generating interest, getting the community involved and ensuring accessibility is available for all students; these are integral ingredients to successfully attract student participation in school based activities.

In Victoria partnership models with student wellbeing at the heart of their strategies are articulated in documents such as *2011-2015 Directions for Catholic education in the archdiocese of Melbourne* (Catholic Education Office 2011) with a focus for Victorian Catholic schools to be core community centres so that collaborative learning networks can be established. The learning networks are to be within and between schools, with governments, universities, community groups and agencies, businesses and other organisations locally and globally so that the synergy of expertise can provide enriched learning opportunities for students and staff (Catholic Education Office 2011, p. 18). Within the strategy the provisions for safe learning environments and improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students are articulated promoting the embedment of wellbeing and inclusivity.

Schooling can also be an alienating experience. Many studies have been conducted reviewing why students from socially disadvantaged environments compared to students from non-disadvantaged backgrounds become disengaged with school. Reasons for not completing secondary education included: the expectation of failure; low academic achievement; responsibilities attributed to family situations such as looking after siblings; needing to contribute to family economy in either a paid or unpaid manner (such as farm work); bullying, experiencing racial discrimination; and school suspensions/exclusions, to name a few (Boon 2008; Bottrell 2009; Curtis & McMillan 2008; Ross & Gray 2005; Roussel & Murphy 2000; Stanley 2007; Ungar et al. 2008b; Wyn &White 1997).

Practices within schools can also undermine resilience. For instance it is shown that suspensions and exclusion provoke early departure from the education system more so than socio-demographic environments, familial backgrounds or academic grades (Boon 2008). Frequent prolonged absences do little to engender a positive attitude towards schooling, rather, they interfere with maintaining social relationships and students fall behind in their work exacerbating their alienation. That is not to say that schools should tolerate student behaviour that may compromise the safety of other students or interfere with their learning. However the practice of exclusion and/or suspension when not consistently applied or when students are singled out as being perpetrators when others equal in guilt (including teachers) are left blameless does

distance students from effectively participating (McCluskey 2008; Bottrell & Armstrong 2012). As reported by Bottrell and Armstrong (2012):

> The context of exclusion is thus more than individual failure to comply with behavioural [sic] norms. As teachers ultimately arbitrate disputes and rule transgressions, individual agency is activated within the constraints of authority and power relations (p. 253).

Pedagogical practices also distance students from learning. Practices such as the one noted below in an excerpt from Lumby (2011) do little to engage students in learning:

> [Students] deplored long stretches of time without physical activity where they were required to do a task they did not understand, by means of first listening to the teacher or reading the instructions and then writing' (p. 9).

Education is now well embedded into first world social systems however as a system it serves to reinforce social class positioning, particularly in the way that resources are distributed through the system. Bureaucratic indifference not only impacts on the quality of educational provision but also reinforces an expectation of failure. Students who perceive the education system as being disrespectful or uncaring are more likely to become disaffected in the learning process and as a consequence disengaged with schooling before completing secondary school (Lumby 2011; Bottrell 2007; Fine et al 2004). Young people know that social class, race and ethnicity determined the allocation of public resources (Fine 1991; Fine et al. 2004). Fine and colleagues (2004) found that public schools in California located in disadvantaged communities that educated poor and working class young people were in dire physical states, did not have adequate training material, employed uncertified teachers and tended to have high teacher turnover rates. Students knew that they were being educationally disadvantaged. The request from young people for better educational facilities was not being met resulting in students being angry and academically disengaged. As Fine et al. noted "... students view[ed] educational inequities as simply an extension of social disregard for them" (2004, p. 57). Students' disillusionment, as expressed by the researchers was that "by high school, students' voiced a deep, well-articulated, painfully sophisticated analysis suggesting that no one cares" (Fine et al. 2004, p. 57). Students in working class localities were not afforded the resources made available to the middle class including the dignity to

be educated in an environment that promoted successful educational outcomes (Fine et al. 2004).

In Australia, DEECD data gathered over time on school retention rates clearly indicated that greater percentages of young people residing in socially disadvantaged metropolitan areas do not complete secondary school when compared to non-disadvantaged areas (DEECD n.d.e, 2009, 2012b). Additionally, young people residing in non-urban disadvantaged locations stayed within the system for less time than metropolitan students overall. Evidence suggested that access to school resources (including teachers) played a role in student success at school and this in turn affected school retention rates (Creswell & Underwood 2004; Lamb et al. 2004; Welch, Helme & Lamb 2007). Furthermore, disadvantaged students in rural areas were more deprived of 'within' school resources than disadvantaged metropolitan students. For instance, Creswell and Underwood (2004) reported that the more distant schools were from metropolitan cities the more likely schools were to: experience teacher shortage; have fewer courses to assist low achievers; provide less opportunity for students to be tutored by staff members; and have inadequate multimedia resources and science laboratory facilities. As noted by Welch et al (2004), student numbers in rural areas tended to be lower in Australia and consequently attracted less funding therefore fewer courses were offered and fewer teachers employed. Having less choice of subjects meant less opportunity for students to be engaged in curriculum they found satisfying and having fewer teachers meant less opportunity to develop rewarding relationships with adults within the school system. In other words, students had less chance to access resources within the school system that studies of resilience note as being supportive to maintain positivity within the school system (Howard & Johnson's 2000b; Gayles 2005; Semo & Karmel 2011).

2.2.3   Friendship

Friendships are important to people and studies show that loud messages are being expressed by youth in terms of where they would seek advice and support. In 2013 friends were the most used source of advice and support reported by Australian young people in a survey conducted by Mission Australia (2013). Within Victoria, of

the 3169 surveyed nearly 80 per cent of young people indicated that friendships were highly valued. These young people noted that they would prefer to receive support and advice from friends and would not be comfortable in seeking advice or support from community agencies, school counsellors, telephone hotlines or counselling services. A study of resilience by Lessard et al. (2014), comparing students who remained at school, to ones who did not, uncovered those students who dropped out experienced negative relationships with school peers. Students who remained at school reported relationships with peers as being positive and long lasting.

Gayles (2005 p. 250) defined resilience as "...academic achievement when such achievement is rare for those facing similar circumstances or within a similar socioeconomic context". However, while educational attainment plays an important role in alleviating poverty young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are cognisant of their cultural connection and work towards not losing ties with their peers or their working class identity (Gayles 2005; Reay, Crozier & Clayton 2009). In a study of three scholastically high achieving African American males, Gayles (2005) recounted that for these young males, resilience meant playing down their scholastic achievements to neutralise the potential risk of not being accepted by peers. They proactively hid their academic achievements to maintain being socially connected with their high school peers to the extent that peers had a difficult time believing that the three were high achievers. The young men in Gayles' (2005) study came from non-affluent homes and attended a high school described as the most violent and lowest achieving high school in their city. These students regarded academic achievement as a practical way of being able to create a transformative bridge between the present and hoped for futures. Grades were something they needed rather than wanted. Their achievement at secondary school meant that they could "...resolve dissonance between their present social and cultural realities and their chosen strategy for fulfilling future aspirations" (Gayles, 2005, p. 257). They recognized that educational outcomes, in the form of qualifications, possess symbolic relevance that translated into economic capital. However, for these young men resilience also meant maintaining their social identity and social relationships. Resilience was more than overcoming adversity. It also meant maintaining links with friendship groups and not being seen to be different.

2.2.4 Institutions run by religious organisations

Participating in institutions run by religious organisations has been found to provide young people with opportunities to extend social networks and generate connectedness to one's community (Anthony 1987; Baldwin, Baldwin & Cole 2009; Werner 1992). People participating in religious run organisations are continuously exposed either through church or school based teachings towards ways of living that adhere to civic compliance, commitment to schooling, maintenance of a work ethic and taking responsibility for the welfare of others (Coleman 1988; Barrett 2010).

In terms of schooling, studies show that attending church based schools, such as Catholic schools, or being a congregation member in church group is a socialising force that strengthens behaviours and attitudes relevant to positive educational outcomes (Barrett 2010; Coleman 1988; Jeynes 1999). For instance, Jeynes (1999) reported that Hispanic and Black young people in the United States who were committed to religious practices (church attendance and self-report of religiosity) did better in standardised measures of maths, reading, science and social studies; were more likely to complete Year 12; and demonstrated positive school related behaviour. Colman's (1988) study found that Catholic educated students compared to state educated students from similar disadvantaged backgrounds had dissimilar rates of high-school retention. Coleman contended that regardless of the level of privilege or disadvantage of students, Catholic schooling accounted for higher retention rates and lower absenteeism due to the effects of norms, sanctions and a close knit school community being forged through the family networks and the church that reinforced the expectations of teachers.

Barrett (2010 p. 450) wrote that "[a]mong urban adolescents in particular, religious involvement was a protective factor in fostering pro-social behaviour and development". He continued by saying that involvement in church based activities negated neighbourhood influences such as drug use and youth crime. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) work, Barrett's research explored how the culture of religion shaped young people's thinking and actions. Barrett concluded that religious

involvement impacted positively on young people's educational outcomes due to the moral imperative to do well academically being preached from the pulpit; the congregational celebration of academic achievement; role models detailing their stories as to how they achieved success to young people; intergenerational mentors made available through the church to assist young people; and in some cases the awarding of scholarships to continue at school.

2.2.5   Sport

Partaking in sport is generally regarded as a way to maintain physical wellbeing. However sport also offers young people opportunities to extend networks and experience new activities. Three positive aspects of sports participation as highlighted by Coakley (2011) included: assisting young people to develop socially desirable personal characteristics such as working with others; exposing 'at risk' young people to structures promoting mainstream values and goals, self-control, and compliance to rules; and fostering social connections that may be useful in the short or long terms. Additionally, sport has been found to extend community participation (Kay & Bradbury 2009; Spaaij 2012). For instance, Kay and Bradbury's study on young people trained to work as sports volunteers found the experience developed a sense of citizenship and extended their community involvement beyond their sporting commitments. Another study found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who participated in a football program 'viewed playing football as a means for personal and professional development (Spaaij 2012, p. 84). Young people in Spaaij's study reported being able to transfer sports acquired skills and learnt knowledge to non-sport contexts (Spaaij 2012). Sports increased young people's personal awareness of their capabilities as well as developed underpinning skills required by labour markets such as teamwork, communication skills, self-expression, administrative skills, tactical abilities and self-confidence (Spaaij 2012).

However, participation in organised activities is not always possible. For instance, sport requires that enough interest is present within one's community to form teams and that structures are in place for activities to take place (coaches, leagues, sporting arenas, accessibility to equipment, management committees). Even where sporting infrastructure is present within one's community participation is difficult for

disadvantaged youth due who are unable to meet the cost of gear, club fees or transport to compete at other locations (Spaaij 2012; Muschamp et al. 2009).

2.2.6   Part time work

Working part time and being a full time student is not uncommon in Australia. Mission Australia (2013) reported that 34% of full time students had part time jobs predominantly in industries that offered flexible working hours such as retail or hospitality. However the percentage rate appeared to be higher for Year 12 students with 56% of Year 12 students across Australia working part time (Gong, Cassells & Duncan 2012). There were many reasons as to why students worked part time including: to have money to spend; enjoyment; to be financially independent; to gain employment skills; to acquire connections for employment post school; and support themselves whilst studying (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013b; Patton & Smith 2009).

However the impact of working part time and being a full time student does receive mixed reviews. A positive relationship between working part time during secondary school years and employability post school is reported (Patton & Smith 2009); but on the other hand working more than 15 hours per week impacted negatively on school examination results and thus hindered students' opportunities to continue to university (Gong et al. 2012). Key features as to whether students worked more than 15 hours per week, not surprisingly, included socioeconomic backgrounds and young people who resided in disadvantaged circumstances were more likely to be working longer hours to supplement the household income and their own expenses (Gong et al. 2012).

2.2.7   Welfare support

Services provided by welfare agencies do provide a wide range of support for youth in disadvantaged circumstances (Pinkerton & Dolan 2007; Ungar 2005). Whilst not always embraced by young people, particularly those who are mandated to partake in intervention services (Ungar 2005), studies do indicate that being connected to welfare agencies and participating in programs offered can shape resilience. For instance, interventional services that provided mentoring, counselling, educational

and/or financial resources to low-income families have been shown to significantly improve the long-term prospects of children, particularly in relation to academic achievement (Olds & Kitzman 1993; Helme & Lamb 2011). Additionally, as suggested by Pinkerton and Dolan (2007), involvement in services opens up channels to increase social networks, which in turn assists in mobilising other resources.

However, support is not readily available to all people in need. This is mainly due to proximity, the shortage of services, waiting lists, eligibility criteria and service gaps (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria 2010; Rose & Atkins 2006). While welfare services are in place to promote resilience, problems with access deter young people from seeking out support and further hinder opportunities for resilience. For instance, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2010) reported that young people in rural Victoria experienced difficulty in accessing health and welfare services despite having greater health and/or welfare needs than their metropolitan counterparts. Simply put government resources required to fund services were not allocated to support rural youth close to their home rather youth were expected to travel (at times quite a distance) to better resourced regional towns or to a capital city.

At times, the competitive nature of welfare services generated by limited funds and tendering processes deterred cooperation amongst services leaving agencies to protect their own turf and not refer clients on. Rather clients were put on waiting lists or left without direction to seek out other agencies for support (France, Freiberg & Homel 2010). As France and colleagues (2010, p.13) noted, vulnerable people in desperate need were "left to negotiate a maze of service options" rather than being directed to other suitable services that may be equipped to support them. Hence it is not simply a matter of providing social welfare. Services need to be properly coordinated, easy to access and, more importantly, relevant to the needs of the targeted community.

2.2.4   Summing up factors assisting resilience

In summing up this section it can be seen that the production of resilience is not a matter of choosing to behave in a particular way. Many social and structural factors can shape or hinder resilience. Explanations of the underpinning sources that drive

resilience requires attention to be given to cultural and contextual aspects so that portrayals of resilience include social relationships, community structures and policy/regulatory[4] determinants. The remainder of this chapter considers the meaning of risk and positive adaptation, and secondly, reviews studies utilising social ecological perspectives.

2.3   Identifying resilience in relation to risk and success

Resilience is commonly defined as positive adaptation despite exposure to adversity in relation to significant threats (Campbell-Sills, Cohan & Stein 2006; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker 2000; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright 2009; Waxman, Gray & Padron 2004). Hence resilience is a two dimensional construct involving facing risks and positive outcomes. However, what is meant by the terms positive adaptation and significant threat can be nebulous and often left to a priori interpretation. For instance Masten & O'Dougherty Wright (2009) note that threats include different kinds of adversities with a potential to derail or interfere with adaptive behaviour and write that in resilience studies, exposure to threats are "predictions of undesirable outcomes in a group" (p. 220). The question that arises is who defines what is regarded as positive outcomes, positive adaptation or desirable. For instance, some studies report successful outcomes in terms of educational retention when students come from neighbourhoods where schooling is not regarded as being important (Morales 2008, Gayles 2005). However, for some young people, schooling post the compulsory school leaving age does not correlate with their intended future aims. This is demonstrated in *Learning to Labour,* a classic study undertaken by Willis (1977) examining working class males who were perceived as underachievers. The Lads, as they were referred to in Willis' text, had an oppositional view to education focusing on "having a laff" disliking pupils who conformed to school rules, showed respect for teachers and were committed to their education (Willis 1977, p. 14). These Lads did not play the conformity game but reflecting on this classic work I would argue that the Lads did demonstrate resilience. For these Lads conforming to school rules and remaining in post compulsory school years meant sacrificing their working class identity and hence their position within the social structure. The Lads were happy to pursue manual or lower level white-collar jobs; jobs that provided

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[4] Policy and regulatory determinants are reviewed in Chapter Four

their society with needed services. An education level beyond what they required at that time was simply superfluous to their intended future needs. As Nash (2002) reflected when reporting on why some working class students did not remain at school "...it is not that they want to be "dumb" –they simply have a different conception of what is worth knowing..." (p.34).

The intention of resilience research is to understand why some people enjoy wellbeing when others do not, despite facing similar adversities. This requires researchers to identify participants for studies based on "risk factors found within the child, the family, the neighbourhood, and in societal structures" that have the potential to limit wellbeing (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch & Ungar, 2005 p. 276). Risks can eventuate from: chronic and continued exposure to adverse social conditions (such as residing in disadvantaged areas); or exposure to a traumatic event (such as a serious injury or death of a loved one); or the combination of a high risk status with traumatic exposure (for instance, multiple adversities) (Masten & Coatsworth 1998; Masten & Obradovic 2006). Patterson (2002, p. 350) suggests that the common element for selection of variables is that "the risk [is] labelled as significant because normatively, most persons exposed to it [show] symptomatic or dysfunctional behaviour" and this impacts on their social, physical and emotional wellbeing. Often, participants for studies of resilience come from cohorts who reside in environments exposing them to risks that potentially can impact negatively on wellbeing. Examples include: residing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Morales 2008; Gayles 2005); living in poverty (Muschamp et al. 2009); exposure to familial psychopathology (Rutter 1979; Garmezy 1991); facing life threatening situations (Bonanno 2004) having a minority or ethnic backgrounds (Demie 2005); or residing in the care of the state (Gilligan 2007). In these studies, young people are deemed to be resilient since they are demonstrating better than expected outcomes when compared to others facing similar adversities.

However, questions regarding number of risks, magnitude of risk factors, acute and chronic risks, and timing of risks in relation to adaptation are not clear. What could be regarded as severe or worse by one person (for instance, the researcher) may not be experienced the same by another (the research participant). For instance, not

completing secondary education is commonly considered being a risk but it may also be an opportunity to escape bullying at school or to enter an apprenticeship at an earlier age and in doing so experiencing success where schooling had often meant experiencing failure. Determining the meaning of risk can at times be quite confusing. Consider for instance, the following excerpt extracted from the New South Wales, Department of Community Services (NSWDoC) and the way that risk factors are explained:

> There is a distinction between 'proximal' and 'distal' risk factors. Proximal risk factors are experienced directly by the child, whereas distal factors are risks arising from a child's context, but mediated through more proximal processes. For example, a proximal risk is exposure to negative peer group influence, whereas a distal risk is a high crime neighbourhood, where the child is directly affected by negative peer influences of involvement in crime and substance use. (NSWDoC, 2007, p. 3).

The attempt of the above definition is to locate exposure to risk and in doing so to instigate youth polices to intercede but the underpinning message has connotations that further marginalise young people and the locations in which they reside. Focusing on negativity reinforces prevailing images that disadvantaged suburbs or country towns equate to trouble youth, when the reality is, that the majority of young people are active and healthy citizens (Mulligan, James, Scanlon and Ziguras, n.d.). Often, good news stories point to high profile individuals who have left the area (Peel, 2003; Mulligan et al., n.d.). Painting such areas, either through public media, government documentation or empirical work as being problematic runs the risk of focusing research towards issues investigating negativity and neglects to explore the experiences of how everyday life produces resilience. At the same time, the potential for wellbeing in terms of safety, health, employment, housing, public transport and education is significantly problematic if infrastructure is insufficient.

2.4   Interpreting successful outcomes from a contextual perspective

Non normative behaviour, which researchers refer to as resistance can also be regarded as a strategy for resilience (Bottrell 2009; Hauser, Allen & Golden 2006; Ungar 2004a; Ungar et al. 2008b; Veeran & Morgan 2009). This is particularly relevant if resilience is to be regarded as a social construct that recognises systems employed and outcomes associated with what people themselves perceive as sources

and outcomes of wellbeing (Wyn 2009). As noted by Bottrell, (2009) for some students, patterns of resistance to schooling were healthy outcomes permitting them to survive in what normatively would be defined as unhealthy circumstances. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds do recognise inequity projected through verbal or social interactions as being acts espoused through the education system to differentiate social class positioning. Bottrell found that students recreate and redefine themselves in opposition to how schools want to re-construct them. It could be argued that students who exercise resistance recognise what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to as symbolic violence and in demonstrating resistance rejected imposed inequality. Symbolic violence functions with the unconscious compliance of recipients and relates to the acceptance of limited social mobility, restricted access to resources and the promotion of inferiority that is perceived by recipients as being the natural process (Webb, Schirato & Danaher 2002).

Qualitative studies (Bottrell 2007; Kid & Davidson 2007; Sanders & Munford 2007) illustrate how non-conventional behaviours assist young people to overcome adversity and how young people utilise available resources to secure their wellbeing. For instance, Kid and Davidson's (2007) research on young people living on the streets in New York City and Toronto found that young people negotiated meaningful and healthy lives. As explained by Kid and Davidson (2007, p. 234) "…it is the person's view of their world that sets the nature and parameters of their coping, efforts to survive, and sources of happiness". As such, some young people do negotiate processes that may be thought of as being alternative and in doing so they give their lives meaning. Hence, defining resilience from a purely hegemonic perspective negates the transitional progress that such young people make towards their definition of positive lifestyles. Sanders and Munford's (2007) study also found that school resistance and networks outside of educational institutions offered resources for resilience through opportunities to convey competency that was not afforded to them at school. For example, in their study looking at young women who experienced school as a hostile place, the young women reported benefits of joining marginalised groups. These benefits included "…gain[ing] group membership and so [achieving] a sense of belonging that was often new" as well as the ability to "exercise choices about things such as where they went, when and if they returned

home" to "situations that had been dangerous or frightening" (Sanders & Munford 2007, p. 193).

Bottrell (2009) and Ungar et al. (2008b) further reinforce that resilience research needs to consider young people's engagement, not only as normatively defined but also on young people's own terms since interpretations of resilience and 'good' outcomes differ due to the different perspectives of agents in different contexts. Ungar and colleagues (2008b) argue: "to assess resilience by an ecological benchmark such as formal education might presuppose cultural hegemony when the specificity of a population's social ecology suggests young people pursue alternative pathways to success" (Ungar et al. 2008b, p. 169). For instance, in the case of racially marginalised Canadian youth, educational attainment does not equate with economic viability or future employment (Ungar et al. 2008b). In such cases, staying at school is not considered to be a vital resource in pursuit for wellness, since the outcome of schooling is not seen to provide relevancy.

Bottrell (2007) argues: "…locating young people in the context of their social and cultural positioning warrants a reframing of their resistances as resilience" (p.613). As Bottrell (2007, 2009) details, in her 12 month study on 12 marginalised Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian females, their experiences of school reinforced social class bigotry that they also experienced outside of school. Bottrell (2009) conveys the females in her study were "…vehement that the stigma of growing up in a stereotyped community is more difficult to endure than other adversities they face in their home lives [or the] social problems of their [residential] area" (p 329). The major adversity for the young women in Bottrell's study was the Janus-faced role of schooling and its propensity to reinforce inequalities through cultivating intolerance (Bryan & Vavrus 2005). Resilience for these young women is not going to be measured in terms of conventional middle class aspirations such as secondary school completion or university entrance. Their resistance in refusing to identify with mainstream practices at school can be understood as acts of resilience. Hence, studies require interpretations of resilience within the social reality of the lived lives of young people and not through some scholarly positioning of homogeneity.

2.5   Social ecological approach for studying resilience

One shortcoming in resilience research is the probability of misrecognising the appropriate identifiers for 'risk' and 'positive outcomes'. Research about resilience requires acknowledging that the meaning of risk and positive outcomes can be culturally and contextually diverse and that the interpretation of resilience needs to allow for wellbeing definitions to be generated by individuals and their social reference group (Bottrell 2009; Hauser, Allen & Golden 2006; Ungar, et al. 2008a; Ungar et al. 2008b; Veeran & Morgan 2009). To mitigate inadequacies of misidentification Ungar and his colleagues (Unger et al 2008b) undertaking studies under the framework of the International Resilience Project (IRP) use criteria determined by relevant community members based on what is culturally and contextually regarded as posing significant risks to young people. Examples of significant risks in IRP studies include exposure to at least three factors such as: family breakdown; poverty; cultural disintegration; multiple relocations; exposure to drug and alcohol addictions; discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, or race; being a child in care; and young people or their parents suffering from a mental illness.

Ungar (2004b, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012) strongly argues against a paradigm of individualism being the central focus of research and encourages methodologies to be more cognisant towards understanding resilience in the context relevant to the lives that are lived. In reviewing the works of others he writes that "...environments count a great deal more than we thought, perhaps even more than individual capacity, when we investigate the antecedents of positive coping after individuals are exposed to adversity" (Ungar 2012, p. 14). Ungar (2008, p. 225) defines resilience thus:

> In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to *navigate* their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to *negotiate* for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways[5].

Resilience is therefore regarded as a quality shared by both individuals and their social ecological (Ungar 2012). Social ecological studies work at understanding both the context and culture of those being studied and the ways that social and physical

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[5] Italics in text

opportunities interact with agency. The differentiation between context and culture is defined as follows:

> ...culture is understood to be the customs, traditions, languages, and social interactions that provide identity conclusions for individuals and groups. Context, [being]... different from culture, is understood to be the social, temporal, and geographic location in which culture is manifested (IRP 2006 p. 5).

Examples of studies exploring young people and resilience via social ecological approaches have included Northern Ireland and South African post conflict youth generations and the way that their cultural connections and social spaces progressed a sense of belonging to enhance wellbeing (Veeran & Morgan 2009); and (as previously discussed), non-normative articulation of wellbeing resulting in school resistance or living on the streets (Bottrell 2009; Kid & Davidson 2007; Sanders & Munford 2007).

In furthering a review of how social ecological methodology is used in resilience studies it is a study by the IRP on which I will focus given its magnitude and the participation of researchers globally. Much of the information about the IRP is reported in publications by Ungar and colleagues and found on the IRP web site (IRP 2006; Ungar et al 2008a; Ungar et al 2008b; Ungar & Liebenberg 2005, 2011). The IRP project was a significant, long term transnational study and at the time of writing the IRP had a collaborative team of 35 interdisciplinary researchers from 14 sites[6] across 11 countries with 1451 young people aged 13-23 participating with each site having a minimum of 60 young people. In reviewing resilience research explored across the globe via the IRP project, Liebenberg and Ungar (2008, p. 5) note:

> ...that in spite of cultural variations, all youth rely on the resources of an 'ecological model'... to varying degrees on the multifaceted components of themselves, their relationships with others, their culture, and their environment to negotiate the best outcomes possible in spite of the challenges and limitations they face.

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[6] Sites and countries included: Sheshatshiu, an Aboriginal Innu community in Northern Canada; Hong Kong, China; East Jerusalem and Gaza, Palestine; Tel Aviv, Israel; Medellin, Colombia; Moscow, Russia; Imphal, India; Tampa Florida; Serekunda, The Gambia; Njoro, Tanzania; Cape Town, South Africa; Halifax, Canada; and Winnipeg, Canada (two sites, one with urban Aboriginal youth, the other with non Aboriginal youth in residential care).

Between 2003 and 2005, the IRP undertook extensive transnational research. The intent of the study was to understand patterns of homogeneity and heterogeneity in samples of youth from around the world. Research involved qualitative methodology investigating resilience through young people telling their own stories; and definitions of resilience and wellness coming from the perspective of their community. All young people had been exposed to at least three significant risks (such as poverty, violence, family dislocation, and parental mental illness) and all were regarded to be demonstrating resilience and selected by members to participate in the study.

The outcome of this study showed that young people mainly relied on resources in their community to navigate their way to health and participants' stories offered context specific illustrations using seven 'tensions' to negotiate resilience. The reference to the word tensions was explained by Ungar et al (2008a) as being used allegorically to draw attention to the way young people negotiated a balance between all seven tensions simultaneously. These tensions included: access to material resources; relationships; identity; power and control; cultural adherence; social justice; and cohesion. Conclusions drawn from this study were reported by the IRP as follows:

> Findings show that youth who experienced themselves as resilient and were seen by their communities as resilient were those who successfully worked their way through these tensions (each in her/his own way, and according to the strengths and resources available to the individual within her/his family, community, and culture). It is the fit between temporary solutions youth try and how these solutions address the challenges posed by each tension, within the norms of each community, which contributes to a young person's experience of resilience (IRP 2006, p. 15).

The study did not find evidence that one way of resolving these tensions is better than another and the researchers concluded "that resilience can be understood as a way of life, whereby each person finds the best way to resolve the tensions she/he experiences" (IRP 2006, p. 16). The study demonstrated the importance of exploring resilience from a social ecological perspective. It reinforced that young people were not a homogeneous group and that "...culturally diverse groups of youth show unique patterns in how resilience is understood and manifested" (IRP 2006, p. 14). This finding reaffirms that 'a one size fits all' approach to positioning resources will not

work to promote resilience. Rather resilience needs to be regarded as a social construct that recognises systems employed and outcomes associated with what people themselves perceive as sources and outcomes of wellbeing (Wyn 2009).

2.6   Conclusion

Understanding and unravelling the life experiences of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition requires reviewing the provision, deployment and accessing of social and material resources located within and outside of school, the function of social relationships, and the role of institutional structures. Hence to achieve an understanding of lived lives of students requires a social ecological approach investigating what occurs within families, schools and communities to aid resilience and transition.

Emerging from the work reviewed in this chapter are factors related to what underpins resilience and what shapes the trajectories of students. In terms of resilience the literature (for instance studies by Howard & Johnson 2000 a & b; Masten & Dougherty Wright 2009) indicates that factors (internal states, social relationships and communities structures) are synergised and operate in an interplaying way. The position I am forwarding through reviewing theoretical and empirical studies is that agency and structures are interrelated and interplay in shaping resilience. Resilience requires that young people set in motion agency to steer towards resources that promote wellbeing. However the acquisition of agency is contingent upon the situation in which the individual is located, seeing as this shapes the provision of resources and possibilities for resilience. In my view resilience is not solely related to being a product of environmental circumstances nor is it solely related to individuals navigating to resources. Transition occurs continuously throughout life but of particular interest to the current study are the factors relevant to the shaping of outcomes post schooling. The literature detailed in this chapter points to many factors shaping an individual's trajectory including family support, the social experience of schooling, resources within schools, relevance of schooling for future goals and social structures located in communities assisting in the shaping of dispositions. As will be discussed in the next chapter Bourdieuian theory of fields (arenas for the distribution of resources), social capital (the building of social

connections) and habitus (dispositions that emerge through contextual and cultural experiences) are relevant to understanding the production of resilience and transitional pathways.

CHAPTER THREE: BOURDIEUIAN THINKING TOOLS

3.0   Introduction

> Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism (Bourdieu 1990b, p.25).

I commence this chapter by quoting Bourdieu (1990b) because, as concluded in the previous chapter (through the review of past studies of resilience), the stance taken within this thesis is that agency and structures are interrelated in shaping resilience. Resilience is not regarded as being exclusively the functioning of agency positioned through cognitive abilities to control actions nor is resilience regarded to be solely the product of social and institutional structures. Rather resilience requires that individuals have acquired the agency to seek out an array of sources to counteract adversity, trauma or stressful life situations; and critical to agency are experiences encountered through lived lives.

Theoretically the current research draws upon the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the purpose of this chapter is to explain the Bourdieuian concepts used in this thesis to explore and explain resilience during a time of transition. Bourdieu did not specifically draw on resilience in his numerous written works. Rather Bourdieu more or less used the word resilience in passing. For instance, in an article titled 'Rethinking the state: Genesis and Structure of the bureaucratic field' he uses the word resilience in relation to the durability of social relations in bureaucratic field as follows: "Symbolic order rests on the imposition upon all agents of structuring structures that owe part of their consistency and resilience to the fact that they are coherent and systematic " (Bourdieu 1994, p.382). Nevertheless, Bourdieu does provide the conceptual tools to explore resilience. In this chapter I review Bourdieu's theoretical position in relation to subjectivism/objectivism; and three concepts that are used to guide the current study, namely, field (in particular the educational field), habitus and social capital. There are many highlights within this chapter including Reay's (1995, 2004) work in explaining and using Bourdieu's concept of habitus as well as her work with others exploring habitus and resilience of working class young

people as they transition to an elite university (Reay, Crozier & Clayton 2009). Social capital provides an insight into individual, familial and community functioning; how networks and links can be utilised to contribute to positive outcomes for the individual, group and community alike. Research by Vryonides (2007) who explored familial social capital and student transition post-secondary school as well as Semo and Karmel's (2011) study in acquired social capital and students' participation in extracurricular activity are reviewed. I next discuss how Bourdieu's theoretical tools work towards furthering a study of resilience and conclude this chapter.

3.1 Subjectivism and objectivism

In the previous chapter I noted that resilience requires that young people set in motion agency to steer towards resources that promote wellbeing. However, the acquisition of resources is contingent upon the situation in which the individual is located seeing that this shapes the provision of resources and possibilities for resilience. In this respect Bourdieu's (1989) position on the binary between subjectivism and objectivism is important to a study of resilience. In an article specially written for English speaking readers, Bourdieu (1989) characterised his work as being positioned within the realm of *"constructivist structuralism or structuralist constructivism"*[7] (p. 14), which he explains as follows:

> By *structuralism or structuralist* [italics used by author]*, I mean that there exist, in the social world itself, and not merely in symbolic systems, language, myth, etc., [sic] objective structures which are independent of consciousness and desires of agents and are capable of guiding or constraining their practices or their reproductions. By constructivism I mean there is a social genesis on the one hand of the patterns of the habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and in particular of what I call fields and groups, especially of what are usually called social classes (Bourdieu 1989, p.14).

Bourdieu (1989, 1990b) critically admonished the antagonism created in theoretical and empirical work by situating objectivism or subjectivism as irreconcilable perspectives. He theorised that objectivism and subjectivism cannot be separated since people's actions simultaneously shape and are shaped by their social worlds.

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[7] Italics are used within the text of the paper

Hence as articulated by Bourdieu (1990a, p. 131) the "structuring structures, the cognitive structures, are themselves socially structured because these have social origins". Bourdieu (1989) argued that the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism meant that

> On the one hand, it can "treat social facts as things" according to the old Durkheimian precept, and thus leave out everything that they owe to the fact that they are objects of knowledge, of cognition-or misrecognition-within social existence. On the other hand, it can reduce the social world to the representations that agents have of it, the task of social science consisting then in producing an "account of the accounts" produced by the social subjects (pp14-15)

In Bourdieu's (1989) view "subjectivism inclines one to reduce structures to visible interactions" whereas "objectivism tends to deduce actions and interactions from the structure" (p.17). Bourdieu's (1990a) work consistently promoted an intertwining relationship between objectivism and subjectivism. For instance, in an interview with Mahar (2000) Bourdieu professed his dissatisfaction with structuralism calling it "very mechanical[ly]" but he also viewed that the individual "existed not just as an individual but as a social product and that a generative principle was at work" (p. 39). Mahar point out that:

> Bourdieu's concern was to develop a method which could show active intention and inventiveness in practise; to recall the creative, active, generative capacity in individual social life and to demonstrate that the subject of practice was not as a transcendental subject in the idealist tradition (p. 39)

In developing a method to transcend the division between subjectivism and objectivism the concepts of habitus, capital and field were introduced by Bourdieu which he articulated in an interview as being concepts "to describe and analyse the genesis of one's person...with an interest in understanding how *''the individual''*[8] is moulded by the social structure" (Bourdieu interviewed by Mahar 2000, p. 38). Bourdieu's view was that people's actions were the product of habitus and capital within given fields and allegorically he illustrates this relationship as (habitus x capital) + field = practice (Bourdieu 1984, p.101). In the following three sections I review field, habitus and social capital.

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[8] Quotation marks and italics are included in the cited text

3.2 Field

The concept of field understood in English terminology is one of domain but in Bourdieuian terms 'field' is explained as a system of relationships within social spaces. Bourdieu (1993) claims that different fields "have invariant laws of functioning … and specific properties that are particular to that field" (p.72). These rulings form the doxa, the set of core values that each field articulates as being fundamental principles and people submit to the conditions of the field (Webb, Schirato & Danaher 2002). Doxa is the unconscious adherence to taken-for-granted rules that are present in social fields, in other words, acceptance of conditions or ways of behaviour without knowing why. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p. 107) emphasised that practice or social action requires a combination of and the interaction between habitus, capital and field and conceptualised that "it is the field which is primary and must be the force of the focus of the research operations". Bourdieu explains his interpretation of field as follows:

> This system of fields (within the social space) can almost be imagined, for simplicity, as a planetary system, because the social space is really an integral field. Each field has its own structure and field of forces, and is set within a larger field which also has its own forces, structures and so on...The field is a field of forces but at the same time it is a field in which people fight to change the structure...so the field of forces is at the same time the field of struggle (Bourdieu interviewed by Mahar 2000, p. 40)

The emphasis that Bourdieu is putting forward is that fields are structured and that there exists competition for resources and desirable positions within the field. The point being that fields are a social construction (and not 'naturally' conceived) favouring particular hierarchal positions; energy must be invested in fields to make them work as a site of competition. This means that competitive strategies are employed by participants to maximise opportunities within fields. Hence, fields are the arenas where activities take place; fields denote the areas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or social status (Swartz 1997). A field, therefore, is the structured relationships of individuals and institutions.

3.2.1 Social field of education

Relevant for an exploration of resilience during a time of students' transition is the social field of education. Of particular interest to the current study is the year that students are completing secondary level education and are preparing for transition into the field of work or field of higher education. There are many actors within the social field of education including students, teachers, administrators and welfare personnel; and the governing structures shaping pedagogy and determining resource allocation are both at a macro level entwined in state and federal government policy and at school level in the way that policy is interpreted (to be further discussed in the next chapter). There are also governing structures dictating rules and regulations, for instance: qualifications of teachers; the entry and exit age of students; curriculum standards; examination processes; disciplinary processes; and codes of practice.

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) text titled *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* brings to attention operative systems functioning within the educational field that effectuate social reproduction. The argument put forward is that the educational field played a critical role in the transmission of cultural practice and consecrated the holders of powers (that being the middle class) as being sacrosanct in determining pedagogy and curriculum directions. As seen in the following passage Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 153) argued that the education field worked subtly to deter or discourage the working class from continuing schooling:

> In every country, the inequalities between the classes are incomparably greater when measured by the *probabilities of candidature* (calculated on the basis of the proportion of children in each social class who reach a given educational level, after equivalent previous achievement) *than when measured on the probabilities of passing...* previous performance being equal, pupils of working-class origin are more likely to 'eliminate themselves' from secondary education by declining to enter it than to eliminate themselves once they have entered and a fortiori more likely not to enter than to be eliminated from it by the explicit sanction of examination failure' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 153).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) theorised that the field of education functioned as an agent of social reproduction through processes such as pedagogy action and pedagogy work. Pedagogic action, the way in which the curriculum is designed and the language used by teachers to express themselves, reinforced arbitrary power relations between dominant and dominated social classes. Bourdieu and Passeron

emphasised that young people from middle class backgrounds will experience schooling differently from young people from working class backgrounds given that middle class young people come to school already equipped with the language skills and cultural backgrounds that were valued by teachers and academics. Pedagogic work was proclaimed as a process of inculcation that legitimised and continually reinforced the role of dominant groups in the educational field. As such the educational field was regarded as a vehicle that contributed to sustaining the power of the dominant groups.

We see evidence of pedagogic action and pedagogic work within the Australian education system where, as argued by Blackmore (2009), the fixation on calibrating outcomes, nationalised curriculum and standardised assessment of numeracy and literacy gets in the way of addressing real issues of students from disadvantaged backgrounds such as feeling disempowered and excluded. Hence, in Australia we find, as reported by Lamb et al (2004), that disadvantaged young people whom Lamb and colleagues categorised as, "the poor" receiving the "Youth Allowance"[9] leave schooling because "the courses available in their school were irrelevant or boring" or "the difficulty of the courses discouraged them from continuing" (pp. 15-16). Similarly Bottrell (2007) noted young people leaving school to escape the disconnection that school curricula have with students' interest and cultural background.

The structure of the Australian education field[10] is reflective of what Bourdieu (1993, p73) refers to as "a state of power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle". Hence, "dominant and subordinate groups each struggle for control over resources" (Dumais 2002, p46). For instance, the struggle within the education field is evident in the way that resources are distributed, particularly funding where the current distribution model favours well-resourced private sector schools rather than public schools located in disadvantaged areas (DEEWR 2011b). Additionally, at

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[9] Youth Allowance is a means tested Australian Government subsidy available to young people of post compulsory school age.

[10] As will be detailed in Chapter Five my usage of the educational field refers to structures such as secondary schools and Technical and Further Institutions (TAFE) which, are governed by State and Commonwealth political agendas.

a micro level, whilst funding available to Victorian secondary schools and Technical and Further Education institutions (TAFE) does incorporate teaching and running costs both sectors exercise autonomy in the way that funds are expended within individual institutions (DEEWR 2011b; DEECD 2013c). This means that decisions made by secondary schools and TAFE may be based on commercial viability ahead of the learning and transition needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In a Bourdieuian theoretical sense, there are endless fields. Furthermore, fields are interrelated (Rawolle 2005), and the interplay of political, social, economic and cultural regimes that position subtle and official rules about practice within one field can have implications for what happens in another field. As noted by Rawolle (2005) "[p]articular fields, though separable, in practice periodically interact with the stakes and practices of other fields" (p.723). Rawolle (2005) used the concept of cross-field effects to highlight the interrelationship between different fields as well as to demonstrate that phenomena and practices are not restricted to one field.

The field of education is not an exclusive space. For instance, the field of government overarches all social spaces (Bourdieu 1998). Bourdieu (1998, p.16) refers to the field of government as the "dominant principle of domination". The field of Government encompasses various ministries and departments, as well as codes, policy and legislation (Webb et al. 2003). Bourdieu (1998, p.16) regards government and its bureaucratic mechanisms as the "field of power" because government discourse and practices establish and dominate the agenda for other social fields. Government policy for education has cross-fields effects. For instance, joint state and commonwealth education policy designed to retain students at school until Year 12 by increasing the post compulsory school age (Council of Australia n.d) affects practices in employment fields (such as a delayed labour market supply or a more skilled workforce), teaching field (more staff required) and higher education (increased teacher training).

3.3   Habitus

"Habitus is a structuring mechanism that operates from within agents, though it is neither strictly individual nor in itself fully determinative of conduct" (Bourdieu &

Wacquant 1992, p 18). Habitus and field are relational in the sense that they function fully only in relation to one another (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Alignment between habitus and field facilitates how habitus comes into play to maximise the benefits of the field.

Habitus is the product of historical and biographical experiences and "...provides predispositions towards and capacities for practice ... [that] are transposable to different contexts" (Rawolle & Lingard 2008, p 731). Bourdieu (1990b, p.53) explained habitus as:

> The conditions associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

Habitus has been acquired through different life experiences – the family, schools, and the wider social, economic and political environments and is a system of dispositions that becomes established in one's mind (Bourdieu 1977). Cockerham (2013) explains habitus as the embodiment of biographical experiences driven by life choice and life chances. Life choices are "processes of agency by which individuals critically evaluate and choose their course of action" where "individuals attach subjective meanings to their actions" (Cockerham 2013, p. 146), whereas life chances constitute the structural conditions particularly those relevant to social class. Cockerham notes that structures operate to either constrain or facilitate agency; hence "choices and chances interact and outcomes are chosen from what is available" (p. 148).

Reay (1995, 2004) articulates Bourdieu's meaning of habitus through four aspects. Firstly, habitus as embodiment demonstrates interrelationship of the body in the social world and the social world in the body. In other words, the habitus is not solely composed of cognitive perceptions; it is also expressed through actions. Secondly, dispositions, which make up habitus, are seen as potentially generating a wide repertoire of possible actions enabling the individual's agency "to draw on

transformative and constraining courses of action" (Reay 1995, p 355). This also means that actions unfamiliar to agents may be excluded from their practice and may be rejected as unthinkable but also can produce new possibilities. Third, the habitus is amassed of collective and individual trajectories that incorporate a person's individual history as well as the collective history of their family and class of which the individual is a member. Finally, the habitus is being continuously re-structured through the individual's experiences. Whilst the habitus does embed early childhood experiences predominantly through the familial socialisation, the habitus is "permeable and responsive to what is going on around them" and as such can transcend adverse social conditions (Reay 1995, p. 356).

When discussing habitus and lifestyles Bourdieu (1984, p. 172-173) notes:

> As structured products (opus operatum) which a structuring structure (modus operandi) produces through retranslations according to the specific logic of the different fields, all the practices and products of a given agent are objectively harmonize [sic] among themselves, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence, and objectively orchestrated, without any conscious concertation, with those of all members of the same class

Hence, experiences unique to individual circumstances shape attitudes and values but at the same time resources and practices in fields dispose individuals to act in particular ways and unconsciously accept collective modes of practice as being the social norm. But habitus is not a "straightjacket that provides no room for modification or escape" as suggested by Giroux (1982 p.7). Differences and diversity between members of the same social grouping does exist; and individual trajectories diverge since each individual is expressing the singularity of his or her position. As argued by Bourdieu (1990b) habitus performs on the "estimation of chances presupposing transformation of the past effect into an expected objective" (p. 53). Habitus inscribes possibilities for the future based on what is known and what has been experienced. In other words, cognitive and dispositional structures are continuously reformatting to the requirements of the social situation as indicated by transition outcomes for working class students as reported by Vryonides (2007) and Dumais (2002). Dumais found that students' beliefs about their future roles reflected social class thinking. Young people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to undertake educational pathways towards higher status employment

targets than working class young people who may be of similar ability because middle class students have, through their parents' networks and lived experiences, seen the wider possibilities. Vryonides reported a similar finding but he noted that working class students needed to be more pragmatic seeing they did not have the social connections to assist their transition into the workforce. This meant that young people from working class backgrounds regardless of academic ability opted for tertiary studies that provided secure work outcomes (for instance, teaching) rather than risked studying courses where future employment options were unknown (for instance politics).

3.3.1   Working with Bourdieu's concept of habitus

Reay (2004) articulates that a great deal of research tends to reference habitus instead of working with the concept as Bourdieu advocates. Reay's (1995) own research involves using the concept of habitus as a method for analysing peer group interaction. Whilst Reay's (1995) focus is on social inequalities as well as diversity within groups, her research also provides an insight into resilience. Of particular interest was a girl that Reay (1995) referred to as Temi. Temi was a black, working class child who had commenced grade 5 in a middle class school whilst Reay was undertaking research activities at the school. Temi had transferred from a primary school that was predominantly working class. Reay did not elaborate on the circumstances for Temi's transference but Reay's immediate impression of Temi was that she looked shabby. The children in Temi's class demonstrated their social status in subtle ways. Reay claimed discrimination was not tangible but was presented in a way that exuded their social standing through a collective habitus positioned by race and social position. Reay (1995) related:

> The racism of these middle-class children [towards Temi] was not manifested in any action, rather it lay in absences. Paradoxically, it was there in what was not there, the lack of care, lack of contact, lack of recognition (p. 367).

Reay (1995) noted the children's actions were acted out though their bodily gestures such as failing to acknowledge, turning away or averting eye contact with Temi and this amplified that "Temi was not important enough to be noticed" (p. 368). Temi's colour and working class background effectively ostracised her from the other

children, including another black girl of the same age. From a resilience perspective Temi used available processes to secure and maintain her social requirements. According to Reay, Temi successfully forged alliances with adults in the school, succeeded academically and managed to carve out a positive educational agenda for herself. Temi's habitus maximised the benefits of the field that was presented to her. Temi comprehended the reality of her social position and overcame this adversity by aligning herself with positions of power within that educational institution, for instance teachers who provided a range of resources for educational success. While not articulated by Reay (1995) it appeared that Temi used social capital within the school system as a resource to deal with adversity.

3.4   Social capital

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p 101) proposed that 'A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field'. Each field is related to "the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies" (Bourdieu 1993, p. 73). Economic capital is easily understood in terms of assets and monetary wealth. Cultural capital refers to objectified, institutionalised and embodied forms of culture that are monopolised by people who are recognised within fields as holding positions of privilege, prestige and/or power. Social capital is a resource that is used to solidify or improve social position, social connections and/or wealth.

Social capital is accumulated, transmitted and reproduced through families, schools and communities (for instance, formal and informal membership in groups and clubs) and adds to economic and cultural capital by gaining access to resources as a result of processing other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). It is the accumulation and the capacity to mobilise social capital, which adds value to economic and cultural capital, which is of particular interest for a study of resilience and transition. It is argued in this thesis that the trajectory of a student who is demonstrating resilience is the product of habitus and accessible social capital made available within social fields. Understanding the functioning of social capital provides an

insight into how networked links operate to consolidate or mobilise social resources required for resilience and transition out of school.

As expressed by Bourdieu:

> Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition − or in other words, membership in a group − which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word ...the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term (Bourdieu 1986, 249-250).

The above excerpt brings to attention that two factors are required for social capital. First, social capital is not a given attribute. The building up of social capital requires an unceasing effort of sociability and a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and re-affirmed within given fields. This series of exchanges requires that habitus is positioned within fields in a way to access social relationships and that habitus has acquired the dispositional characteristics of that field for playing the sociability game. Second, important for social capital is membership in groups which provides each of its members with a multiplier effect of credits and entitlements of collectively owned capital. The volume of social capital possessed by an individual or a collective group depends on the size and the network of connections that can effectively mobilise social connections to attain other forms of capital such as cultural and/or economic capital (Bourdieu 1986).

3.4.1   Social capital as a resource

Bourdieu (1986) refers to social capital as being a resource (as noted above ... aggregate of the actual or potential resources) and as noted by Siisiäinen (2002) it is "a resource in the social struggles that are carried out in different social arenas or fields" (p.2). Hence, the opportunity to gain access to certain social networks is not equally available. Issues related to family backgrounds, social class, ethnicity, proximity and gender play a role as to which groups access what resources (Woolcock 2001; Bassini 2007). Barriers to participation in social groups ultimately mean a reduction in social networks upon which to accumulate social connections. A

good example is found in Vryonides' (2007) study of working class compared to middle class Cypriot families whose children are graduating from secondary school. Vryonides' research acknowledged that many young people expected their family to assist them in securing employment through their inter-family networks. However one in six middle class young people compared to one in three working class young people did not expect families to assist. Vryonides claimed that

> ...in terms of their social capital, professional middle-class parents were in a position to have the kind of social connections and networks that allowed them to have better prospects to valorise the qualifications gained in what was perceived as a very competitive and 'close' labour market' (p. 880).

However the social contacts of most working class parents were "often not of the kind that could be mobilised to secure advantages for their children's future prospects" (Vryonides 2007, p.881). Additionally Vryonides found that middle class parents actively made decisions about their children's education and were socially connected with other middle class individuals and institutions. Middle class parents would also use their social networks to position their child into employment; whereas parents from working class backgrounds tended to rely on their children to make decisions regarding secondary education and were not well connected socially to support their children's transition into the workforce. The same can be said of Australian culture. As an example, the removal of capped student intakes into Australian university courses meant that more students were able to study law however the reality is that there are not enough jobs for the number of law graduates. The oversupply of law graduates is highlighted in media reports (Lee 2012; Tadros 2014) where estimates are that 66 per cent of graduates are unlikely to ever practice law. Employment criteria for law graduates to get a job as a lawyer included amongst other factors (such as school grades, evidence of community work) going to the right university (Tadros 2014) or private secondary school education (Douglas 2013). As noted by Douglas, the reasoning behind eliminating public school applicants was that lack of connections that could benefit the law firm. Hence students from non-elite schools/universities were not admitted into the practice due to perceptions of not having the background to contribute resources towards the building up of social capital.

3.4.2 Production of social capital away from that found in families

As expressed by Semo (2011) "it is difficult to know at which point 'inherited' social capital wanes and when young people begin to produce their own" (p.2). Semo and Karmel (2011) defined social capital as being "the attributes and qualities of the family, social and community networks that facilitate[d] cooperation between individuals and communities" (p.7). Their analysis was based on data collected annually as part of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). LSAY data collection was via telephone interviews and the initial participation rate of 10,370 respondents in 2003 with a mean age of 15 years. Semo and Karmel's analysis examined the influence of social capital on education and training retention rates when respondents were aged 17 years (in 2005). In doing so they were concentrating on a cohort that was not mandated to attend school. At that time, 7,014 LSAY respondents were still attending school. To capture information on social capital, Semo and Karmel selected responses to questions that were asked of participants for LSAY data collection. From their analysis Semo and Karmel's (2011) concluded that "participation in school based activities was the most important social capital factor influencing educational participation; this was followed by the strength of the relationship students have with their teachers" (p.24). They further claimed "...that social capital is relevant across the full range of backgrounds, which [they note as being] important because it means that social capital has the potential to address the influence of disadvantageous background characteristics" (p. 23). Whilst findings by Semo and Karmel appear promising in assisting future cohorts of disadvantaged students there were areas within their report that required clarity. For instance, the analysis presented by Semo and Karmel was not able to shed any light as to how young people developed the opportunities to participate in school based activities during the course of their school life; nor did they detail how students and teachers built up relationships.

There are many actors within the social field of education including students, teachers, administrators and welfare personnel, each bringing into the educational field biographical experiences through membership and participation in other fields.

Membership in various groups is important as this provides young people with more opportunities to access resources to support resilience as well as acts as a multiplier in furthering connections. While family connections are important young people of post compulsory school age are also involved in social settings that may be independent to those located within their families. For instance, young people form social relationships through work places, schools and sporting associations and therefore do develop social capital outside of the family. The product of the various social networks operating within the lived lives of young people warrants further investigation to explore what connections aid resilience and transition.

3.5   Bourdieu's tools for resilience research

When asked about the core ideas to be extrapolated from his work Bourdieu responded that

> The main thing is that they are not to be conceptualised so much as ideas, on that level, but as a method. The core of my work lies in the method and a way of thinking. To be more precise, my method is a manner of asking questions rather than just ideas. This I think is a critical point (Bourdieu 1985b cited in an interview with Mahar 2000)

Research using Bourdieuian tools of field, habitus and social capital moves in the direction of exploring and capturing information on intertwining factors: the networked social structure that frames the availability of resources; the interconnectedness of social relationships that assist trajectories; and the shaping of habitus to maximise opportunities within fields. Bourdieu (1990b) parallels practice to game playing. In using this analogy he implies that practice requires knowing and following participatory rules and as in all rules there are boundaries that govern who stays in the game and who is out. Fields are also arenas of competition for limited resources. The accessing of goods and services is competitive and requires what Bourdieu (1990b, p.66) refers to as having a "feel for the game". The feel for the game requires an investment of time to observe and participate, as well as gain a sense of belonging (for instance, knowing the rules, understanding one's position) within that field.

Studying the concept of resilience through focusing on habitus and social capital provides the avenue to explore, metaphorically speaking, how the game of resilience is played across and within the social field of education and other fields that interact with it. Young people who are demonstrating resilience have a feel for the game and invest time playing the game. Subjectively, the game has a meaning, a direction and an orientation; objectively, young people have developed "practical mastery of specific regularities" by being able to participate in the game (Bourdieu 1990b, p 66). Hence, young people have developed the agency to seek out resources that support resilience while at the same time the resources located within fields have shaped thinking and actions towards these resources.

3.6   Conclusion

Cognitive and dispositional structures that make up habitus are continuously reformatting to the requirements of differing social situations and do so based on biographic familiarity. Resilience requires that young people have acquired the habitus to set in motion the mechanisms to mitigate adversity and shaping habitus are structures (social, economic and political) located within fields. Resources located within fields, such as access to social capital, influence life possibilities.

The old adage *it is not what you know but whom you know* is relevant to understanding how social capital can assist resilience during a time of transition. In other words, it is the quality of the social connections that is important and membership in various groups is vital as this provides young people with more opportunities to access resources to support resilience as well as acts as a multiplier in furthering connections. The types of groups that young people can access will depend on a number of factors including what is available and amenable within their social contexts. Families are a source of social capital. However, students, particularly young people of post compulsory school age are involved in social settings that are independent to families and therefore do develop social capital outside of the family.

CHAPTER FOUR: POLICY AND FRAMEWORKS TO AID RESILIENCE AND TRANSTION

4.0   Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter Bourdieu theorises that the field of government is the field of power seeing that Government policies create and overshadow the agenda for other fields. The intent of this chapter is to discuss and review the way that State and Commonwealth policies posit resilience and transition in relation to Victoria students. I commence by reviewing two ministerial reports drafted by Kirby (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000) and Connors (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000). The recommendations presented in these documents are particularly important to positioning schools as the hub of the community working collaboratively with a range of agencies to support retention and successful transition out of school. Second, I review Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). LLENs are unique to Victoria and were implemented by the Victorian State Government in response to recommendations stemming from the two ministerial reports drafted by Kirby and Connors. Third, I provide an overview of the Victorian school system detailing options made available to Victorian students to complete Year 12. This overview is required for readers who are not familiar with the Victorian system and will assist readers to understand the context presented in chapters seven to ten. Fourth, I consider the issue of interagency collaboration reviewing successful partnerships and the difficulties confronting structural alliances. Finally, I briefly review how students' health and wellbeing is catered for within the Victorian education system, which is then followed by concluding statements.

4.1   Framing the way forward

In policy terms resilience is understood as '*breaking the cycle of disadvantage*' (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2010, p. 6) and requiring social capital to

> ... remove barriers so people can participate in activities that most Victorians take for granted such as: a job; an education; access to services; involvement in sport and recreation; volunteering; and taking part in local decisions (Department of planning and community development (DPCD) 2008, p.4).

Policy makers see individuals or organisations working together as a means for "addressing problems and delivering outcomes that are not easily or effectively

achieved working alone" (Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) 2013, p. 1). Collaborative partnerships are about systematically implementing strategic and/or operational processes to progress changes and "in many cases, these partnerships, framed under the banner of interagency collaboration are promoted by governments as a means of achieving social goals" (Seddon, Billet & Clemans 2004, p.127).

In Victoria, framing a way towards resilience through using interagency collaboration was articulated in 2000, when Connors was commissioned by the State Government to review and put forward recommendations to shape the future of the Victorian education system. In the publication *'Public education: the next generation: report of the ministerial working party'* (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000) commonly referred to as the Connors' report[11] she criticised 1990s neoliberal education policies that promoted competition amongst schools rather than collaboration. Connors argued that the interconnectedness between schools had been damaged and needed a sense of the public system to be restored. Findings revealed that the increased administrative workload created by neoliberal devolution added pressure to schools and impinged on teaching and learning time. Additionally, resource attainment, both government and community, were inadequate for service delivery with many students in disadvantaged circumstances falling through the cracks.

In total twelve recommendations resulted from Connors' investigation and of particular interest to resilience and transition were those recommendations that specifically focused on developing networks for supporting student wellbeing. The review noted that partnerships between schools and community had an important role to play in supporting youth who would exit schooling without Year 12 and were unlikely to secure viable employment options or training. In particular, Connors (Victoria DEET & 2000) pointed out partnerships as being "a means of providing

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[11] In this thesis I refer to the *Public education: the next generation: report of the ministerial working party* as the Connors' report. However Victoria DEET & Connors are referenced as the authors as per the authorship information on the report.

optimum service delivery for students 'at risk' through developed or enhanced cross-sectoral approaches to primary prevention and early interventions" (p. 48).

In recommendation 2, Connors detailed the need for schools and community organisations to network and collaborate to enhance "opportunities for students, to promote educational excellence and to meet the diverse needs of their communities in the provision of student support services" as well as in "other areas of cooperation as would be identified by the schools in the networks" (p.8). This required "the establishment of protocols for collaborative working arrangements between schools, school clusters and service providers; and welfare provision that could be addressed on a school, school cluster and community basis" (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000, p. 48).

Related to Recommendation 2 was student support and wellbeing, which was addressed in Recommendation 7. This further reinforced service provision through collaborative networks as well as advocated responsibility to schools. Within Recommendation 7 it was noted:

> That schools take on an explicit responsibility, acting collaboratively through these networks, and in conjunction with other agencies, for monitoring the circumstances of all young people of school age in their community, to ensure that they remain engaged in education, training or employment (or a combination of these); and for taking any action that is necessary to connect with their appropriate services (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000, p. 11).

Premising the benefits of social capital, Connors (Victoria DEET & 2000, p 29) wrote: "A school that is networked with other schools around it and with other agencies, organisations and groups, can achieve much more" (p.29). Such synergy was seen as providing benefits such as resource sharing, economies of scale, a forum to develop and implement common strategies and a systematic way of facilitating pathways between secondary schools and other educational institutions or workplaces. The shaping of the school networks were envisaged "as 'flat' and 'bottom-up' structures formed and run by member schools" (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000, p. 29). In seeing to student wellbeing, the role of schools was to track the whole of age group, drop out and failure rates, and to ensure coherent planning in

the provision and pathways at post compulsory levels through "networks and in conjunction with other agencies, for monitoring the circumstances of all young people of school age in their community..." (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000, p. 52).

Specific to community infrastructure was Recommendation 3. This recommendation requested the Victorian Government to: identify areas of acute social, education and economic disadvantage; examine adequacy of infrastructures; and to "work with communities to develop flexible and workable strategies...to improve strategies for children and young people" (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000, p. 8). This required "...equitable access to resources on the basis of need, and the effective coordination and integration of resources..." (Victoria DEET & Connors 2000, p. 50). Distribution in its current format favoured students who came from advantaged backgrounds where communities had skills and social capital to negotiate for resources, whereas the voices of disadvantaged communities who lacked connectivity to sources of influence remained disempowered.

In the same year as the Connors' review, the Victorian Government commissioned a review of post compulsory education and training resulting in a report titled *'Ministerial review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria'*, or as it is commonly known, the *Kirby Report* (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000)[12]. Of particular interest were 15-19 year olds. Relevant to young people within this age bracket were concerns regarding non-completion of Year 12. Kirby noted that

> Dropping out of school is influenced by socioeconomic level. In regions of Melbourne where there are many tertiary-educated families, fewer than 1 in 10 young people leave school early. In regions of mixed socioeconomic status, dropping out increases to around 20 per cent of girls and 30 per cent of boys. Low socioeconomic status areas record the highest rates of early leaving from as high as 30 per cent of girls to more than 40 per cent of boys. In country regions, early school leaving is also at these high levels (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000, p. 50).

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[12] I refer to the *Ministerial review of post compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria* report as the Kirby report throughout the thesis. However Victoria DEET & Kirby are referenced as the authors as per the authorship information on the report.

The implications for reforming the post compulsory education and training sector were twofold: to produce a high-skilled workforce; and to develop solutions towards sustaining young people most 'at risk' (understood as disengaged with school) within the education system. Kirby, similar to the Connors, emphasised a need for interagency collaboration. Kirby (2000) advocated for the establishment of geographically positioned planning networks to develop improved approaches towards the delivery of post compulsory education. Collaboration between education, industry and business was regarded as integral to build social capital that could advise, engage and mentor disadvantaged youth on "pathways open to them" (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000, p .5). He recommended that each local network be structured to incorporate "local government, other State and Commonwealth government agencies, industry and voluntary agencies in establishing coordinated and collaborative approaches to supporting young people, and building safety nets (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000, p. 116).

In recommendation 7, Kirby detailed the purpose of the local planning networks in five bullet points as follows: maximising the educational opportunities and positive outcomes for young people; maximising the benefits of collaboration and partnerships between providers, industry and other agencies; bringing together, at the local level, all relevant agencies, including industry, that provide services for young people in education, training and employment; establishing a new relationship between providers and government that involves less direct state management, but greater accountability of providers for outcomes to both government and the local community; and providing local input into state-wide policy and planning processes for post compulsory education, training and employment.

In addition to interagency collaboration the reforms painted by Kirby moved towards reducing the fragmentation of training options opened to young people of secondary school age. For instance, it was Kirby who premised the benefit of young people completing Year 12 within adult learning institutions such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) that offered VCE studies to adults.

4.2   Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENS)

Kirby and Connors' recommendations paved the pathway for change for Victorian schools and stemming from the recommendations was the introduction of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). Thirty-one geographically bounded Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) were phased in across Victoria during 2001 and 2002 (DEECD n.d. g) and all remain operational at the time of writing this thesis. As detailed by the Office of Education Policy and Innovation (2007, p.5):

> LLENs do not have statutory or mandated authority. They rely on the value of their local planning and the quality of the partnerships they have facilitated to engage stakeholders and effect improvements to the education and training outcomes of young people

The management of LLENs is through the Department of Education. Each LLEN is required to be an incorporated body run by a Board or Committee of Management comprising of cross-sector community based stakeholders as determined by the rules of incorporation[13]. LLENs are contracted for a period of three years. Each LLEN enters into negotiated targets and performance measurements annually. Boards or management committees appointed an Executive Officer to manage LLENs. Staffing within LLEN offices is found to be minimal. For instance, in Kamp's (2006) review of a LLEN the ongoing staff comprised of an Executive Officer and administrative support, and project officers were recruited as needed to facilitate networked projects. In addition to Board or committee members any individual or organisation can be involved in the LLEN as a community participant (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development n.d. g).

LLENs were initially funded by the Victorian State Government to: i) coordinate locally based education, training and employment projects focusing specifically to assist young people aged between 15-19 years; ii) establish relationships between key stakeholders including government departments, employers/industry and education/training providers to take shared responsibility for post compulsory

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[13] The rules of incorporation that govern the structure of LLENs Committee of Management requires representation from the ten following sectors: Schools - government and non-government; TAFE institutions; Adult Community Education; other education providers such as universities, registered training organisations; Unions; Employer/peak employer organisations; Local Government; Koorie organisations; and community members (Office for Education Policy and Innovation 2007).

education and training, or transition out of school outcomes; iii) provide local input in the form of strategic projects to retain students at school or successfully transition into work; and iv) be the linchpin of state wide policy and planning objectives (LLEN n.d.; Kamp 2006). Since 2009 a joint venture by the Australian and the Victorian State Governments under the *National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transition* (Council of Australian Governments (COAG) n.d.) altered the age target of LLENs to include young people from 10 to 19 years (Department of Employment and Early Childhood Development (DEECD 2010a).

The purpose that LLENs play within geographical boundaries is not always apparent to stakeholders. Henry and Grundy (2004, p.23) wrote, "Some schools were unsure of their LLEN's role and knew little of what it was planning or doing". Kamp (2006), who studied the operations of a regionally based LLEN, found questions being asked as to what value had the function of the LLEN added to the community. As noted by Kamp "[t]here was a lot of 'wait and see'…the 'wait and see' became nothing happened" (p.73). Additionally Kamp's investigations revealed schools declaring, "they didn't know anything about the LLEN's work" (p.212).

In a recent review of LLENs' operations commissioned by the State Government criticisms were targeted at LLENs by stakeholders for "engagement in service delivery without a clear need for doing so, and concentration of LLEN staff expertise in one area (usually in the school or youth sector)" (The Allen consulting group 2012, p.5). The review panel also reported:

> …there is uneven awareness of LLENs across Victoria. Stakeholders from just more than half of the 31 LLENs reported high awareness of their LLEN and its activities. It was notably strong among schools, local government and youth service stakeholders. Among employers awareness was often weaker. Engaging with small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) poses particular difficulties for LLENs as most SMEs lack dedicated human resources staff and understanding of the benefits of LLEN involvement (The Allen consulting group 2012, p.4).

As indicated in the above excerpt, awareness of LLENs amongst employer groups was not good. Additionally another study reported that absence of youth as advisors (Kamp 2006). Hence local strategies were determined and implemented without consultation with the most significant stakeholder group. Youth appeared not to have

a voice deliberating on what was needed within the local community to resolve early school departure and aid transition. For instance, Kamp (2006) reported that the regional LLEN she reviewed preferred not to have youth involved because "voicing their opinions…would often open up issues that were beyond resolving" (Kamp p.67).

Despite the above contentions LLENs have been recognised by the State Government as being a valued resource for the introduction of initiatives which are now embedded in the Victorian education system (DEECD 2013a). One of these is Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) project, and the other to be discussed later in this chapter, is the Vocational Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). MIPS emerged from a 2004 project developed by a LLEN based in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne (Office for Education Policy and Innovation 2007). LLEN committee members were "exploring ways to support local young people at risk of disengagement from education...(and) to find a way to identify these young people before they left school" (DEECD 2013a). Through recognising that data relevant to disengagement behaviours (such as truancy, low literacy and numeracy levels, and socio-economic indicators) were already kept by schools a mapping model was devised and trialled by a group of five schools. In 2007, after the success of piloted trials across three disadvantaged regions, MIPs were implemented across all Victorian schools. At the time of writing this thesis MIPS was used to track Victorian students from Year 10 as they progress in the education system and into employment. A strategy titled *On Track* integrated the activities of MIPS enabling data to be gathered and generated to measure students' outcomes post school.

Aligning with the introduction of MIPs was the vocational guidance strategy whereby schools employed vocational guidance officers[14] or seconded teachers into the role tasked to work with students, other educational institutions, LLENs, industry groups and local employers. Vocational guidance officers provide students with career education, assist students in mapping out education pathways towards occupation goals, organise workplace related activities (with the support of LLENs)

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[14] Career teacher is the terms used in later chapters of this thesis which is the common lexicon used in secondary schools.

and develop workplace and/or educational connections to aid students during times of transition (DEECD 2013b). The significance of this role to support successful transitional outcomes into employment and/or post secondary schooling is evidenced in documents produced by OECD (2002) and the Education and Training Committee (Parliament of Victoria 2009) that reviewed policy implementation. Both reviews strongly recommended that specialist training be afforded to personnel who undertake the role. For instance, the OECD report noted:

> We accordingly suggest that steps be taken to ensure that all schools in all states have at least one person on their staff who has had specialist training in career education and guidance, who has a substantial amount of time for this role, and who is able to act as a co-ordinating resource for other staff involved in career-related work in and around the school and to set the standards for this work. Training provision for career guidance practitioners will need to be substantially expanded in order to implement this suggestion (OECD 2002, p. 17).

In 2009 the Education and Training Committee reviewing geographical conditions and participation rates in higher education across Victorian linked aspirations to transition into university studies to the vocational guidance strategy but noted that not all vocational guidance officers employed by schools were qualified in career education at a post graduate level (Parliament of Victoria 2009). The committee emphasised that career education required improvement principally in the areas of individual support and career planning. In particular, the committee called upon the Victorian Government to

> ...improve the quality of career education in Victorian schools by: phasing in a requirement that all career teachers have a postgraduate (or equivalent) qualification in career education; providing ongoing professional learning for career educators; consulting with the Career Education Association of Victoria to determine appropriate staff time allocation for career education roles; and supporting and promoting greater engagement of parents in career education activities (Parliament of Victoria 2009 pp. xvi-xvii).

The vocational guidance strategy was, and still is, a good attempt to build labour force and social connections that support students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds into employment, higher education or vocational training. The strategy also works to shape habitus and encourages the extension of social capital as illustrated in later chapters (particularly Chapter Seven).

4.3 Retention until Year 12

School attainment until Year 12 is a major priority for the Australian Government. Year 12 attainment is regarded as a key factor underpinning a skilled workforce which in turn contributes to building up economic development and continues to raise Australian living standards. This has led to a number of initiatives being instituted at state and/or national levels. For instance, the *National partnership agreement on youth attainment and transition* (Council of Australian Governments n.d.) signed in 2009 affirmed a commitment by the Commonwealth of Australia and States and Territories to reform structures that lead to "increased educational attainment ... and transitions of young people from school to further education, training or employment for young people aged 15-24 years" (p. 3). Amendments to Federal legislation, namely the *Social Security Amendment (Training Incentives) Act 2009* (Commonwealth of Australia 2009), commonly referred to as the Learn or Earn policy, was introduced to retain young people at school. Under this legislation, young people under the age of 21 years who did not have Year 12 or its equivalent and were not working were required to undertake study or training to be eligible for the Youth Allowance government subsidy[15]. In support of the agreement, in 2010, the Victorian school leaving age was increased to 17 years of age with a minimum completion of Year 10 (The Education and Training Reform Amendment (School Age) Act (2009)).

Educational structural changes were initiated into the Victorian system that pre-emptied the national agreement. For instance, *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* introduced by the Victorian government guaranteed a training place in non-secondary school institutions (such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, the Centre for Adult Education and Adult Multicultural Education Services) to all young people under the age of 20 who had not completed Year 12 (DEECD n.d. c). Commonly referred to as the *Youth Guarantee* policy (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD n.d. c) under this legislation adult education providers that offer Year 12 or equivalent (that being the Victorian Certificate of Education, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning,

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[15] The Youth Allowance subsidy is available to young people who reside in financially disadvantaged backgrounds or young people who are classified as independent.

International Baccalaureate Diploma or a vocational education and training qualification at Certificate II level or higher) were enforced to offer places in Year 12 or equivalent programs to eligible young people as a matter of priority (DEECD n.d. a, b & c).

4.4   Year 12 plus

There are several options offered to Victorian students to attain a Year 12 standard. The most common option undertaken by students is the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)[16]. VCE requires a pass in English and at least three other prescribed Year 12 subjects. The process towards acquiring the VCE requires that students complete a series of school-assessed tasks and successfully pass state governed examinations. VCE offers students a pathway into university providing that qualifiers for the various courses, which are based on the VCE results, are attained. VCE results are translated to an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). The ATAR is a percentile ranking which publically reflects a student's overall VCE performance relative to other students (Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority (VCAA) n.d a; VCAA 2012b). The ATAR score alone does not determine entry into all university courses. For some university courses, such as medicine, subjects such as chemistry, biology and mathematics undertaken at VCE level is required within the combination of subjects that contribute to the ATAR score (Monash website n.d. b).

An alternative to the VCE is the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), which was introduced in 2002 to provide students who did not want to undertake the rigors associated with public examinations the opportunity to obtain a Year 12 qualification. The VCAL was designed to accommodate the requirements of students who prefer to either continue schooling post Year 12 at a vocational institution or enter into a trade apprenticeship (VCAA n.d. b; Victorian Qualifications Authority 2004). Studies towards the VCAL are taken during Years 11 and 12 and the curriculum incorporates units of competency from nationally endorsed training packages, industry participation, and numeracy and literacy units. VCAL does not

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[16] Over 82,800 students sat for VCE examines in 2012

provide students with an ATAR score so generally restricts students from going to university immediately post Year 12.

However the VCAL has not been fully embraced by schools. Providing students with options in addition to VCE for Year 12 is more complex for schools to administer, also there are no guarantees that employment opportunities or transition to further education will eventuate. So it is not surprising to find some resistance from staff. For instance Kamp (2006) notes that teachers perceived VCAL as an imposition and reports it was viewed as:

> something a school had to do when it wasn't busy with the stuff that is – as defined by the system and the public – 'the measure' of schools: the VCE and the ENTER score it generates (Kamp 2006, p. 116)[17]

Despite VCAL being positioned as secondary to VCE the program has endured with 442 secondary schools, TAFE institutions or adult education organisations delivering VCAL to 21,555 students in 2012 (VCAA 2013).

The third pathway to completing Year 12 is through undertaking Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) programs. VETiS programs were introduced into the Victorian school system in 1998 (DEECD n.d. a). VETiS can be taken in conjunction with VCE or VCAL. VETiS is generally at certificate I or II levels of nationally accredited training packages as stipulated by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and is generally delivered in partnership between the school, employers and a Registered Training Organisation (RTO)[18] or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institution (DEECD n.d. a,b & c). The extent and range of the various VETiS options do differ across locations depending on resource availability (such as adequately trained teachers), student uptake of options as well as the commitment of the school to incorporate options within the curriculum (Polesel et al. 2004; Lamb & Vickers 2006).

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[17] ENTER refers to Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank and has since been replaced with ATAR – Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
[18] An RTO is a nationally recognised training provider registered by relevant state authorities to deliver vocational programs. Secondary schools and private providers that meet required criteria for specific vocational courses can apply to state authorities for registration.

The benefits of completing VETiS programs are threefold. Students can exit the secondary school system with a vocational certificate from an RTO or TAFE as well as the VCE or the VCAL. Second, students are entitled to receive recognition of prior learning for units of competency completed at Certificate 1 or 11 level if they continue to undertake further studies at TAFE or RTOs in nationally endorsed courses. Finally VETiS programs are designed to correspond to skills and employment requirements of industry in Victoria (DEECD n.d. b).

School Based Apprenticeship and Traineeship (SBAT) is an option within VETiS where students combine part time paid employment (minimum of 7 hours) with vocational training (minimum averaging 6 hours per week) over a two year period (DEECD n.d. a). A SBAT requires a signed agreement (employer, school and TAFE or RTO) with a specified training plan that is registered with Skills Victoria. SBAT training can lead to gaining a nationally endorsed certificate at II, III or IV level and can be undertaken in addition to VCE or VCAL.

Debates do appear within the literature as to the effectiveness of VETiS in assisting students' transitional needs. It has been argued by Keating (2009) that VETiS still retains connotations of existing "in the shadows of the mainstream academic programs that produce the tertiary entrance rank" (p.44). Keating also claims that VETiS is "typically provided by schools with students from low SES households" (p.44). Within Victoria Keating's claims are corroborated with evidence suggesting that vocational studies during senior secondary school years are favoured more so by students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds or students who resided in non-metropolitan areas (Parliament of Victoria 2009). While this may be the case, young people are taking up VETiS options and this alternative to Year 12 is now well embedded into the Victorian and Australian senior secondary school system with over 90 per cent of secondary schools delivering vocational programs (Lamb & Vickers 2006). During 2011 almost 50,000 students were enrolled in VETiS programs across Victoria (Catholic Education Melbourne n.d.). Of these, 30 per cent were Year 12 students with 25 per cent also participating in VCE (VCAA 2012a).

It has been found that having VETiS options does retain young people at school (Lamb & Vickers 2006) but a debate rages over as to whether VETiS programs lead to employment outcomes. Clarke (2012) argues that VETiS is predominantly targeted at the foundation level of vocational courses or entry level to apprenticeships but students saw it "as a ticket to full-time employment after school without any further investment or participation in education and training" (p. 31) a perception which she declares is incongruent to that of employers notions of VETiS. Whereas other studies consider that VETiS is effective to furthering transitions into vocational studies at TAFE after completing Year 12 and does open doorways to apprenticeships (Lamb & Vickers 2006; Taylor 2004). Unfortunately, determining the long-term outcomes of VETiS are hampered by impoverished data as noted in a recent report compiled by the Victorian-General (Victorian Auditor-General Office 2012). Within this report the Auditor-General's office did note that more students from backgrounds identified as 'at risk' of not completing secondary school were veering towards vocational studies with an increase of student uptake of VETiS by 60 per cent from 2006 to 2011. However, the Auditor-General's office noted that details about the effectiveness of VETiS were difficult to obtain from government sources to the extent that within the report the Auditor-General's office condemned DEECD for not collecting, collating and providing comprehensive data to assist decision makers in terms of determining which vocational strategies have been effective and why. However, VETiS programs provide students with a range of benefits including completing nationally endorsed units of competency that underpin further vocational training, a taste of a particular employment field through participating in workplace training and the opportunity of entry into vocational pathways post Year 12.

4.5   Studies of collaborative processes

Lessons learnt from overseas experiences highlight that interagency strategies do contribute towards developing resilience and two reviews worth noting took place in Lambeth in Britain (Demie 2005) and the other in Ohio in the United States (Anderson-Butcher et al. 2010). In both studies schools function as being the hub of the community, taking a lead role in bringing together agents to enhance students' wellbeing in a way that is culturally and contextually relevant.

Demie (2005) explained that specific legislation to improve health and education outcomes through interagency collaboration has been operating in England and mandated through the *Children Act 2004*. The British Government's approach to the well-being of young people from birth to age 19 involved strategies such as *Every Child Matters* and the *2007 Children's Plan* that aimed to increase resilience through operationalising initiatives such as *Building Stronger Partnerships* (Department for Children, Schools and Family 2010 a & b). The intent of the partnerships was to create a shared vision and improve outcomes for children and young people. The aim of the *Every Child Matters* strategy was to give all young people the support they needed to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve life opportunities, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic wellbeing. The *Children's Plan* aimed to improve educational and health outcomes, reduce offending rates among young people and eradicate child and youth poverty by 2020, thereby contributing to the achievement of the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes. The *Building Stronger Partnerships* initiative related to partnerships between schools and businesses (Department for Children, Schools and Family 2010). Local Area directors were appointed to implement policy strategies. These directors were given the responsibility for establishing and leading projects, which involved the cooperation of partnerships, including public, private, voluntary and community organisations.

In 2005, Demie explored the effectiveness of the strategies using Lambeth Local Education Area as a case study. The question Demie asked was why in the Lambeth Local Education Area (LEA) did Black Caribbean ethnic minority students achieve academic standards above national averages despite scholastic achievements of Black Caribbean students across the country being the lowest when compared to national test outcomes of other minority groups and white British students. Demie (2005, p. 484) noted that "[Lambeth] LEA is one of the most ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse boroughs in Britain". Demie's (2005) appraisal as to why the Lambeth schools did well compared to other schools was that teachers worked at understanding the social struggles of parents and embraced systems that acknowledged parents' backgrounds. Teachers, parents and community bodies then worked together to advance young people's positions in society by drawing in a

range of supports from within and outside of the local community. Demie (2005, p. 497) found that the distinguishing factor of the three secondary schools reviewed in the Lambeth LEA was that "…these schools offer[ed] a rich and varied range of experiences that [were] not random, but [arose] from a systematic and clearly thought through approach by head teachers and staff". Students' grades were attributed to curriculum activity that included: visits out of schools to provide students which a rich experience of possibilities that existed outside of Lambeth; visitors to the school such as well-known celebrities reinforcing the benefits of schooling; and the schools' 'civic' role in strengthening social capital by forming strong links in the community to provide extra-curricular activities. These extra-curricular activities were designed to encourage parents and children to participate in wider networks. Through building up social capital, the Lambeth secondary schools maximised opportunities to familiarise students with numerous cultural and social activities. For instance, the schools used the arts, drama and music, and developed links with artistic and sporting communities in London, such as the Royal Ballet, Royal Festival Hall, the Royal Institution, and English National Opera which enlightened young people's dispositions towards seeing the opportunities that gaining an education had to offer.

Schools in Lambeth worked at successful outcomes for students by: taking a leading role in engaging community membership in academic activities; treating all pupils as potential high achievers regardless of socio-ethnic backgrounds; using imaginative ways to make parents welcome; and listening to pupils and parents to further understand culturally important issues from their perspective. Demie's study also involved ten primary schools but unfortunately, Demie's account did not articulate whether students attending the primary schools transitioned into the three Lambeth secondary schools or whether primary and secondary schools got together to design programming. Nor did her analysis articulate what happen to students post Year 12.

Across the Atlantic, in Ohio, Anderson-Butcher et al. (2010) found that interagency collaboration presented the opportunity for schools to become the "hubs of community engagement and development, helping to unite school boards, the business community, community agencies and governments" (p. 170). This required

that protocols were in place to inform practice between schools, businesses and community providers as well as determine strategies required to achieve outcomes relevant to the social context. In Ohio, projects to support students' wellbeing included: systematic approaches to align after-school programs with homework tutoring opportunities; school boards and leaders working collaboratively with community agents to secure funding for mental health services within schools to cater for students socio-emotional needs; and the generation of community funds to support the employment of school based social workers and transition workers.

Other studies of interagency collaboration have revealed mixed results. In their research van Eyk and Baum (2002) evaluated collaborative strategies across four healthcare agencies in Adelaide, South Australia which resulted in an understanding of why collaborative projects either continued or ceased; why staff commenced work on interagency activities; and the advantages and difficulties which staff encountered. Although collaboration was viewed as being positive by those involved, overall the results indicated community care collaboration was challenging in the areas of building up trust across agencies, philosophical and professional barriers to collaboration, time constraints, project ownership, experience of multidisciplinary work and the lack of funding allocated to implement interagency collaboration.

Tett and partners' (2001) review of Scottish approaches involving schools and community collaboration found teamwork with community groups, community education and voluntary agencies was low and collaboration occurred across only twenty per cent of the schools. Tett and her colleagues concluded that although the intent of the multi-agency approach was to deal with complex social situations, collaboration between the school, other professionals, parents and community agencies was difficult to implement. Constraints to effective collaboration were noted as: lack of time and money; competing professional cultures; conflicting perspectives of parental involvement; and tensions regarding academic achievement verses pupil involvement in the wider community. Hence, unlike the studies reported by Demie (2005) and Anderson-Butcher et al (2010), it appears from the accounts of Tett and partners that the Scottish experience lacked the sharing of common perspectives.

Other difficulties have been expressed in studies of the Swedish system (Dahlstedt 2009). Since the late 1980s, Sweden experienced a shift in government policy from a state funded, welfare regime to partnerships between governmental and non-government agencies, citizens and civil servants, corporations and organisations, schools and parents. The idea of partnering has significantly altered the way that education is governed. The changes implemented in the 1990s introduced a school governing system from a bottom up process through the interaction of teachers, parents, students and players from the local community. However, the expectation was that parents conformed to the principles and fundamental values defined by schools. As noted by Dahlstedt, parents' involvement meant partnering on schools' terms, hence being voiceless contributors rather than having input on decisions. Additionally "the [schools'] officials chose primarily to include individuals they already knew, with whom they had good contacts and whom they judged to be 'reliable' partners" enabling the officials to maintain control over schools' agenda and exclude ideas that differed (Dahlstedt 2009, p. 796). Thus, Dahlstedt's account reinforces that the power holders within the system are inscribing what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) refer to as pedagogic action[19].

4.6   Equality and equity

Educational outcomes and transition to employment, training or further education are no longer regarded as being the sole responsibility of secondary schools. Outcomes and transition, as summed up in The *Melbourne Declaration*, are a shared responsibility between schools "with students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other educational and training providers" together focusing on young Australians becoming successful learners and active citizens (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA) 2008, p.4). However, state and Commonwealth governments need to also assume responsibilities particularly in terms of ensuring that students have equal access to quality schooling and school resources. As argued by Cuervo and Wyn (2012) resource allocation across schools is based on the Australian mantra of neoliberal educational discourse framing equality through formula based provisions (that being

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[19] Pedagogic action was discussed in Chapter Three

funding allocation, staff levels and teacher expertise) regardless of locational, socioeconomic or cultural context. Hence, the current funding model "ignores the qualitative differences in people's starting points" (Cuervo & Wyn 2012, p.100). Thus, students will continue to experience poor quality schooling in certain locations unless funding regimes are altered.

In a commonwealth commission review chaired by Gonski and presented in a document titled *Review of funding for schooling: Final report* which is commonly referred to as the Gonski report (DEEWR 2011b) a finding was that "much of the current underperformance in schools is a result of factors associated with student [disadvantaged] backgrounds" (DEEWR 2011b p.108). An educational system that offers a level playing field is required to resolve the underperformance issues rather than the current model which is seen to be uncoordinated, favouring funding to the private school system, duplicating funding in some areas (such as the chaplaincy program noted in the next section) and not addressing the educational needs of students situated in disadvantaged circumstances (DEEWR 2011b).

Across Australia, students who are educated in the private school system are more likely to gain better ATAR results and gain entry into university than students educated in public schools (Better Education VCE School Ranking 2010). Students educated in the public system in non-disadvantaged areas are more likely to go to university or complete secondary education then young people in disadvantaged areas (Vinson, 2007). But students who are refugees, reside in remote areas, are homeless, have disabilities and come from low socioeconomic backgrounds are least likely to complete secondary school (MCEEDYA 2008; Parliament of Victoria 2009).

Even more noticeable is that students located in regional or rural areas are less likely to go to university than metropolitan students despite gaining the required entry requirements (DEEWR 2010) and students from non-metropolitan areas who do transition into university are more likely to 'drop out' (Parliament of Victoria 2009; Wilson, Lyons & Quinn 2013). Reported literature points to a range of factors as to why less rural or regionally located students transitioned to university including:

distance from university which means that students incur more costs related to living away from home (Parliament of Victoria 2008); relevance of courses being offered (Blakers et al., 2003); belief that a university course would not lead to a rewarding career (James 2000) and familial and community attitudes towards further study (Kilpatrick & Abbot-Chapman 2002).

4.7   Health and wellbeing in schools

Whilst it may be debatable as to whether teachers could ever be completely divorced from supporting young people in need, supportive structures implemented by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) do assist to remove the welfare onus from teachers. For instance, the DEECD website lists a range of strategies that have been implemented into Victorian government secondary schools to support students' health and wellbeing (DEECD 2012a; DEECD n.d. h). Schools have access to funding towards appointing student welfare coordinators to deal with issues such as bullying, non-school attendance, drug problems and depression. Additionally, access to psychologists, guidance officers, and speech pathologists is available through the student support program. Schools are also supported in forming partnerships and retaining relationships with agencies that deal with mental health issues, self-harm and suicide through the school focused youth service.

From a Commonwealth perspective, funding has been made available to secondary schools across Australia upon submission of a tended application for chaplains and/or welfare staff (DEEWR n.d., 2012a; Department of Education and Workplace Relations, n.d.). This funding has been in place since 2010 and overtime has raised considerable ongoing debate (Inside Story 2011; Lee 2013). When first introduced the funding was specifically targeted towards schools employing the services of a chaplain and whilst it is not uncommon for schools to have a chaplaincy service the payment of salaries from Commonwealth funds created concerns. For instance, the role of the chaplain was regarded as unnecessary and a duplication of welfare services that the State school system already provided (Lee, 2013). Secondly, the effectiveness, qualifications of appointed chaplains and the likely promotion of spirituality in what is constitutionally a secular school system were questioned

(Inside Story 2011). Yet it is reported (Hughes & Sims 2009) that chaplains are highly rated by principals as well as families and students who have access to that service. The Commonwealth Government has since changed the funding terms allowing schools to tender for chaplains or welfare staff. The role of the chaplain or welfare worker is to support the wellbeing of students, staff and where required parents and family through providing general personal support (DEEWR 2011a).

4.8   Conclusion

The Commonwealth *Learn and Earn Policy* and Victorian *Youth Guarantee policy* are designed to keep young people from disadvantaged backgrounds within the school system and underpinning these policies is a government mindset that school retention will effectuate pathways to resilience and break the cycle of locational disadvantage. Education policy does have a cross-fields effect, for instance, the implementation of Kirby and Connors recommendations positioning schools as the hub within communities does re-organise strategies regarding the delivery of welfare support within schools and collaborative partnerships between schools, community agents, businesses and government departments.

As noted within this chapter a response to school retention and successful transition out of school is the introduction of LLENs to underpin collaborative partnerships. However, as pointed out, the role of LLENs is to produce strategic programs aimed to support young people at school and during a time of transition. Producing strategic programs is different to developing collaborative partnerships working alongside educational institutions focusing on practical solutions. Collaborative partnerships, as portrayed by Demie (2005) and Anderson- Butcher et al. (2010) require both strategic and pragmatic processes.

The research literature, theoretical position and policy frameworks positioning the basis of the current study reported in this thesis have been presented in Chapters Two to Four. The next chapter details the methodological and procedural approach for exploring resilience and transition.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PROCESS FOR EXPLORING THE LIVED LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

5.0   Introduction

In 1990 Bourdieu wrote the following:

> The objects of thought constructed by social scientists so as to grasp social reality must be based on the objects of thought constructed by the common sense thinking of people who live their daily lives in their social world (Bourdieu 1990a p. 125).

Bourdieu's (1990a) words neatly express my sentiment in undertaking this study of resilience during a time of transition. My role in this study is to piece together the lived lives of young people. The intent of this chapter is to detail the process and methods used to answer the question of what biographical experiences shape the trajectory of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition. Eighteen young people agreed to participate in this research exploring lived lives. They have four things in common: school personnel consider that they are demonstrating resilience; all were of post compulsory school age; all were undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE); and all resided and attend public education institutions in areas that Vinson (2007) found to be disadvantaged. The cohort is not extensive yet the information gathered is rich and provides significant insights into the lived lives of students.

In the introductory chapter I detailed that the current research draws on Bourdieuian (1977, 1984) theory that dismisses the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism and utilises his thinking tools of field, social capital and habitus. I further explained these concepts and tools in Chapter Three. These concepts are relevant to a study of resilience. For instance, resilience studies acknowledge the significance of the interplay of agency and structures (Howard & Johnson, 2000b; Benson, 2003; Edwards, Mumford & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Gore & Eckenrode, 1996; Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch & Ungar, 2005; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Masten, 2001; Masten, 2009; Oswald, Johnson & Howard, 2003; Resnick, 2000; Russo & Boman, 2007; Sanders & Munford, 2007; Scales, 2000; Schoon & Bynner, 2003). From reviewing these studies, and as I argue throughout this thesis, resilience is

evident when young people display forms of agency indicating a capacity to seek out resources for wellbeing and agency. But this also requires that structures and resources be in place to develop that resourcefulness, that being, conditions enabling resilience.

To briefly reiterate, fields are the structuring arenas where activities take place; habitus is the embodiment of biographical experiences that shape attitudes and dispositions that govern the manner in which social engagement takes place; and social capital derives from the opportunities to participate in networked groups in ways that build on cultural and economic capital that students bring with them to education. The primary arena for the current study was the educational field. The educational field included structures such as secondary schools and Technical and Further Education Institution (TAFE). Education policy designed to retain students at school until Year 12 and transition students to employment or further education post school crosses over to practices in other social fields such as industry, social welfare and community.

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the process used for exploring the lived lives of young people. I commence this chapter by detailing the relationship to, and the divergence of, the research detailed in this thesis from the broader Australian Research Council study undertaken at Deakin University. Being mindful not to divulge features that may inadvertently identify schools, locations or participants I deliberately provide a brief overview of each research location and site. This is then followed by a detailed overview of the recruitment strategy and particulars regarding participants. Data collection tools and the process used to gather data are next discussed. After that a detailed explanation of the analytical strategy is provided. Toward the end of this chapter I discuss how I handled validity, reliability, generalizability and ethical considerations.

5.1 Alignment to ARC-linkage research

As noted in the introductory chapter the research reported in this thesis contributed to a broader study undertaken in Victoria, Australia, by Deakin University which was funded through an Australian Research Council – Linkage grant in partnership with

the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, VicHealth and Community Connections (from here on I shall refer to the Deakin project as the ARC project). The ARC project was a longitudinal and cross sectional study of how interagency collaboration supports students and schools identified as demonstrating resilience. The ARC study focused on three transitional stages: early school years (kindergarten transitioning to primary school), middle school years (final year at primary school which in Year 6 transitioning to secondary school) and post compulsory school years (students aged over 17 years while completing VCE transitioning to employment or further study).

My research focus was in the post compulsory transitional period. Whilst the data collected contributed to the ARC project the research methodology of this study addressed the particularities of my research question. This required some modifications to the initial ARC project design such as increasing the age of participants; and revising the student mix to include students who were pursuing the VCE at a TAFE. The age extension meant that older students who were at secondary school studying towards the VCE could also be included into this study. TAFE and TAFE students were included for two reasons. As noted in Chapter Four changes brought about by The Education and Training Reform Amendment (School Age) Act 2009 which was implemented on 1 January, 2010, meant that post Year 10 students could choose an alternative to secondary schools to complete their studies until the minimum school leaving aged which was increased to 17 years in 2010. Hence the timing of the current research meant capturing details about students who had moved into TAFE. Secondly, including TAFE participants meant that young people who chose an alternative to mainstream secondary schooling were also given a voice whereas they often disappear from many school-focused analyses of post compulsory transitions.

5.2   Research locations and sites

This study took place at four sites (three publically funded secondary schools and one TAFE) across three separate locations in Victoria: a Melbourne outer suburb

(Metro) and two regional locations[20] (Regional and Rural). The three locations were selected by the ARC team based on the social indicators of disadvantage as noted by Vinson (2007). Statistically, as displayed in Table 1 there were a number of demographic commonalities and differences across the three locations as well as differences when compared to Victoria overall (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011a, b & c). For instance, one difference across locations is that Metro as a region had a greater percentage of residents not having English as their first language and more parents born overseas than in other locations and indeed one of the highest in the country. A second was that the percentage of people employed part-time in Metro was less when compared to other locations or the whole of Victoria, again possibly a consequence of it being a location of refugee groups. Interestingly Rural had a lower unemployment percentage rate when compared to Victorian wide statistics. However Rural also indicated a higher percentage of people employed part time. Table 1 also shows that across all locations when compared to Victoria wide statistics, the full time employment percentage rate was lower, as was the median weekly wage and the percentage of individuals employed as professionals. Similarities, as reported in *Adolescent Community Profiles* (DEECD, 2010b), were that the Metro, Regional and Rural schools retention rates to Year 12 were lower; more young people in these locations were placed on community orders; the rate of babies born to teenage girls were greater, levels of psychological distress were higher; and students were less likely to feel connected to school as they neared the legal leaving age.

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[20] Definition of regional is based on the Victorian Department of Business and Innovation and defined in the Government Act, 1989.

Table 1   Statistical comparisons across geographic locations & Victoria.

	Metro	Regional	Rural	Victoria
Population	58,778	25,844	11,229	5,354,042
Median age of population	35 years	36 years	40 years	37 years
English only spoken at home	35.2%	78.1%	93.6%	72.4%
Both parents born overseas	76.5%	31.1%	8.9%	38.1%
Unemployment rate	9.7%	10.9%	3.8%	5.4%
Full time employment	57.7%	51.1%	55.6%	59.2%
Part time employment	26.6%	31%	33.5%	29.6%
Occupational status – professionals	12.3%	7.6%	11.6%	22.3%
Medium weekly wage	$1,044	$931	$1164	$1460

Source: ABS 2011a, b & c [21]

5.2.1   Metro and Metro Secondary School

Metro is an outer suburb of Melbourne approximately 35 kilometres away from the central business district. As indicated in Table 1 almost 60000 people resided in Metro and there was a diverse ethnic mix. English was not the main language spoken within most households. Fifty-eight per cent (%) were employed full time and 27 % part time. The unemployment rate was at 9.7 %; much higher than that across Victoria. The most common types of occupations for people who resided in Metro tended to be manual, technical or trade related (ABS, 2011b & c)[22].

In 2007, Metro secondary school (MSS) amalgamated with two nearby secondary schools and new buildings were funded to cater for the 2000 students. This merger meant that MSS had one of the highest student populations when compared to other

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[21] The statistics reported are relevant to the period when this study was undertaken. For instance, students were in Year 12 during 2011.

[22] Note that the reference used does not specifically name the location to protect the identity of schools and participants.

public secondary schools in Victoria. Sixty-six different language backgrounds were represented in the student population and 84 % of the students' first language was not English (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA 2011[23]).

5.2.2 Regional, Regional Secondary School and TAFE

Regional is a suburb of a large regional city located approximately 80 kilometres from Melbourne. At the start of this research Regional had a population of approximately 25,000 of the approximately 200,000 residents in the city. The majority of Regional residents were born in Australia (68.9%). Overseas born population come from North-West Europe, South-East of Europe, and some from Asia, America, and Africa. At the time of this study the unemployment rate at 10.9% was well above the Victorian average of 5.4% (refer Table 1). Regional residents tended to be employed as labourers, technicians, trade workers and machine operators. Those employed in positions such as managers or professionals tally 7.6 per cent, well below the Victorian average (Data extracted from ABS 2011 b & c[24]).

Until 2010, Regional secondary school (RSS) was known by a different name and catered exclusively for Years 11 and 12. It also offered services to keep young parents in school. After 2010 RSS become part of a clustered network of schools as a result of local restructuring of provision arising from the Kirby and Connors reviews[25]. During the time of data collection all public primary and secondary schools in Regional and a neighbouring suburb were re-structured into one mega school with multiple campuses for early, middle and senior year levels. School staff were relocated throughout the area. RSS became the Years 9 to 12 campus for 380 students (ACARA 2011[26]).

The Technical and Further Education Institution (TAFE) is in the same regional town as RSS approximately10 kilometres away from RSS. The TAFE has a long

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[23] Note that the reference used does not specifically name the location to protect the identity of schools and participants
[24] As per note 16
[25] Detailed in Chapter Four
[26] As per note 16

established history in the region and enrols approximately 19000 students. It offered VCE and certificate to advanced diploma level courses. It was also the only TAFE available to young people within a fifty kilometre radius however smaller Registered Training Organisations also offered some courses similar to the TAFE (ACARA 2011[27]).

5.2.3   Rural and Rural Secondary School

Rural is approximately 150 kilometres from Melbourne and 70 kilometres from Regional. As indicated in Table 1 of the 11,000 people residing in Rural the majority were born in Australia and those born overseas primarily came from North West Europe. Rural is predominantly a farming community (dairy, sheep, cattle and pigs) and other forms of employment include technical and trade, and service industries required within the local community.

In 2008 the technical and high schools amalgamated, after significant community upheaval, to become Rural Secondary School (RUSS) catering for 700 students. RUSS received funding for new school buildings and in 2011 the school relocated to a new site positioned to take advantage of a newly developed community precinct. The community precinct housed Rural library and had the capacity to house other community based structures (Data extracted from ABS 2011 b & c; ACARA)[28]. The aim was to integrate the school into the community through shared facilities such as library.

5.3   Participants' recruitment strategy

Three sets of research participants contributed to this study: students, school staff and Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) executive officers (EO). School staff included those who had responsibility for teaching, administering, or the welfare needs of VCE students; and LLEN executive officers included those who had responsibilities for Metro, Regional and Rural.

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[27] As per note 16
[28] As per note 16

5.3.1   Recruitment of schools

Telephone discussions were followed by an emailed Plain Language Statement (PLS)[29] detailing the ARC project, proposed methodology, line of questioning and consent form. These documents were forwarded to the principals of the three selected secondary schools and the relevant TAFE executive who had directorate responsibilities for VCE. All gave their approval to conduct this research within their institutions. A follow up face to face meeting was organised with the principals as part of the wider ARC project and the TAFE executive to further clarify any questions and so that pragmatic arrangements could be organised to conduct data collection. The pragmatic arrangements included the appointment of a school contact person (SCP) who liaised between myself and participants to organise the dissemination and collection of PLSs, interview dates and times, and suitable spaces within the school for interviews.

5.3.2   Recruitment of school staff

Principals and TAFE executive were asked to identify and invite school personnel who had responsibility for teaching or welfare needs of VCE students to participate in this research. A PLS addressed to school personnel detailing the ARC project, proposed methodology, line of questioning and consent form was left with principals and TAFE executive to be given to school personnel. The SCP at each institution returned completed forms. All school personnel who agreed to participate were interviewed. School personnel who participated in this study included teachers, social/welfare workers, career teachers, and chaplains. All three principals agreed to be interviewed as part of this research however the TAFE executive declined. As detailed in Table 2 more staff from MSS agreed to participate. At RSS no teachers agreed to participate despite many efforts made by this researcher and the SCP at RSS. No reason was offered as to why this was the case but the supposition at the time was that teachers were overwhelmed with the changes occurring at RSS due to the re-structuring of schools and re-allocation of staff in Regional.

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[29] These PLS differed to those given to teachers, young people and parents

Table 2   School staff and LLEN executive officers

School site	School staff				LLENs	Total
	Principals	**Teachers**	**Welfare/Career**	**Chaplain**		
MSS	1 (male)	9 (7 females & 2 males)	5 (females)	1 (male)	1 (male)	17
RSS	1 (male)		1		1* (female)	2
TAFE		1 (female)	1 (female)			2
RUSS	1 (Male)	5 (3 female & 2 males)	1 (female)	1 (male)	1 (male)	9
Total	3	15	8	2	3	31

* TAFE comes under the auspice of the Regional LLEN executive officer

5.3.3 Recruitment of students

This study was based upon the life experiences of young people who were regarded to be demonstrating resilience. However, as noted in Chapter Two, determining which students display resilience is a contentious issue. It is not simply a matter of students doing academically well. Rather resilience requires an understanding of the positioning of young people within their context (Bottrell 2007; Ungar et al. 2008a). The method used in this study for selecting students was to ask school staff to identify students since as noted by Waxman, Gray and Padron (2004) school personnel understand the local context and through continuous contact know their students intimately over time. There is however disagreement within the literature as to whether teachers do recognise resilience in alignment with 'at risk' indicators or whether teachers consider students as being resilient because they are doing academically well. For instance, Green, Oswald and Spears (2007) found in their study that teachers appeared to be describing students as demonstrating resilience because they appeared competent. However these students did not appear to be experiencing adversity. This factor was explored in the current study.

School and TAFE personnel who agreed to participate in this research were asked to discuss how they understood resilience and to identify VCE students of post compulsory school age upon their understanding of resilience. Post being interviewed schools and TAFE staff decided upon which students were to be invited

to participate (hence not in the presence of the researcher) and student names were forwarded to SCPs. Each SCP was provided with PLS forms to be forwarded to identified students and/or parents to complete (parental consent in addition to student consent was required for students under the age of 18) which detailed the ARC project, proposed methodology, line of questioning and consent form.

As indicated in Table 3, the student numbers were not evenly spread by gender or location.   The study attracted 14 females and 4 males. In total seven students were from Regional (3 TAFE & 4 RSS), three from Rural and eight from Metro. The three female students from RSS were mothers and two were aged over 18 years (1 x 21years; 1 x 28 years). All Metro students identified with a non-Australian cultural background and one male student was aged 19 years.

Table 3　　　　　Students by location, gender and age bracket

School site	Males	Female	Total	Age range in years - start of VCE
MSS	3	5	8	17 – 19
RSS	1	3	4	17 – 28
RUSS		3	3	17
TAFE		3	3	17-18
Total	**4**	**14**	**18**	

5.3.4   Recruitment of LLEN Executive officers.

The researcher telephoned each of the LLEN EOs to explain the ARC study and forwarded a PLS which detailed the ARC project, proposed methodology, line of questioning and consent form. All invited LLEN EOs agreed to be interviewed.

5.3.5 Recruitment of parents

Parents were also invited to participate however not one parent accepted. At all schools I was informed by SCPs that this would be the case seeing that parents rarely attended the school or participated in school events.

5.4   Collecting data

Metaphorically, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur, someone who uses a diverse range of available tools and materials to create an understanding of a particular perspective. As the bricoleur of this study I explored resilience and transition through a social ecological approach. As noted in Chapter Two, through employing a social ecological approach the definition of risk and positive outcomes are shaped by the conditions of possibility within the local community. The aim of the research was therefore to understand both the context and cultural backgrounds of those being studied through using a variety of data collection tools.

The process used for collecting data from students included: narrative inquiry using semi-structured interviewing templates; eco social network maps whereby relationships were plotted within a grid framed template; and the completion of Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL) 8D questionnaires which provided measurements of mental and physical health. School and LLEN participants were interviewed using a semi structured interview template. Process and tools are further described below.

5.5   Tools used for student data collection

5.5.1   Narrative inquiry

Data was collected from young people using narrative inquiry (Gubrium & Holstein 2009) supported by a semi-structured interview template. Narratives provided opportunities to gather biographical information on: how young people reworked their thoughts over time; how thinking turned into action; how social connections were used; and what participants did to mediate difficulties. The use of narratives captured with the assistance of semi-structured interviewing was selected for the following four reasons. First, as noted by Bryman (2004 p. 543), semi-structured

questioning, whilst providing a general interview guide, allows flexibility to vary the sequence of questioning and to "ask further questions in response to what is seen as significant responses". Second, semi structured interviewing offers the flexibility to approach each participant differently whilst still covering the same content (Noor 2008). This is particularly important when interviewing people from different cultural backgrounds where English is not their first language which was the case for several young participants. Third, semi-structured interviews', being open questions, give participants the opportunity to pause, consider their answers, and to add their own criteria to qualify their responses. Finally, as noted by Bold (2011) a narrative approach provides the flexibility to detour and follow a line of inquiry that may not have been previously considered by the researcher, therefore allowing new insights to develop. In the current research prompts were framed to explore how biographic experiences shaped thoughts, attitudes and actions; and to explore the strategies employed to acquire, navigate and negotiate resources relevant to maintaining resilience and assisting transition. The prompts, whilst guiding interview sessions were not used as discrete questions. Rather the prompts were used to ensure consistency in gathering information about young people's experiences and participation in school/ family/community life. The prompts aimed to assist young people in discussing the processes they used to engage socially, their future intentions, access to resources, the ways in which they negotiated pathways and systems they accessed and used to maintain wellbeing.

5.5.2 Eco Social Network Maps

As noted by, Colarossi and Mercier (1996) research applications include comparing and analysing relationship patterns and issues across and within families, as well as analysing aspects of social systems outside the family. In addition to narratives, an eco social network map (ESNM) was used to determine young people's social networks and changes to social networks over time (refer to Appendix One). The ESNM utilised for this research was adapted from the MacKillop Family Services (2004) family transition project and permission to use this resource was accessed by the ARC project. As a visual tool these maps provide useful information for understanding relationships with other individuals, communities and institutions (Jesuit Social Services 2009; Hartman 1995). Hence, eco social network maps

together with narrative inquiry enabled the opportunity to explore the meaning given to social relationships.

In this study the ESNM comprised of a series of inner and outer circles divided into four quadrants that were labelled peers, close friends, family and professionals (schools, welfare community). The young person was positioned in the centre circle and young people plotted people or organisations in relationship to significance; those positioned closer to the centre were those of more significance in the young person's life. Young people provided their own definitions in terms of the meanings for family, close friends, peers and professionals. It was up to students to determine their own meaning for 'significant' and no restrictions were made in terms of how many people or organisations were plotted or where these were plotted on the ESNM. As students positioned the plots they were questioned about the positioning. Dialogue during the plotting of ESNMs was taped and transcribed.

5.5.3   Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL) 8D questionnaire

The Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL) 8D questionnaire (Richardson, Khan & Iezzi 2010) was used to measure health and wellbeing compared to population norms. The AQoL 8D measured dimensions of wellbeing related to physical and mental wellbeing such as independent living, use of senses and experience of pain; and psycho-social wellbeing relevant to mental health, happiness, self-worth, coping and relationships. These indicators relate well to the 'personal qualities' of young people demonstrating resilience as reported in studies by Howard and Johnson (2000b) detailed in Chapter Two. Permission to use the AQoL 8D questionnaire was accessed by the ARC project.

The AQoL 8D was selected as an instrument of choice for this study because it was easy to administer taking between 2 to 6 minutes to complete, relevant to the age of the target cohort and tests of convergent validity demonstrate that this instrument reflects the findings of other well-known instruments that are widely regarded as reflecting wellbeing status relevant to health (Monash University n.d. a).

5.6   Student data collection

Collecting data from students took place during November 2010 to August 2012. During this time students were interviewed, completed two ESNMs and two AQoL 8D surveys. In total 65 interviews were conducted with students. Of these, 39 interviews were conducted with young people whilst completing VCE and 26 interviews when students had left secondary school or TAFE.

5.6.1   Student data collection during VCE

The interviews conducted at school were between 30 minutes to 60 minutes in duration and took place during November 2010 until August 2011. Within school interviews were set up by SCPs and were timed to coincide with free periods so that young people did not miss out on class time. On all occasions the researcher in a room allocated by the institutions interviewed young people individually. A professional person appointed by the ARC project transcribed transcripts of taped interviews. Details of interview times and dates are located in Appendix Two.

Ten students (8 Metro, 1 Rural & 1 Regional) were interviewed towards the final weeks of Year 11[30] and the other eight students at the start of the VCE. The timing of the first interviews was dependent on schools selecting students, distributing PLSs and students or their parents completing the consent forms. During this interview students were asked to complete the first eco social network map and whilst doing so discussed the rationale behind the way they plotted individuals or organisations. Four students (3 Metro and 1 Regional) were unable to complete the ESNM during the first interview due to insufficient time so I returned when a mutual time could be arranged for this to occur.

The next school based interview occurred during Term III. These interviews were timed to not interfere with Term IV examination preparations, which may have deterred young people from participating in interviews. One participant declined the second interview, citing concerns that allocating time to be interviewed took her

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[30] In Victoria VCE is generally taken over two years (Year 11 and Year 12). To not confuse the reader I have referred to the first year of VCE as Year 11.

away from completing schoolwork. During this interview students were asked to complete the second eco social network maps.

At the first interview the technique used to engage young people in dialogue commenced by asking them to 'tell me a bit about yourself'. This first question was deliberately framed to open the gateway to biographical information. Subsequent questions were not sequenced since the intent of the design was to follow a natural conversational flow. A semi-structured interview template was used to guide questioning. The focus of the first interview was on collecting narratives about lived lives. Amongst a range of questions young people were asked to talk about personal difficulties, seeking resources and services, aspirations for the future, and familial, school and community life. In subsequent school based interviews questions were asked to re-affirm information previously provided and students were also asked questions about their current circumstances and future aspirations. Students were also asked if I could contact them post VCE. All agreed and either gave me their telephone number or email address.

Engaging young people in dialogue was not difficult. A relaxed language style and friendly approach was deliberately used. This technique was successful and participants provided a wealth of information about issues and experiences. As noted previously semi structured interviewing techniques were used supported by an interview template. Students shared their stories openly and provided a wealth of information about their life. I put this down to the PLS given to students and parents being clearly detailed as to what the study was about and why they have been invited to participate. For instance, student PLS forms contained statements such as: 'your voice is important for us to understand how people cope and are successful in their lives'; 'you are invited to participate in this research because you have been identified as someone who has demonstrated resilience'; 'we are looking to interview you and other significant people who are identified as contributing to the development of resilience'; and 'we want to talk to you about your family, school and community and their role in supporting your resilience'.

AQoL 8D questionnaires were administered twice when students were undertaking VCE. The first time was during Term One and the second in Term Three of the school year. Names and details were not noted on questionnaire and results were collated across all groups. AQoL 8 D questionnaires were completed at the end of interview sessions and not in the presence of the researcher. Completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher and unsighted responses were placed into an envelope to be analysed later.

5.6.2 Data collection post VCE

Of the 17 students who were interviewed just prior to VCE examinations I was able to contact 15 when VCE results were officially made available to students. Most students were contacted on the day the results were announced in December 2011. This interview was of a short duration of approximately 10 minutes and conducted over the phone for 13 participants and emails for two participants. It was up to the students to determine how they wished to be contacted. Two students from Metro were unable to be contacted (one was a student who had informed the researcher that she would be overseas; and another young person had become disengaged from his family during VCE). For 11 of the 13 students the phone calls were taped and transcribed. The other two participants returned calls when access to the recorder was not available. For these two students notes were taken immediately after the call. Student discussed their VCE results however not all students revealed their grades. Based upon the results students were asked what their intentions were for the following year.

Post VCE interviews number two and/or three

One student from RSS contacted me March in 2012. He had commenced university at the same campus on which I was located. He wanted to tell me his story about getting into university. He was interviewed in my office. The interview was taped and transcribed. The final interview was conducted during July/August 2012 approximately eight months after students completed VCE. Ten students were interviewed. Four students elected to be interviewed face to face (3 x TAFE; 1 x RSS); two by email (1 x Metro; 1 x RUSS) and four by phone (2 x Metro; 2 x RSS). At this interview students discussed their life after VCE. Telephone interviews were

generally around 15 minutes and face to face interviews were generally an hour long. Three of the face to face interviews (all TAFE students) were at a cafe chosen by young people. All cafes were quiet at the time of interviews. The other interview was in my office at Deakin University (RSS student who was not also studying at Deakin). All interviews were taped and transcribed.

5.7 Interviews school staff and LLEN EOs

To explore resources and processes that support resilience and transition this research interviewed school staff (principal, teachers, welfare officers and chaplains) and LLEN executive officers. The process used was semi-structured interviews and two sets of interview prompts guided the process. Prompts for school staff included questions about characteristics of young people demonstrating resilience, their understanding of issues facing young people, interagency collaborations, school and staff approaches for supporting resilience, links with parents and networks with other organisations. The prompts guiding interviews with LLEN executive officers focused on the role of the centre, community based strategies that supported resilience, the challenges facing local youth and interagency collaboration.

In total 14 interviews were conducted with 29 school staff and 3 LLEN executive officers. The researcher participated in all interviews. School staff were interviewed either individually or in groups (refer Table 4) during 2010 to 2011 depending on school time tabling schedules. Interview dates and times were set up via the SCP. All school personnel were interviewed at their respective schools. All LLEN executive officers were interviewed individually in their offices during 2011. The interviews with school staff and LLEN executive officers generally took an hour and a semi-structured interview guide was used to support the interview process. Interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed by an independent person allocated by Deakin University. The researcher reviewed transcribed texts and amended any errors.

Table 4   School staff by number of participants in each interview session

School locations	Nos of participants interviewed Alone	Number of participants in pairs	Number of participants in groups of 3	Number of participants in groups of 4	Total number people interviewed	Total number of transcripts
Metro	2	2 (n=4)	2 (n=6)	1 (n=4)	16	7
Regional	2				2	2
Rural	1		1 (n=3)	1 (n=4)	8	3
TAFE	2				2	2
Total					**28**	**14**

5.8   Analytical Strategy

The interview prompts used in this research were designed to gather an understanding of school and community experiences from the perspectives of young people, school staff and LLENs EOs. Thematic analysis (TA) was a medium used to unravel young people's biographic experiences and patterned information from school staff and LLENs executives officers TA was used because it complements semi-structured interview techniques (Aronson, 1994; Atkins, 1984; Boyatzis, 1998; Schmidt, 2004) and because of its flexibility when compared to other approaches (Braun & Clark, 2006). For instance, TA is not constrained by confined parameters as found in approaches to conversational analysis that dictate precise formulas and demarcations as to what does and does not get included as narrative (Labov 1972; Patterson 2008).

5.8.1   Using thematic analysis

In developing themes Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phased process was followed: familiarisation with the data; coding; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes and writing up themes. The first step, namely, familiarisation with the collected data, involved reviewing the transcribed data several times and becoming intimate with the details. This first step also served other purposes. For instance, it was necessary to be thoroughly familiar with the data when re-interviewing students so that changes in their lives could be discussed and

discourse anomalies between interviews clarified; and reporting to the ARC project team about preliminary findings at team meetings.

The second step involved coding the collected data. The process used was primarily what Braun and Clarke (2013, p.207) refer to as 'complete coding'. They note that complete coding involves identifying '*anything* and *everything*[31] of interest or relevance to answering the research question 'within the entire dataset' (p.206). As Braun and Clarke (2013 p. 207) note a 'separation between semantic and latent codes is not pure; in practice codes can and do have both elements'. The process used in this research included both 'researcher-derived coding' utilising Bourdieuian theoretical tools of field, habitus and social capital and topic knowledge to guide coding and 'data derived codes' mirroring the semantic meaning of participants' language. Figure.1 details an example of how the data was translated into codes.

Data	Codes
Researcher: *To begin with can you just tell me a bit about yourself?*	
Natalie (TAFE student): *I dropped out of high school in 2008 and for a whole year I didn't know what to do with myself.*	**High school unrewarding**
And then the next year I got involved in this [named program] and it's for people that have like depression and stuff and try and get back out into the world and stuff.	**Accessed community resource**
And I wanted to do VCE but I was too afraid but she, the person that, helped me get back into VCE. So that's why I'm here this year.	**No longer afraid – feels safe**
Ever since coming here I've felt much better and I have more goals now. I want to go to uni.	**TAFE rewarding experience** **Pictures life post VCE**

Figure 1   Example of coding

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[31] Italics used by Braun and Clarke

The example provided in Figure.1 was coded in conjunction with the rest of the data extracted from Natalie's interviews where she indicated not fitting in at high school and fearing the possibility of being rejected by peers at the TAFE Institution.

The pragmatic process for coding entailed using the Review function on Microsoft Word which is a suitable medium for TA (Braun & Clarke 2013). This involved highlighting texts relevant to the research question and generating codes which I noted in side columns for all transcripts. Identified codes were then transferred to excel several sheets and rearranged into themes. Excel sheets were generated for three datasets: students, school staff and LLENs[32].

The third phase involved searching for meaningful patterns amongst the codes transferred to the excel sheet and generating preliminary themes which Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) refer to as candidate themes. This involved combining coded data that had similar meanings and were relevant to the research question. For example, referring back to the coding example in Figure 1 stemming from student data across sites were issues related to physical and/or emotional wellbeing and the acknowledgement that students feel safe at school. Grouped together the re-occurring codes come together under the theme 'School a safe haven'. Themes are further discussed in Chapter Six.

The fourth phase reviewed the candidate themes within the data sets to ensure relevancy and the emergence of a storyline aligned to the research question. Through undertaking this process it became apparent that some candidate themes could be collapsed and others needed refining. In the fifth phase I developed definitions and named each theme. The final phase involved synthesizing the analytical information in relation to the existing literature.

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[32] I did investigate Nvivo as an option but decided against it for three reasons: a) familiarity with the process I used; b)I had to spend precious time learning a new program; and c) using Nvivo there was no value add; the same results are achieved.

5.8.2 Analysis of AQoL 8D questionnaires

Responses to the AQoL 8D were analysed with the assistance of an ARC team member who is an experienced statistician (Magnus & Carter n.d.). The data were entered into Excel, verified for accuracy of data entry then scored with the SPSS algorithm provided on the AQoL website (AQoL n.d.). The distributions of the scores for the first and second assessment were then compared to age relevant Australian population norms using t-tests.

5.8.3 Analysis of Eco social network maps

Eco social network maps provided the opportunity to visually explore changes in young people's lives. These maps were analytically considered when deciphering individual stories as well as exploring collective patterns for social capital. To explore collective information eco social network maps were collated into two sets of data per cohort: Eco Social Network Map 1 (ESNM 1); and Eco Social Network Map 2 (ESNM 2). ESNM 1 refers to plotted maps gathered at the start of VCE and ESNM 2 towards the end of VCE. The visual impact created by this type of analysis provided the avenue to compare the overall relationship patterns over time within locations. This analysis is used to highlight and complement data collected from student interviews.

5.8.4 Interagency activity

In determining patterns of interagency activity that support resilience and transition the analysis followed the argument put forward by Kirby (Victoria DEET & Kirby 2000) who emphasised a need for all government levels, industry and voluntary agencies to work collaboratively with schools. Organisations that school personnel and LLENs EO specifically named were grouped into one of the following categories: not for profit organisation (NPO); business enterprise; government department (which included local, state or federal level); or education sector (schools and school networks). Information provided the researcher's knowledge of organisations as well as website home pages of organisations named by school staff and LLEN EOs assisted in determining category allocation. Vague or generalised references by participants were not categorised. Trends noted were then noted to assess what types of interagency activities were occurring at locations.

5.9 Validity, reliability and Generalizability

As noted by Creswell (2009)

> Viability means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (p. 190).

As such the structures for validity, reliability and generalizability were established prior to undertaking the research and further reviewed during the colloquium confirmation process as required by Deakin University processes. For this research internal viability was ensured via triangulation of the data (multiple interviews with participants, focus groups, interviews with teachers and community workers, eco social network maps, AQoL 8D) and the long-term engagement with participants that gave the researcher an in-depth understanding of resilience and issues within and across social contexts. Multiple interviews with students provided the researcher with the opportunity to verify information collected during the first interview. The AQoL 8D provided the opportunity to verify that selection of students by school staff. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to check for accuracy and clarity of interpretation. Being an ARC study the findings were also scrutinised by team members and a research fellow. Reliability measures included checking transcripts for obvious mistakes make during transcriptions and constantly comparing codes during data coding process. The richness of the text within this thesis and coding descriptors found in the next chapter are included as evidence to verify reliability. The intent of this research was not to generalise findings to places or people outside of the current study. Hence the descriptions and themes developed are relevant to the context of the specific sites and locations.

5.10 Research notes

It is argued that when data for analysis is only extrapolated from the narrator's text (Labov 1972) anything occurring within one's environment is dismissed seeing that such experiences are outside the prescribed formula as to what constitutes narrative research warranting analysis (Patterson 2008; Squire 2008). However, reviewing only the narrative text limits information and as noted Gubrium and Holstein (2009, p. xv), results in 'strip[ping] narratives of their social organization and social

interactional dynamics'. In order to fully understand young people's narratives the 'need to know the details and mediating conditions of narrative occasions' (Holstein & Gubrium 2011, p.349) was considered important.

Throughout the research I noted information that was relevant during the interview process, not in a systematic way rather in note form that I attached to transcripts later. I documented certain occurrences that were not captured on audiotape, for instance I noted interruptions that occurred during the interviews and why. These notes included information such as one student stopping the recording to yell expletives at another student, whether participants were waiting to be interviewed or whether they were late, distracting activities during the interviews (school bells, announcements, knocks on doors), students requesting to be interviewed away from other students and why; my impressions of the local communities, emails to and from schools, and my feelings and personal reflections on what I witnessed.

Research notes were not analysed in any particular way. The purpose of the notes was to record anything that occurred during interview sessions that was unusual. As such the notes are used as highlights throughout the thesis in *italicised blue script and dated* to give the reader a feel for my impressions of a particular situation and what was happening at a school.

5.11   Ethical considerations

5.11.1 Ethics committee approval

The initial applications for ethics approval was submitted by the ARC project team to Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department (DU-HREC) of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Victoria. This application covered all three levels of the ARC project (early school years, middle school years and post compulsory school years). Approval to proceed was granted by DU-HREC on 12 February, 2010 and DEECD on 11 March, 2010. My appointment to the project commenced on 1 March 2010.

An amendment to the ethics application was submitted to DU-HREC and granted on 9 March, 2011 to increase the age requirements for the post compulsory group[33] and to add the TAFE as another cohort for the post compulsory school years. TAFE also required other amendments: PLS forms to specifically include my name as the researcher; and the removal of any reference within the PLS form for young people to be observed at the institution.

5.11.2 Non observance of students at school

Initially the research design also included observations of students at school and whilst schools and students agreed for observations to take place I believed that ethically this would impact on other students within the school who were not part of this research. At all secondary schools and TAFE I was made aware that more students were invited to participate than those who took up the offer. Clearly a number of students did not want to be involved in the project. For instance, one school had invited 23 potential participants but only three accepted; at another school over 40 students were identified but only eight accepted. There were also instances when parents informed the schools that they did not want their son or daughter to participate and although I would not be recording, nor reporting or analysing these students' activities I would inadvertently be observing their behaviour.

5.12 Conclusion

Narratives obtained through semi-structured interviews worked well and provided tremendous insight into the lived lives of young people. Young people frankly talked about a range of issues related to money, family, physical and mental wellbeing, estrangement from parents, accessing support, experiences of school, community and social life and future aspirations. There were added bonuses within this research. The data plotted on the ESNMs painted a picture of the way that social networks operate in young people's lives over time. The interviews with school staff and LLEN personnel provided firsthand information about difficulties facing young people and structures operating to support resilience and transition within locations. The

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[33] At one secondary school young people who were parents wanted to participate and have their stories heard

longitudinal approach allowed for the verifying and clarifying of information between interviews; and the exploration of changes in young people's lives over time.

CHAPTER SIX: THE PRELUDE TO STUDENTS' LIVED LIVES

6.0   Introduction

The current study is about the lived lives of young people of post compulsory school age who a) reside and attend schools in disadvantaged locations, b) are studying towards the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and c) are demonstrating resilience. Complementing students' narratives are interviews with school staff and Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) executive officers (EO) who provide details as to how individual schools and communities position strategies to promote resilience and assist students' transition post VCE. This chapter provides a backdrop to the remaining five chapters. In the following four chapters more detailed analysis of students' experiences at each different site are presented. The final chapter draws the findings together and summarises the contribution that the research reported in this thesis provides to advancing knowledge. In this chapter I commence by detailing the adversities faced by students in this study and the results of the AQoL survey. I then detail the themes extracted from interview data.

6.1   Protecting the identity of schools and participants

The following pseudonyms have been used throughout to this thesis to protect the identity of school sites and participants. The three secondary schools are referred to as Metro Secondary School (MSS), Regional Secondary School (RSS) and Rural Secondary School (RUSS) indicating the location in which each school is situated. The Regional Technical and Further Education institution is referred to as TAFE.

Snapshots introducing individual students are presented in Appendix Four. Each student has been given a unique pseudonym created by the researcher. As per convention a letter of the alphabet following the year of interview is used to differentiate multiple interviews during the same year. Teachers are referred to as Mr or Ms to note gender followed by a letter (for example Ms A) and identifying characteristics such as the acronym for the secondary school or TAFE or focus group allocation (refer to Appendix Three). Welfare officers for RSS and TAFE are referred to as Welfare Officer or WO with the acronym for the secondary school or

TAFE. However MSS had multiple welfare officers who participated within group interviews hence in this case the participants have been allocated Ms or Mr to indicate gender followed by a letter. Principals are referred to as principals with the acronym for the secondary school. Local Learning and Employment (LLEN) executive officers are referred to as LLEN EOs with the acronym for the location. Details of pseudonyms are also located in Appendices Two and Three.

6.2   Adversities

4 May 2011   I was so wrong

I have now completed the first round of interviews with students and I am indeed overwhelmed with the magnitude of information that students were willing to share. I was somewhat naive at the start of this study thinking that the indicators for adversity would only entail the disadvantaged location and scarcity of resources within home, schools and/or community. This could not have been further from the truth. There was so much occurring in the lives of these students. I believe that my decision to adopt a narrative qualitative approach complemented by the eco social network maps provided students with the vehicle to candidly voice and share important experiences about their lives.

As noted in Chapter One resilience is commonly defined as positive adaptation despite exposure to adversity in relation to significant threat (Campbell-Sills et al. 2006; Luthar et al. 2006; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright 2009; Waxman et al. 2004). However, what 'demonstrating resilience' means is contentious, particularly in terms of interpreting the meaning of threat and adaptation. The strategy used in the current study to overcome this difficulty was to ask school personnel who also were participants in this research to nominate and invite VCE students to participate in this study. School personnel determined the meaning of resilience from a contextual perspective. Considering that disadvantaged locations was the rationale for determining which educational institutions participated in this study staff could have easily premised resilience in terms of academic outcomes with location being seen as the adversity in students' lives. However this was not the case. School personnel moved away from focusing solely on academic ability as a precursor for resilience and nominated students with varying abilities and diverse life stories.

Student interviews revealed a multiplicity of adversities being experienced. The results of this research hence supported Waxman, Gray and Padron's (2004) findings that school staff can select students as participants for resilience studies and did not support the findings of Green, Oswald and Spears (2011) who found that teachers assumed students to be demonstrating resilience because they were competent but were not able to articulate what risks students faced.

As detailed in Table 5 students in this study were facing various adversities. In terms of health five students across three sites suffered from depression and of these three young people had attempted suicide. Seven students discussed being at some time victims of bullying at school and two students experienced bullying whilst this study was taking place. Five students were formally disengaged from school. Six students 18 years of age or younger were not living with their parents at some time during their VCE year. Some students resided in abusive situations and others in larger size families. Money was an issue with many young people and/or their parents being on welfare benefits. The information contained in Table 5 will be revisited in subsequent chapters where reviews of sites will be further analysed.

Table 5   Difficulties facing young people

		Suffered from depression	Suicide attempt	Physical Health issue	Bullied at school	Victim of physical assault within the community	Not living with parents during VCE	Limited family income	Familial health issues	Teenage parent	Arrival to Australia < 10 years	Four or more children in family	Parents with limited English	Young person or their parent(s) on income support	Disengaged with former secondary school	Resides in abusive situations
Metro*	Ana							X	X					X		
	Blanca							X				X	X	X		
	Connie							X				X				
	Dani															
	Elana	X			X							X				
	Tony						X	X			X	X				
	Will				X	X	X	X							X	X
	Yohan							X			X					
TAFE*	Janie	X			X										X	
	Leah	X	X				X								X	
	Natalie	X	X		X		X	X	X					X	X	X
Regional*	Helena	X	X							X				X	X	
	Gabby				X		X	X						X	X	X
	Fiona				X			X	X					X	X	
	Zac				X			X								
Rural*	Mandy						X		X			X				
	Penny			X												
	Olanda											X				

*Students are grouped by location

6.3   AQoL 8D results

Despite the numerous difficulties faced by students the AQoL 8D survey results indicated that as a cohort the selected students fall within population norms for the self reporting of physical and mental wellbeing at the start of VCE (Year 12[34]) as well as in Term III of the school year. The mean utility score at the start of VCE was 0.78 (95% CI[35] 0.69 to0.87) and in Term III was 0.82 (95% CI 0.72 to 0.90). The AQoL 8D age relevant population norm was 0.74 (95% CI 0.70 to 0.77). This meant that during Term I and Term III of the VCE school year young people reported their quality of life as being positive on all eight dimensions targeted by the AQoL 8D questionnaires: independent living, happiness, mental health, coping, relationships, self-worth, pain and physical senses (refer to Chapter Four for an overview of AQoL 8D). While participant scores when compared to population norm was slightly higher for both reporting periods there were no significant differences. Hence, as a cohort, students who participated in this research appeared to fall within the Australian population norm for AQoL 8 D utility scores. Additionally comparison of students' scores over the two periods did not reveal significant changes in self-reporting of mental and health wellbeing over time.

6.4   Themes

What experiences shape the trajectory of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition was the question that guided the analysis. Seven themes emerged from the analysis. These themes were titled as follows: *Social connectedness, VCE is insufficient, School a safe haven, Success equals wellbeing, Money matters, Collaborative synergies aid resilience and transition,* and *LLEN an unidentified strategic linchpin*. A description of each theme is given in this section with examples from interviews to highlight connections.

6.4.1   Social connectedness

The theme titled 'social connectedness' was about the multiplicity of social networks, which included people and organisations, that provided avenues for young people to call upon for support, build social connections and experience ways of

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[34] Note that VCE is undertaken during Year 12 and that students do refer to it as 'Year 12'.
[35] CI = confidence interval

engaging conducive to sociability. Critical to social connectedness were social relationships that provided opportunities for students to express feelings, thoughts, desires and future intentions without fear of ridicule, rejection or judgement as well as the availability of structures located within communities where students could socialise and experience life outside of family.

~ Family

The meaning of family did not necessarily require a genetic connection. Young people defined the meaning of family in their own terms and in doing so extended the meaning beyond the nuclear family unit. In this study young people included extended family members, step parents, god-parents, others residing in the family household (for instance siblings' partners) and current partners within their definition of family. Family life included participating in family functions, attending church, enjoying recreational and social activities as well as engaging in dialogue about a range of issues including schooling, employment, sexuality and drugs.

Families were sources of social networks and many students spoke about friendships and/or social relationships being extended or established with others through family connections. For instance Mandy (Rural student) who was studying a traineeship that required her to undertake block training in Melbourne was able to secure accommodation in Melbourne through her sister's friend.

Many students highlighted seeking support from their mothers:

> I tell my mum everything and anything. If I'm having trouble with friends or boyfriend or anything...I always go to mum (Penny RUSS, 2011a p. 17)

> Mum, we're really close. We use to play volleyball together so we spent a lot of time together ...she always has that word of advice...and talking to her always makes me feel better (Janie TAFE, 2011a p.8)

Parents and/or family were still important in students' lives whether or not young people lived at home. Parents and family were spoken about as being a source of encouragement, emotional support, financial means (when possible), companionship and material support.

~ Friends

Throughout interviews students constantly highlighted the importance of friends both within and outside of the school environment. Students talked about calling upon their friends when needing: social companionship; emotional backup to discuss difficulties; physical support such as finding accommodation when unable to reside within the family home; connections to employment; advice about life changing decisions involving social relationships and transition out of school; and access to learning information to get them through school. The importance that friends brought to extending social networks was depicted in statements such as:

> ...Everywhere we go, one person will bring this person, like, just a wide range of connections with people (Connie MSS 2010, p. 8).

The role that friends played to retain students in school was evident in statements by two students who were formerly bullied at previous secondary schools:

> I've made so many friends it's a real shock…practically everyone in the class, we're all friends, it's just awesome (Natalie TAFE 2011b p.2)

> ...everyone is friends, like all of the Year 12 kids all hang out, we all spend time together, we all get along (Janie TAFE 2011a p. 3).

~ School staff

The significance of being able to connect and form positive relationships with teachers was constant throughout student narratives. For instance Natalie (TAFE student, 2011a) related

> I've connected a lot with [teacher] so I go to him with my problems or if they're really severe I go to [welfare officer] but I prefer to talk to [teacher]' (p. 7).

Similar to previous studies (for instance, Howard & Johnson 2000a & b) teachers were generally regarded by students as being supportive, approachable, accessible and empathic to issues which arose in students' lives. However in addition to the findings of other studies teachers were also talked about as being sources of social capital with resources benefitting students. For example, Natalie who vacillated between going to university or TAFE post VCE (TAFE student 2012b, p.6) talked

about her VCE TAFE teacher taking her on a tour of the TAFE campus where the Diploma of Conservation Land Management course was being taught and introducing her to a couple of teachers which aided her to make a decision. Mandy (RUSS student) who was completing a school based traineeship[36] in addition to VCE related that her secondary school teachers connected her with other teachers within RUSS to assist her when she experienced difficulty with VET studies or acted as conduits between the secondary school and VET institution to resolve difficulties or clarify issues.

School based welfare services were essential in supporting young people at school with advice, the issuing of material resources and in connecting young people with a range of services outside of the school. Young people talked about accessing welfare support from within their schools for a range of issues including family difficulties, referral to other agencies, difficulties with students or staff and access to resources. School based welfare officers and chaplains were also conduits to other resources outside of the school environment. For instance, they provided students with information and introductions to community based agencies as well as supported students by acting as advocates to access out of school resources. The connections that welfare officers had with Not for Profit organisations and government departments were seen positively by young people enabling them to access support services and develop rapport with workers more easily. For instance, at RSS the welfare officer invited community workers to the young parents' centre as guest speakers and this provided an avenue for students to develop relationships with the workers. As noted by a young parent when discussing her experience of leaving the family home during a post school interview "It's pretty good I got a worker that I already know" (Fiona RSS 2012, p.5). The community worker was someone that spent time at the school talking to parents; a support mechanism that was organised by the school welfare officer. The social capital accumulated through the school based welfare officer meant that Fiona did not need to recount her past life to justify why she required welfare assistance. Schools' connectivity with 'out of school

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[36] School based traineeship means that students are employed one day per week as well as undertake vocational training at VET institution such as TAFE.

agencies' receives further attention in this chapter under the heading of 'Collaborative synergies aid resilience and transition '.

Each school site differed in terms of how welfare support was offered to students. TAFE and young parents at RSS had welfare officers dedicated to the specific needs of VCE students. For instance the TAFE welfare officer only worked with VCE students; and young parents at RSS had a welfare officer specifically appointed to work only with young parents. Students at TAFE and RSS also had access to other welfare staff who worked across all school or TAFE levels. The welfare officers at MSS worked with students across all school levels; and RUSS at the time of this study did not employ welfare staff but allocated welfare responsibilities to teaching staff. Students also noted chaplains as sources of support across each secondary school.

~ Connecting to others via community involvement

Young people talked about participating in their community through: educational programs outside of school (VETiS and language); church based activities (choir, youth groups and congregational gatherings); recreational activities (such as sporting groups; participation in singing, modern dancing, folk dancing or music lessons); volunteer work (youth group, working with animals, crèche committee) and part time employment. Involvement in community life extended social capital beyond that which was available in families or secondary schools or TAFE. Outside of school participation in community life provided students with opportunities to experience leadership roles, locate employment and find relief during times of crisis. Additionally, participation in community life did provide structures for interpreting rules and regulations, determining strategic actions, committing to teamwork, communicating with others and seeking out guidance from mentors. Hence, involvement in a range of community-based structures did have a role in the production of cognitive and behavioural dispositions that shaped dispositions towards learning the game of sociability and connectivity as noted in the following three examples. The first example is that of belonging to a church group. Church featured in the lives of several students. Students talked about being part of a congregation and living a life that followed Christian teaching. Church based

activities such as youth group, choirs and social gatherings offered young people a social outlet, the opportunity to develop social contacts, a sense of belonging to a community, connections to supportive networks, mentors that offered guidance and the opportunity to experience leadership roles by being youth work leaders or lead singers in choirs. Similarly in the second example sport provided opportunities to access resources that promote resilience. Participation in sport was common. Across the four research sites students noted having participated in competitive sporting programs such as soccer, basketball, table tennis, tennis, badminton, volleyball and netball. Participation in sport required adherence to rules and disciplined commitment (Spaaij 2012; Coakley 2011, Kay & Bradbury 2009), shaping dispositions seen to assist habitus to be transposable to other fields such as education and work. Being involved also provided an avenue to extend social connections and to benefit from the social capital on offer. For instance, through sporting connections Will (MSS student) befriended a male professional who became his mentor providing advice about handling challenging situations as well as transition. The third example of community involvement is related to MSS students. Community involvement provided MSS students all of which identified with non-Australian backgrounds with a sense of belonging to a specific cultural group. Students talked about committing and participating in ethnically based cultural functions, festivals, language schools and dance groups that shaped habitus to embrace their cultural background and provided a means for understanding their heritage.

6.4.2   VCE is insufficient

As noted in Chapter Three, policy objectives by State and Federal Governments have positioned school retention until Year 12. However students and schools within this study recognised that VCE, which is an option for Year 12 completion requiring the successful completion of English and three other subjects, did not adequately prepare students for employment or guaranteed transition into further education. VCE was seen a basic requirement but insufficient to meet life goals. Many young people engaged in additional studies while at secondary school that were either organised through their schools or by educational institutions other than the one in which they were doing VCE. Studies organised by schools included accelerated learning and

Vocational Education and Training in schools (VETiS) and School Based Apprenticeship and Traineeship (SBAT).

Accelerated learning meant students studied VCE subjects at a lower year level which freed up students to take on additional VCE subjects during Year 12 or to concentrate on fewer subjects. Either way the idea behind accelerated learning was to enhance the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) score and in doing so increase chances for a university place. VETiS programs provided opportunities to complete vocational units of competency that could either lead to a completed work-ready qualification or develop underpinning knowledge in readiness for further vocational or university studies within a field of interest.

Some students engaged in VCE as well as vocational courses. This study found that in some cases dispositions towards a particular vocational area of study was generated from experience outside of the educational field. For instance, Zac (RSS student) enjoyed social media activities and completed a lower level certificate in information technology; Penny (RUSS student), who talked about her love of animals and was surrounded by animals at home completed a lower level certificate in animal studies; Gabby (RSS student), a mother of three children, undertook a children's services course; and Connie (Metro student), who enjoyed all types of sport and wanted sometime in the future to become a physical education teacher undertook studies towards a personal trainer qualification.

Some students were studying VCE language subjects or vocational courses delivered by private training providers. The language courses taken by students were also accredited VCE subjects which meant that young people could sit for VCE examinations and receive extra credit towards their ATAR score; whereas the vocational studies were directly related to qualifications required for employment within a particular field, such as childcare and personal trainer.

The logic informing students' thinking about life post VCE aligned to paralleling qualifications obtainable at university or vocational institutions as the passageway for transitions to employment. However, VCE outcomes had little impact on whether

young people chose higher education as an option post VCE. Similar to findings reported by Blaker and colleagues (2008) and James (2000), the results of this research found that metropolitan students (MSS) more so than students located in non-metropolitan areas (TAFE, RSS & RUSS) aimed towards bachelor studies post VCE. Features shaping the habitus of MSS students towards university when compared to students at other schools included: close alignment to career teachers; accelerated learning structures and language courses that impacted on ATAR scores; and the networked relationships with two local universities. Hence resources available to MSS students during a time of transition strongly positioned university as a post secondary school destination. Career teachers were highlighted as significant sources of support at MSS more so compared to other schools; only one student outside of MSS spoke about career staff being supportive. MSS employed three dedicated career teachers and their role included at some stage throughout the year a formal meeting with students to discuss career options. Students could access career teachers at any other time via making appointments. At MSS students spoke about attending university information sessions and staff at MSS spoke about two universities providing tutoring and information sessions.

In the cases of the non metropolitan students, where the majority continued to vocational courses post VCE, all had experienced being students at TAFE or RTOs either during VCE or previously. For instance, some students completed VCE at TAFE whereas others had undertook vocational training courses whilst at secondary school. They had developed a sense of what student life was like within institutions that delivered vocational studies. As such students' habitus was already aligned to studies at vocational training organisations. Dispositions towards vocational rather than university studies post VCE were also shaped in other ways. First, going to university was meaningless if the odds for meaningful employment post university study were low within the location in which young people resided. Janie (TAFE student) does not take up a university offer because in her experience jobs for graduates were not available within Regional. Secondly, students regarded vocational training as preparing them for university. Students' thinking was that there was less of a risk of failing university studies by first gaining underpinning skills and knowledge at TAFE. Hence TAFE or studies through RTOs provided students with

opportunities to acquire what Bourdieu (1990b) refers to as a feel for the game. Thirdly, vocational courses offered the qualifications required for entry into particular fields at para-professional level providing an opportunity to secure employment in the short term or a backup plan if university studies did not work out.

6.4.3 School a safe haven

Little can be achieved within the school system when students do not feel safe and do not feel supported. Many students experienced feeling unsupported and intimidated in past schools (refer to Table 5). Students talked about being bullied, not being listened to, being belittled by school personnel when seeking support and the lack of resources with a school environment to assist with complex needs. As an example, Janie (TAFE student) who suffered from depression and was bullied at her previous secondary school spoke about her discomfort when revealing intimate details about herself with teachers who were also allocated welfare responsibilities. Her former school did not employ a trained welfare professional despite having high incidents of student suicide. Janie, like many other students in this study who had bad experiences at former secondary schools, became a disaffected learner. She attended but did not fully participate in class or in school life.

Students experienced safety in their current secondary school or TAFE because mechanisms and supportive structures were in place. Being safe at school retained students within the education system. School became a safe haven where they could form positive social relationships with teachers and other students. For a number of students school was a sanctuary that provided professional support through welfare structures to deal with emotional issues found in everyday life such as homelessness, sickness within families, racial abuse and/or residing in abusive situations.

As illustrated in the following two examples, one from the MSS and the other at RSS, procedures within schools promoted schools as a safe haven. Students and staff at MSS pointed out school policies that were in place and strictly adhered to. Staff at MSS noted that the school was a "safe place"; students also regarded their school as being safe, where harmonious inter-racial friendships were seen as paramount. Students and staff put this down to MSS' enforcement of the 'zero tolerance to

fighting policy' being applied in a consistent manner. Students clearly understood the consequences that followed if breaches occurred and MSS staff enforced the no fighting policy "there's no discussion; both sides of the party are sent home to cool down" (focus group interview, welfare staff, 2010). An exclusive space turned school into a haven for young parents at RSS. This exclusive space meant that young parents had a place where they could congregate. Additionally students who were parents were provided with childcare facilities. The centre included a kitchenette for making lunches, toy equipment for children and an office housing the welfare officer who provided emotional support. Being close to the children's day care facility was essential since many young parents did not have their licences. As found in this research this exclusive space did provide young parents with a sense of belonging, did assist young parents with resolving social isolation and did work at retaining young parents at school.

6.4.4   Success equals wellbeing

Success at school is not always measured in educational outcomes. In this study young people reported the meaning of 'success' in terms of physical and emotional wellbeing. Students positioned success by focussing on everyday life issues such as coping with depression, forming functional relationships with school peers and school personnel, and having a place to reside. That is not to say that participants did not have aspirations for studies beyond Year 12. They did. However, schooling was somewhat secondary to issues such as social isolation, bullying, depression, drug addiction and/or homelessness. Mobilising resources for wellbeing 'within' and 'outside' of school environments was highlighted throughout student interviews. 'Within' schools supportive structures included access to welfare officers and chaplains. 'Outside' of school students talked about accessing psychologists, psychiatrists, youth centres, migrant resource centres and welfare agencies helping students with housing, domestic violence, mental health and income.

6.4.5   Money matters

The issue of money featured throughout many interviews and what emerged was that accessibility to money did affect whether students continued at school and did determine study options. Many students and/or families were on welfare support.

Students noted that limited family income placed a burden upon how money was distributed. For instance Connie (MSS student) who resided in a household of nine (parents, five children and paternal grandparents) supported by her father's income indicated that "We're just like, kind of, broke ...I don't spend ...money on myself" (2010, p.12) and talked about being unable to do Outdoor Education as a VCE subject due to the $600 fee. Students were aware of the pressure their schooling costs placed on families. For instance Tony (MSS student) claimed: "I can't rely on my parents. My parents have to take care of the other kids" (2010, p.6). In some cases young people contributed part of or all money earned towards assisting in maintaining the household.

As indicated in Table 6 parents' employment backgrounds were generally in areas that were not well paid with many working in labouring or service type roles. Hence for a number of students the luxury of not working part time was not an option. As reviewed in Chapter Two (Gong et al. 2012; Mission Australian 2013), it was not unusual for Australian students to have part time jobs with Gong et al. reporting that 56 % of students having part time jobs during Year 12. In this study a similar percentage rate was found during Term III of Year 12 with 53% of students doing part time work generally in retail sector (refer to Table 6). Of the eight students who were not working (Term III interview), five were on government benefits, two gave up part time jobs to concentrate on VCE studies and another had never worked. Of the students who sacrificed a part time income to concentrate on VCE studies one student noted putting savings aside to not rely on her parents for income.

Table 6   Occupation types: father, mother and young people

		Occupation father	Occupation mother	Income young person at first interview	Income young person Term III, Year 12
Metro	Ana	Invalid pensioner /casual security guard/owns rental properties	Pensioner look ing after father	Retail	Nil
	Blanca	Manual worker	Factory work currently on work cover	Retail plus youth allowance	Retail plus youth allowance
	Connie	Owner /operator rubbish skip business	At home mum	Nil	Cleaner casual
	Dani	Bus driver	Factory worker	Hospitality	Nil
	Elana	Telecommunications manager	Accountant	Retail	Retail
	Tony	Factory worker	Aged care worker	Retail	Retail
	Will	Electrician	Unknown	Retail	Government benefits
	Yohan	Painter	Aged care nurse	Nil	Factory work
TAFE	Janie	Accountant	Photographic editor	Retail	Retail
	Leah	Police officer	Clerical worker	Government benefits	Government benefits
	Natalie	Motor mechanic –self employed	At home mum	Government benefits	Government benefits
Regional	Helena	Electrical contractor	Fashion merchandiser	Government benefits/ Casual Promotional work	Government benefits/ Casual Promotional work
	Gabby	Retired - factory worker	At home mum / disability pensioner	Government benefits	Government benefits
	Fiona	Factory worker	Mother not mentioned	Government benefits	Government benefits
	Zac	Clerical worker	Cleaner	Nil	Nil
Rural	Mandy	Sand blaster/milks cows	Nurse/disability worker	Retail/dental assistant traineeship	Retail/dental assistant traineeship
	Penny	Rubbish recycler	Milks cows	Retail	Retail
	Olanda	Factory worker	Milks cows	Retail	No longer participating in study

6.4.6   Collaborative synergies aid resilience and transition

Underpinning the production of resilience and assisting pathways for transition were collaborative partnerships formed by secondary schools and TAFE. Partnerships were about creating synergy to implement processes to enhance student wellbeing, school retention and structured pathways. The formation of partnerships generally resulted from the social capital that personnel brought into the school and the proximity of agencies and organisations to the school.

The partnerships entered into by the three secondary schools and TAFE were analysed into four categories: Not for profit organisations (NPOs); local, state or federal government departments; other schools; and industry. The number of interagency networks varied across locations with MSS noting more agency connections across the four categories. This was due to a number of reasons including that this study had more MSS staff (n=16) participating. However that reason does not account for the fact that RUSS which had 8 staff (principal, chaplain, associate principal, four teachers and vocational teacher) answering questions, did not name more interagency activity than RSS where two staff (principal and welfare officer) participated. Rather, as will be further discussed in Chapter Ten, RUSS due to its location had fewer opportunities to establish networks compared to other schools.

~ Connecting with Not for Profit Organisations

The most prominent networks identified by school personnel were with NPOs. As indicated in Table 7 NPOs made up 56% of the named connections. This was followed by affiliations to government departments, other schools and industry. The types of networks created and maintained by schools with NPOs were relevant to the cultural needs of young people. For instance, MSS was affiliated with organisations that catered to immigrants or refugees settling into Australia. These were organisations that assisted students with the development of language skills, locating housing if living out of home, linking up with same language support groups, assistance with trauma related illnesses and help with gaining employment. MSS staff also noted connecting with local NPOs that were affiliated with environmental and arts based activities.

Table 7   Number of interagency networks across locations

	NGO	Schools	Govt Depts	Industry	Number of networks by location	
Metro	15	6	6	4	31	48%
RSS	11	2	2	0	15	23%
RUSS	4	3	3	0	10	16%
TAFE	6	0	2	0	8	13%
						100%
Number of networks by organisation type	36	11	13	4	64	
	56%	17%	20%	6%	100%	

MSS had a well-established link with a local church group that provided funding towards the partial salary of the school's chaplain. This money supplement funds made available through the Commonwealth government for school chaplains[37]. As indicated by the MSS principal, without this additional income the chaplain would only be employed part time. A number of NPOs supported MSS by delivering programs to assist retention. Others targeted transition out of school. For instance, staff spoke about NPOs that assisted students with learning needs, material resources (such as computers to selected individuals), literacy skills and delivered programs within the school system to keep young people engaged in schooling. Other NPOs were integral players in providing resources such as mentors who were linked to corporate business and provided information about accessing jobs. NPOs also ran mock interviews to skill up students hence providing them with chances to compete for entry into the labour market. MSS also collaborated with the Metro LLEN[38] to bring industry groups and local employers to the school to talk to students as well as assist students when transitioning to employment.

The Regional area RSS and TAFE concentrated more on developing associations with social welfare and health-based organisations. In total 17 NPOs were connected to TAFE or RSS. Connections included a range of organisations that provided students with material resources required for schooling as well as connections to

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[37] Chaplaincy program discussed in Chapter Four.
[38] LLEN were discussed in Chapter Four

organisations that supported physical and mental wellbeing. The TAFE welfare officer also spoke about connecting with young people's caseworkers, medical personnel, and networking with drug treatment and rehabilitation units. RSS was more connected to NPOs that supported young parents and their children with one group running parenting and child health programs at the school.

Staff at RUSS noted the least number of networked activities with NPOs. The four that were noted included: a church group supplementing the salary of the chaplain; a rural youth support service that occasionally provided income towards projects; a group that worked with the school and ran programs to encourage school retention or successful transition into employment; and local welfare based NPO that supported young people living out of home.

RUSS had the least number of interagency connections with NPOs and this was due to the lack of NPOs being available within that region. Similar to MSS a church group supplemented the salary of a school chaplain and a local NPO ran programs at the school to encourage retention and to aid transition into employment. A NPO occasionally provided funds towards projects. Another assisted young people who were living out of home. However welfare support was insufficiently funded in Rural to cater for the needs of many young people who faced crises in everyday life. For instance, the principal at RUSS talked about the school having many students facing "really deep seated challenges" and not having enough support services within the local community or funding within the school to deal with the ongoing situations (RUSS principal, 2010, p. 9). School staff echoed what the principal had said. Emergency support services were difficult to obtain. This was predominantly due to Rural being situated between two larger provincial towns and the expectation was that young people in need of care were to access services at these towns. However one town was approximately 80 kilometres away and the other nearly 115 kilometres. Additionally, public transport to either town was limited. For instance the train service that connected Rural to either town was only available three times during the day (early morning, middle of the day and late evening). Hence, young people were more or less forced to remain in situations that were far from ideal or rely on friends to assist them during times of need.

~ Connecting with other educational institutions

In terms of connections with other schools the TAFE staff did not name any connections with other educational institutions however the TAFE welfare officer did make a general remark about young people not fitting into the structures of secondary education stating that "A lot of times the schools ring us and the kids have got behaviour problems so they send them down here" (2011 p.9). RUSS and RSS staff noted networked relationships with schools that provided vocational courses or with primary schools during times of transition.

The story was different at MSS where staff talked about networking with nearby TAFE institutions, two universities, a Trade Training Centre and the local English Language School. These connections served a number of purposes such as: informing students about courses at the various institutions; developing students' language skills; providing students with a feel for trade training through taster programs provided by a TAFE; and providing MSS students with tutoring support offered by university and TAFE students. Networking with other educational institutions was also mutually beneficial. For instance, as noted by career teachers at MSS it provided students such as those from University with work experience as tutors. Additionally, networking during times of transition assisted Universities and TAFEs to attract students into vocational and tertiary courses.

~ Connecting with Government Departments

The secondary schools and TAFE networked with government departments for a range of activities and services. For instance secondary schools named various state and commonwealth government departments and provided examples to highlight how support was provided to students. MSS staff talked about networking with commonwealth government departments such as: Centrelink to assist students to secure funding for extra-curricular programs such as security guard courses so that students could work part time and remain at school; and Department of Immigration to assist refugee young people living alone. There were several state government departments working with each of the schools. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development worked with RUSS to assist young people with health concerns. MSS and RSS networked with the Department of Human Services to

support and protect young people's physical and mental wellbeing. MSS and RUSS had affiliations with the police force to run civic programs at schools.

Secondary schools also identified the provision of programs through local government (also referred to as local council) aimed at engaging young people in the local community. For instance, the MSS principal spoke about a collaborative relationship with the local council as being "a mutual realisation that collided" and stated that "the City of [Metro][39] and its area of youth development work[ed] very closely with the school" (Metro principal 2010, p.6). MSS teachers, career and wellbeing staff also spoke about programs run by the local council to engage young people such as skate tournaments, band competitions and concerts, as well as the connection that the council had with the school to deliver drug, alcohol, and health related programs. RSS and the local council maternal and child health department collaborated to run a range of programs at school that supported young parents and promoted child wellbeing such as dental health, general health, information about kindergartens and schooling for their children.

~ Connecting with industry bodies
Of the four educational institutions only MSS staff spoke about positive affiliations with industry bodies: a national hardware chain that supported programs such as horticulture as well as supported students undertaking the Vocational Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL); a manufacturing association that delivered career advice to students at the school; and two newspapers (one local and the other state wide) which MSS used to effectuate publicity regarding the plight of students. These connections did effectively provide assistance to students through either work placement activities or the generation of community support. However MSS teachers did not mention a direct link with industry as an employment source for students.

~ Creating and maintaining connections
Ongoing commitment towards maintaining and establishing social relationships with NPOs, government departments or industry did result in dividends for students and will be discussed further in Chapters Seven to Ten. However, networking required that structures were in place for creating and maintaining connections. As detailed in

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[39] Name withheld so that location of school could not be identified

Chapter Three in addition to counselling support the functional roles of welfare officers and chaplains was to engage with the broader community to establish inter-connectivity between schools and NPOs (DEECD 2012a; DEEWR n.d. a). The analysis found that welfare officers and chaplains were well networked to local NPOs, had experienced working in the community sector prior to working in schools or TAFE, knew what welfare resources were available within communities and understood the strategies required to access services and products to support students. Hence the social capital that welfare officers and chaplains gained from working in the welfare field prior to being employed by schools was brought into the education field. The following excerpt illustrates how a welfare officer used her social capital to assist students:

> I use to work at the [welfare organisation] so I know all of them, thank God, and I often just hit them up for money and they're pretty good with me...there's places you can go for money...I suppose workers like myself we have a good link with the community (TAFE Welfare officer 2011 p.7-8).

The TAFE welfare officer also spoke about negotiating opportunities for young people such as ringing up employers to find apprenticeships and related a story of a former student who was "heavily into drugs" (TAFE WO 2011, p.4) and whose life altered when the TAFE welfare officer found her a chef apprenticeship. This connection resulted in the young person being "offered 5 different positions around [Regional]" upon completion of this apprenticeship (TAFE welfare officer 2011, p. 4).

The MSS principal was adamant about being visible to generate support for young people. He noted "there is amazing generosity in the world of the community if you can just unlock it" (2010, p.12). To unlock generosity he networked with contacts in the print media field and provided an example to demonstrate how this activity paid dividends:

> We're had an interesting experience in the last 2 years with some community benefactors who give us money. Came as a result of an article in [named a state wide newspaper]...some people in the community give $200 to $400 a month to identified kids so we're got some targeted support. We had a very wealthy accountant from [names another location approximately 25 kilometres away from Metro] who paid for everything

for a young fellow...his Rotary club bought the boy a computer[in] Year 12, bought him a car [and] found him a job (MSS principal 2010, p.12).

The MSS principal worked at developing and utilising social capital that benefitted the student population and as detailed in Chapter Seven expected the staff to do the same. He regarded creating and maintaining networks as the role of principals as well as teachers premising that such activity "yields massive benefits" for disadvantaged students (MSS principal 2010, p.12). As seen in the above excerpt networking with the print media field generated additional contacts and extended social capital that could be called upon within the future for further support.

6.4.7 LLEN an unidentified strategic linchpin

In policy terms Local Learning Employment Networks (LLEN)[40] were established by the Victorian Government in the early 2000s to work with key stakeholders to identify gaps within services or training, to implement strategic solutions to retain students in school until Year 12 and to accommodate successful transition out of school. Hence LLENs were formed to be the strategic linchpins that united schools, industry/employers, Government departments, NPOs and parents/families. Metro LLEN was set up to accommodate collaborative processes across three local government areas with 55 secondary schools; Rural LLEN covered five provincial shires and 19 secondary schools; and Regional LLEN had responsibility for four regional shires with 32 secondary schools[41]. In 2010 the role of LLENs altered when Victoria agreed to the *National Partnerships on Youth Attainment Transitions* policy (COAG n.d.) and LLENs were allocated additional responsibility for the implementation of that policy. Effectively this meant that the role of LLENs was expanded to include retention and transition strategies to accommodate students between the ages of 10 to 19 years.

LLENs Executive Officers (EOs) across the three locations emphasized that LLENs were strategic planning bodies and not service providers and the function of LLENs was to broker strategic projects. This finding reflected Kamp's (2006) case review of

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[40] The introduction and role of LLENs were reviewed in Chapter Four
[41] Information was gathered through reviewing environmental scans prepared by each LLEN but will not be cited to protect the identity of LLENs and locations.

a regional LLEN. This meant that schools did not have a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 66) and were missing out on influencing the direction of resources within local contexts.

LLEN EOs noted that at times school principals were not aware of the connection that the school had with the LLEN. For instance, Metro LLEN EO reflected on a survey forwarded to secondary schools principals noting that

> ...some of the feedback was that we don't work with the LLEN at all. Whereas we knew very well that that school did, but the principal didn't know that they did. You know we were working with them at a career level or a transition or a VCAL (Metro LLEN EO, 2011 p. 17)

Hence even when LLENs were functioning to aid transition the role being performed by LLENs were not recognised and/or clearly understood by schools. This echoed the findings by others who had reviewed LLENs (Kamp 2006; The Allen consulting group 2012).

As explained by the Regional LLEN EO (2011, p.3) when asked to discuss the role of LLEN:

> ...data shows us where we've got hot spots that need to be attended to, to make sure that kids are moving a bit more seamlessly...and where we find the hotspots we look at who the various members of our network are that we need to bring to the table to talk...maybe deal with this differently and the way that you all interact with each other.

LLENs were involved in the shaping of resources within locations and this study found that the nature of the projects undertaken by LLENs varied depending upon the needs of the local context at a particular time. For instance the following diverse projects were discussed (amongst others) during interviews with the LLENs EOs across the three locations. Regional LLEN EO found that the largest growing employment sector within the region was health and community services sector and identified that within the region there were no formal vocational pathways for young people into that sector. So Regional LLEN through partnerships with the local TAFE, local university and local health services worked on devising new training

pathways for young people into that field of employment. Metro LLEN EO talked about young women leaving school to have children and not returning to education. So the LLEN set up a partnership between a local secondary school and a local childcare centre that had the required space to run secondary school level classes to transition young mothers back into education. The school delivered educational programs at the childcare centre which allowed for young mothers to become re-connected to schooling in a safe place as well as gave them the time to settle their children in day care. After a familiarisation period young mothers were eased back into the high school environment. The Regional LLEN EO spoke about a research project trialling career education at middle school level (graded 5 and 6) within schools in disadvantaged areas. The project involved informing students and parents about the regional economy, where jobs were likely to be in the future, the importance of technology for jobs, and introducing parents to community agencies so they could be informed about accessing information and services to support their children. The Rural LLEN EO talked about working through processes with local schools to introduce protocols and curriculum content that engaged Indigenous young people.

LLENs also accessed and interpreted local data regarding transition outcomes. For instance, Regional LLEN through an analysis of local data collected from publically funded secondary schools and catholic colleges found that 85 per cent (%) of school resources went into preparing 35% of young people for university but there was little preparation of young people for vocational roles or courses post Year 12. As noted by the Regional LLEN EO many schools feared focusing on vocational courses claiming that parents would withdraw their children and enrol them in schools that were perceived to be more academically orientated. Ultimately this meant that the majority of students exited secondary school with little preparedness for vocational studies or the workforce.

Across locations schools did not identify LLENs as key players working on strategic solutions. Rather LLENs when spoken about by schools were acknowledged for pragmatic operational functions. For instance MSS school personnel spoke about Metro LLEN and being the organisation to call upon when organising guest speakers

from industry or locating work placements for students. In terms of other schools the role of LLEN was not mentioned at TAFE or RSS and the RUSS principal mentioned LLEN as being the organisation to contact for more information about the Rural. The ramification of this finding is that schools that participated within this study failed to have a strategic voice directing which projects LLENs took up to support resilience and transition and three institutions missed out on opportunities to build social capital through LLENs' networked connections.

~ Challenges hindering collaboration as noted by LLENs
The difficulty of coordinating teamwork amongst agencies was discussed in Chapter Four (Tett et al., 2011; Dahlstedt, 2009; Seddon et al., 2004; Billett et al, 2007) and this again was reported by the LLENs in terms of the community welfare field. For instance Metro LLEN EO noted that across the region there are over 100 community agencies providing services however the approach to service delivery was outcome driven rather than focused on what was best for clients. The Metro LLEN EO spoke about the lack of interagency referrals across welfare agencies and noted if welfare agencies were at capacity then they would put young people "on a waiting list or tell them we don't have space" (Metro LLEN EO, 2011, p. 19) rather than referring them to another agency and jeopardise losing them as future clients. The competitive nature within the community services field was of concern particularly if this meant that some young people missed out on receiving basic support related to shelter, clothing, food, health or securing employment. The Regional and Rural LLEN EOs also voiced territorial rivalry amongst welfare agencies. As the Rural LLEN EO reported:

> in many cases there is no communication between agencies and certainly we're got government silos and those silos are amplified if you are looking at cross agency communication' (2011, p. 3)

The fear of losing clientele hindered cooperative practices and working on collaborative projects. As noted by the Metro LLEN EO the difficulty with generating collaborative networks particularly across the welfare services field was that the most vulnerable people within locations were being assisted by the sector that got the least amount of funding and were most at risk of losing funding. This

meant that organisations continued to compete with each other to survive and attention was not drawn to practices of collaboration.

Forming partnerships with parents/families as key stakeholders was also problematic. For instance, when changes to the role of LLENs were evoked in 2010 the Regional LLEN did an environment scan to explore activities that brought parents together in some kind of formal way and found that within Regional the only kind of parent activity was via the school councils which the Regional LLEN EO noted as having 'a sense that parents didn't have a very strong voice in curriculum' (LLEN EO 2010, p. 5). The results of the current study also noted the lack of any mention by LLENs who participated in this research of forming partnering relationships with community based organisations that offered recreational or spiritual services or with youth.

6.5   Conclusion

Pivotal to biographical experiences that shape the trajectory of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition are a range of social relationships together with supportive school and community structures. Students positioned successful outcomes in terms of physical, social and financial wellbeing. This study found that students' post Year 12 intentions were aligned to opportunities within their locations, hence Rural and Regional students were more focused on vocational pathways seeing this is where students saw job opportunities. Whereas Metro students forged towards university studies positioning themselves as viable competitors in the Melbourne based job market. Interviews with school personnel found that schools and communities did work together however there was little evidence to suggest that structures for interagency networks were strategically thought through or coordinated by schools. Rather interagency collaboration tended to be based on the social capital that staff brought into or developed through the school.

The strategic role of LLENs appeared not to be wholly understood by schools that participated in this research. Additionally LLENs expanding to include welfare based agencies and families/parents in the mix of stakeholders to work on strategies to sustain students at school or assist with transitional outcomes was yet to be realised.

This meant that sectors within the community missed out on articulating the direction of education or community resources within their localities.

The next four chapters unravel the lived lives of students across four school sites to answer what biographical experiences shape the trajectory of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition. Experiences are diverse across sites hence a chapter is devoted to each site to bring out the contextual experiences. Chapter Seven is devoted to the Metro cohort where all students identified with ethnic minority backgrounds. TAFE students are highlighted in Chapter Eight and this chapter reviews how systems at that site worked to maintain students who became disengaged with the secondary school sector. Chapter Nine is dedicated to the Regional secondary school cohort where the experiences of young mothers and one male student are reviewed. Rural students' experiences are reviewed in Chapter Ten.

5 August 2010   First impressions of Metro Secondary School

Very busy, very structured and zero tolerance to breaking of school rules, yet the students appear happy and proud to belong to this school community. The learning centres are impressive. Four are operational and the other three are under construction. You can see the wealth of experience that the principal has contributed to this school – a progressive way of taking education into the new millennium. The principal not only redesigned the school, working through the amalgamations but also worked through re-designing the approach to teaching and learning and getting staff to move in that direction – not an easy feat.

7.0   Chapter Overview

Many newly arrived migrants reside in Metro so it was not surprising to hear the principal say that Metro Secondary School (MSS) caters to the needs of 77 different language groups (Principal MSS, 2010, p.7). The secondary school was centrally located in an older part of the suburb where many modest and cheaply erected houses were built for immigrants to Australia post World War II. Within proximity of the school were shops, a cinema complex, the train station, bus services, a TAFE, a public hospital, various sporting facilities, manufacturing industries and a range of welfare agencies.

At the time of this research a re-structuring of secondary school system was taking place across Victoria and for Metro this meant that three schools were being merged into one larger secondary school catering for 2000 students. Accompanying this re-structure was a $45 million grant for the re-development of the new buildings. The model for the new secondary school was innovative. It was designed into seven open plan learning centres (individual buildings designed as mini schools) housing up to 300 students and 25 teachers in each centre. The open and flexible spaces allowed for a team teaching model to be adopted.

At the start of this study, the eight young people (3 male & 5 female) who were attending MSS were aged between 17 and 19 years. This chapter reviews: what life is like for non-Anglo-Saxon students; dealing with adversity; school structures; the utilisation of social capital; community engagement in recreational, religious and other educational activities; and aspirations for life beyond the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Complementing young people's narratives were interviews with school staff who discussed: issues facing the student population; the distinct roles of teachers and wellbeing staff in assisting young people when facing welfare related difficulties; and the collaborative approaches between MSS and community bodies to support resilience and transition.

7.1   Retaining a cultural identity

As noted by the MSS Principle "The Anglo-Saxon community of the school is around 15 per cent" (2010, pp.14-15). Comprising this cohort were two young men, Tony and Yohan, who came from countries within the African continent. Tony was born in Liberia and his family arrived in Australia five years ago; and Yohan was born in Sierra Leone and had been in the country for three years. Three young people identified themselves as Serbian: Blanca came to Australia when she was two years old; Ana was born in Australia shortly after her family migrated; and Will was born in Australia. Connie said "my parents were born in Australia so I'm an Aussie but my background is Albanian". Dani was born in Australia and her parents and sisters were born in Sri Lanka. Elana, who was born in Australia, referred to herself as half Mauritian and half Chilean and reported that she identified more so with the Chilean and Spanish community.

In this cohort, strong cultural traditions and customs that inform individual dispositions were entrenched in young people's 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). For instance, Blanca (MSS, 2010, p.6) expressed: "My parents feel that we are going to forget our language if we don't do something that's Serbian". Being involved in Serb dancing as well as Serb language school retained her connection to the Serbian culture. Even if a young person called herself Australian, as did Connie, her MSS school friends dictated what was acceptable in terms of self-reference and identified her by her ancestry. "They're going you're Albanian" related Connie (2001, p.1)

when describing how her friends and peers positioned her background. In the eyes of MSS students identifying with an ethnic background was a good thing that espoused respect for culture, tradition, religion and elders. As explained by Connie (2010) being an "Aussie" had connotations of being able to "do whatever they want' having 'no religion' or 'no culture" (p.1) indicating that alignment with an ethnic identity meant having an ancestral collective history and assumed compliance to the cultural norms and adherence to parental rules.

As noted by Blanca (MSS, 2010, p.4) when talking about her parents that she referred to as being strict:

> Well they expect a lot… they don't want us to turn out like them, like, to have bad jobs or whatever, but they want us to do really well in school.

Ana, Blanca and Elana talked about being exposed to experiences that developed a sense of identity reinforcing membership to a particular cultural group due to familial heritage. For instance, Elana spoke about participating in Spanish church, Spanish festivals and learning Spanish at a language school. Involvement in these structures meant that young people's thinking regarding belonging to a specific community as well as the importance of education was further shaped and reinforced by a range of people outside of the family (teachers, pastors and others who participated in the activities). Attending language schools provided an added bonus for students since language studies undertaken at these schools were recognised at VCE level hence offering the opportunity to extend the young person's Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) score. Ana and Blanca attended a Serbian language school as well as participated in Serbian folk dancing. Dancing classes were held weekly for an hour. Serb dancing provided Ana with the opportunity to tour around Australia with the dance troupe to whom Ana referred to as "real Serbs" (2010, p.6). Serbian dancing functioned as a reinforcer of unity amongst the Serb community. It was also an outlet for parents to socialise with other Serbians while waiting for their children hence maintaining social capital and/or extending it by building up social ties.

Several students highlighted the social aspect of joining in culturally based activities. For instance, Dani spoke about the 'Batch', an extensive network of over 100 Sri Lankan immigrants who attended the same school as her father. The Batch went on holidays together and participated in organised social gatherings. Blanca overviewed the Serbian tradition of family saint's day where over 100 people would visit the family bearing traditional gifts of coffee, sugar and sweets. Connie stated Albanian people enjoyed to congregate, "we're always together, like, everything we do is together" (2010, p.1) and talked about extensive networks within the Albanian community across Victoria.

Participating in ethnic specific activities did have benefits such as maintaining networks. However, strong attachments to a select group also work towards fostering "ethnocentric views" that "reinforce racist attitudes" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.2). In Metro this can result in an unsafe environment and Will, whose heritage is Serbian, spoke about being involved in racially provoked altercations with Albanian youth. He recounted:

> when they [Albanian youth] see you they just want to beat you up... that's the reason why people dislike you ..., just cause I'm Serbian...there's like a lot of hatred between our nations (Will, 2011, p. 21-22).

Other young people did not experience racially provoked attacks within their school or community. They were more inclined to talk about having friends rather than having enemies. While celebrating their cultural heritage students also had friendships circles that included people from various ethnic backgrounds. For example, many young people specifically named the nationality of their friends. Ana talked about friends at school who were Serbian, Turkish, Mauritian and Albanian. Will also spoke about a Sri Lankan friend. The majority of students spoke about friends in general without specifically naming nationalities but defining them by categories such as school, work, sporting or dancing friends.

7.2   Facing adversity

Residing in an area that was considered as being one of the most disadvantaged in suburban Melbourne was but one issue facing the cohort of young people at MSS (Vinson 2007). In this cohort, young people talked about facing or having dealt with personal, familial and social problems such as depression, bullying, estrangement from parents, limited family income, serious health issues within families, recent arrival to Australia and residing in households with more than three children (refer to Table 8). The analysis found that these young people did utilise resources to assist them when needed.

Table 8   Metro cohort: types of adversity experienced

	Suffered from depression which required professional intervention	Bullied at school	Not living with parents during VCE	Limited family income	Serious familial health issues/injury resulting in welfare payments	Arrival to Australia < 10 years	Four or more children in family	Parents with limited English	Young person or parent(s) on welfare support/ workers' compensation
Ana				X	X				X
Blanca				X			X	X	X
Connie				X	X		X		
Dani									
Elana	X	X					X		
Tony			X	X		X	X		
Will		X	X	X					X
Yohan				X		x			

During school based interviews young people were asked to complete ESNMs[42] detailing significant people or resources they considered as supportive. The collated outcomes of the ESNMs for the Metro cohort are detailed in Figures 2 and 3. In these figures the dots represent the positions allocated by young people in terms of what resources or people were regarded as being supportive. Inner circle positioning indicates greater support significance than outer circles. As indicated in the legend each young person is allocated a colour. Each dot represents the number of people nominated or a particular agency with no people nominated (such as Christian Radio or school in general). For instance, the three light blue dots in the inner circle of

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[42] Refer to Chapter Five for more information

Close Friends quadrant represents that Connie specifically identified three people. The legend also specifies other peculiarities such as no specific number was stated (circle with inner dot). This was used when a student did not specifically mention a number. Whereas the four-leaf clover shape indicates that a student specified support from more than three people.
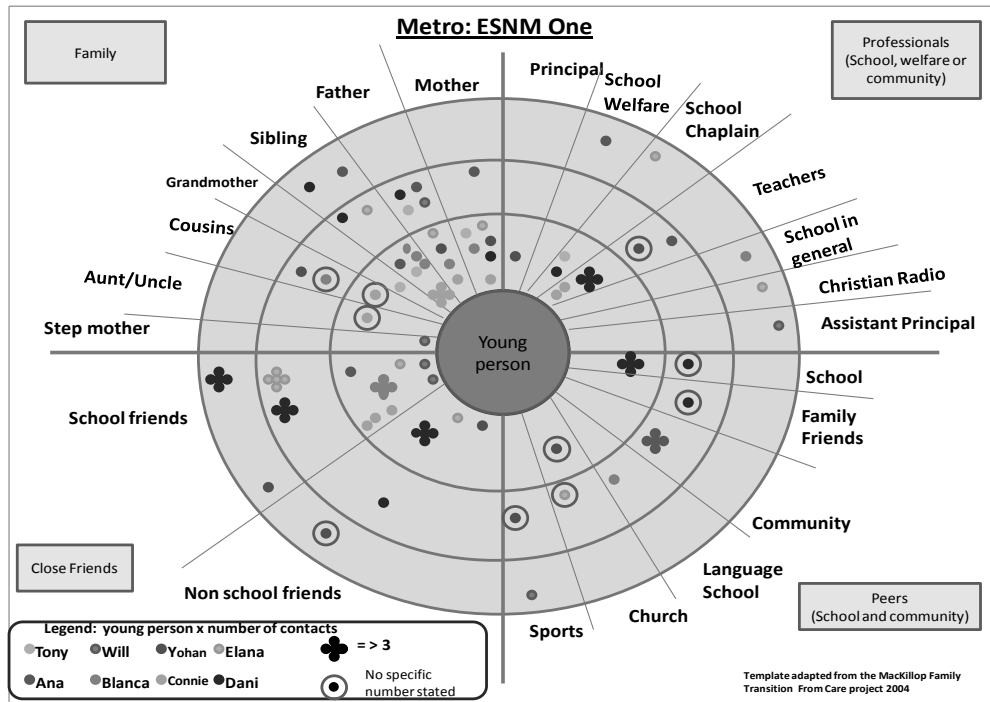
Figure 2   Eco Social Network Map: Interview One MSS participants
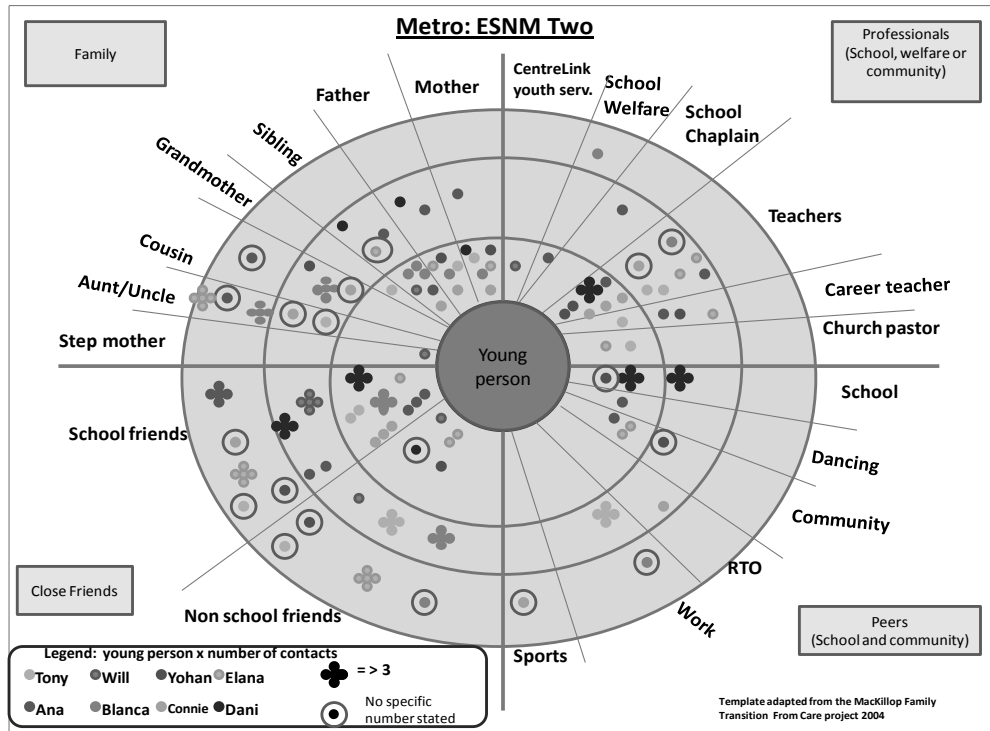
Figure 3 Eco Social Network Map: Interview Two MSS participants

Similar to previous studies (Howard & Johnson, 2000b; Resnick, 2000; Ungar, 2004c; Armstrong, 2005) MSS students highlighted the importance of family as a support mechanism. The general sentiment from this cohort of students was that they enjoyed family life and resided in caring family structures. As graphically depicted in Figure 2, students were more likely to nominate a range of family members as supportive people in their lives. Seven of the eight students positioned their mother within inner or middle circles; all young people positioned their father either within inner or middle circles; and seven young people also positioned siblings and extended family members within inner or middle circles. Parents and extended family were still relatively important in their lives in the third term of VCE as indicated in the Figure 3.

Dialogue indicated that peer networks tended to be a "let's have fun, let's muck around" type of group (Connie, 2011b, p. 26) whereas friends were people that students called upon for support, advice and at times shelter. Peers were highlighted more in the Figure 3 suggesting that young people were extending their networks and

these groupings provided them with a wider and varied selection of people as they were preparing to transition out of school. People that students noted as peers transitioned into the friendship quadrant over time as seen in Will's ESNMs (to be discussed below) where his table tennis peer became his mentor and a source of emotional support when relationships with his father dissipated.

As indicated in Figure 3, the connections with professionals (school, welfare or community based personnel) also grew as young people transitioned through VCE signifying that young people navigated towards networks that provided relevant advice or information as required at the time. In the first ESNM (Figure 2) four young people plotted teachers on their maps and none plotted career teachers. The second ESNM was completed during the time when students were submitting applications for tertiary courses and preparing to transition out of secondary school; a time when students were nearing their final examinations. They were forced to make choices as to whether they would continue onto post compulsory studies. Seven young people plotted teachers and four plotted career teachers. The mapping on the second ESNM of career and classroom teachers, which were not present in the first ESNM highlighted the importance that students placed on the advice and support made available to them during a critical time of the school year.

7.3   Will's story

To demonstrate how young people worked through issues I have selected Will's story. As detailed in this section it is the combination of Will's agency as well as available structures (familial, community and social) that assisted him during a time of personal turmoil. His story imperatively demonstrated the importance of having access to resources to extend social connections and how through these connections social capital was used to maintain his resilience.

When I first met Will in 2010 he was 17 years old. He was completing Year 11 and within days of this interview the school year would be over. At this interview Will noted that his father was a builder. At that stage he appeared to have a stable living arrangement with his father but had little to do with his mother. When I interviewed

him again he was in Year 12, completing studies towards the VCE. Will was now 18 years old and estranged from his father and mother. During the second interview he stated that "dad has lost the plot and my mum's brain just doesn't work" (Will, 2011, p15).

While completing Year 12, Will was living on welfare benefits and residing with a friend and his friend's mother, whom he had known since primary school. Will was still attending school and was intent on going to university to study towards a career within the health science field. He felt confident of achieving this aim. In terms of schooling Will (2011, p.20) noted:

Will	School's a big part of my life
Interviewer	*Why would you say school is a big part of your life?*
Will	Ideally you're looking like socioeconomic status, the more education the better job, the higher income, the more you can support yourself, health care, look after yourself and just do things you want to do in life. The less education the more closed doors you have for opportunities.
Interviewer	*What's led you to think like that?*
Will	Well, I study health and stuff, I understand how it works. I don't know it's just my mindset.

For Will an education was a way of improving his socioeconomic status. Will talked about episodes in his life that contributed to his 'habitus'. He reflected on his childhood and talked about what life was like for him. Will detailed that his mother and father separated when he was about two and he did not have any contact with his father until he was nine. Will lived with his mother until he was 14 years old and then went to live with his father. At that time his father had separated from his second wife (Will's step mother). Living with his father meant taking care of himself which Will explained as having to 'cook, clean, work, financially support myself' (Will, 2011, p. 13). Will saw schooling as being important; it was a vehicle to help him meet his future life goals that Will defined in the following extract as being:

just live a normal life, a decent standard of living, supply[ing] for my kids and stuff. Yeah, that's what I want...Yeah, it's just like I want to focus on the things that I know that I'll need in life (Will, 2011, p. 9).

Will explained the meaning of "focusing on things" as follows:

Just family support, you know, like having a stable home; stable household. Not being from parent to parent, from house to house, having to support you own self. Like, sure it's good for a certain level of independence and stuff but you know in terms of trying to do well in school and completely being independent, yeah, it's kind of hard (Will, 2011, p. 9).

Will was adamant that higher education was the key required to fend off adversity and he noted that studying in a subject called Health and Society while doing VCE had opened his eyes to the possibilities that a good education has to offer.

Will utilised social and material resources accessible through social capital. For instance, in the first interview he noted that friends were important "to just help you when you have problems and stuff and people you look to talk to" (Will, 2010, p. 2). By his second interview he used this capital to seek out shelter from a school friend. His involvement in playing table tennis at a community location contributed to building up his social capital independently to that located through family or school connections. Being connected to table tennis provided him with access to supportive adults, for instance, Will spoke about an older Sri Lankan male, a lawyer aged in his late 20s, whom he met at the table tennis venue located in Metro. Will regarded this male as "someone to look up...a role model" (2011, p.16-17). Will met up with his male mentor several times during the week. He stated "ever since I've been hanging around him, like, he's taught me about inner peace" (2011, p.16).

Will's sister (who lived interstate), his former stepmother (who is now divorced from Will's father and lives in Metro) and grandmother (who lives overseas) were also sources of emotional and financial support. He saw his stepmother weekly and spoke about their relationship as follows:

I'm really close to my step-mum and like she treats me like a son...like even though she broke up with my dad a good five years ago she still like sees me as a son...she calls me her son to people (Will, 2011, p. 10).

Will explained that his sister (now aged 23 years) also experienced similar difficulties with their parents and needed Centre Link[43] payments to assist her. Will utilised Centre Link Youth Services for advice and financial support. He noted that if he could not get money from Centre Link then he would not be able to look after himself or attend school.

Despite facing much adversity Will did not access welfare resources provided at the school. When asked if he got support from the school, Will replied "I guess just coming to school, you know, just having that opportunity to be here" (2011, p.20) but does not elaborate nor does he position teachers or welfare staff in his second ESNM as being supportive. This finding brings to attention that whilst support may be available within a school the type of assistance may not be what is required and/or that some students may be reluctant to discuss personal issues about their life with school personnel. In Will's view the main function of school is to provide an education that will ultimately deliver employment opportunities. The immediate solution to Will's dilemma was not going to be addressed by school counsellors. Centre Link provided Will with a practical solution, that being, having access to financial support. Will through witnessing his sister's experience understood the channels for accessing resources to maintain his wellbeing and grasped these opportunities.

However, accessing welfare payments was difficult seeing that young people must demonstrate that parents are no longer supporting them. Will detailed this experience as follows:

> It took a while because it's a pretty lengthy process of getting the approval cause you have to prove that it's unreasonable to live at home and stuff, otherwise everyone is just going to go, you know, leave home and stuff but yeah eventually I got it probably around a month and a half, two months. You go to do an interview and you have to get this approval that it's unreasonable to live at home and then they have to investigate that, call this person, call that person... I was able to have my sister as like a reference because my sister kind of went through a similar thing... Yeah she was on that kind of thing when she was a teen (2011, p.19)

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[43] CentreLink is an Australian Government department that provides financial support to people in need.

Within the school system it was the connectivity with other young people that Will situated in his ESNMs (refer to Figures 4 and 5) as being sources of support in his life and supportive networks, as detailed in his ESNMs, did alter over time. In his first ESNM (Figure 4) Will positioned a MSS assistant principal in an outer circle but school staff were not featured in Will's second ESNM (Figure 5) which was plotted eight months later when estranged from his father. Other differences between the first and second ESNM were the dismissal of his father and the inclusions of his sister, male mentor (lawyer friend), and Centre Link Youth Services in the inner circles.

As demonstrated more so in Figure 5 the focus of adult support for Will was outside of the school system. The most noticeable difference between his first and second ESNM was that more people/services were included in the latter suggesting that at a time of need Will called upon newer resources for support. Will's friends also moved from inner circle to middle circle between the first and second ESNM and more friends were included in the second plotting of the ESNM. The only consistent person over time appeared to be his stepmother.

Will ESNM 1

Family

Professionals
(School, welfare or community)

Father

Step Mother

Will

Assistant Principal

2 Male Friends

Table Tennis Partner

Close Friends

Peers
(School and community)

Template adapted from the MacKillop Family Transition From Care project 2004
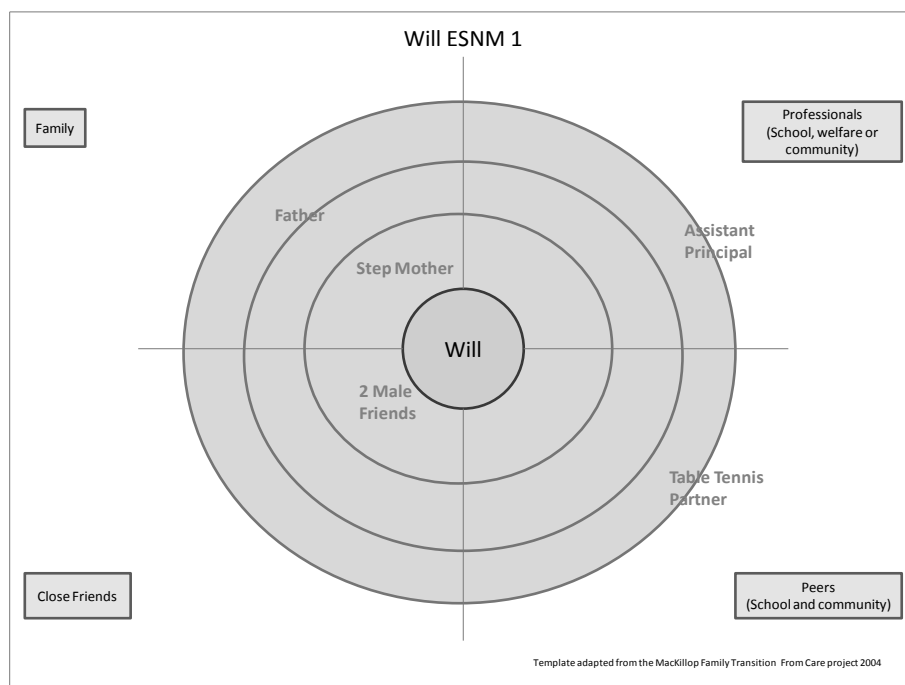
Figure 4   Eco Social Network Map: Interview One Will
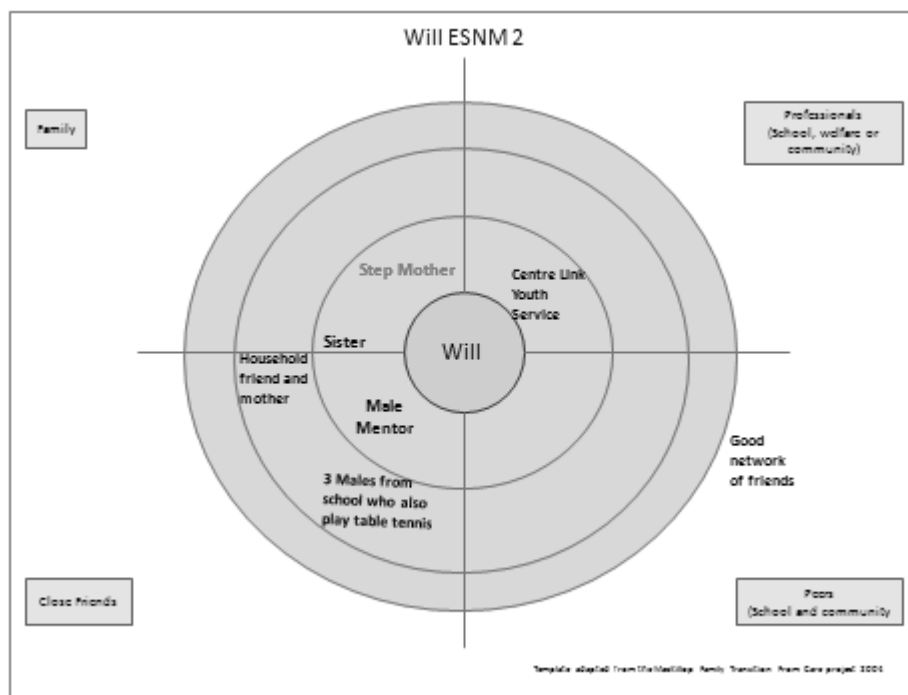
Figure 5   Eco Social Network Map: Interview Two Will

Schooling provided Will with hope for a better future. The experience shaped his habitus towards recognising a different life was possible and critical to his agency were supportive relationships (friends, sister, step mother) and structures that positioned the possibilities to attain his goal of remaining at school. Income and having access to accommodation were vital to sustaining resilience in what appeared to be a chaotic life. I was unable to connect with Will once he had left Metro secondary school. However, a listing (The Age, January 17, 2012, Tertiary Places) of awarded tertiary places notes a person with the same surname, same given name initials and postcode as being offered a tertiary place to study osteopathy. Seeing that his surname was unusual and given that Will's indication of aiming to study in this field it is quite likely that this listing did refer to him.

28 July 2011   Social cohesion amongst students

Gazing out of the school window whilst students are on recess I see various cultural groups intermixing in an assortment of activities. There are over 2000 students attending MSS and most noticeable is that students of different races are chatting, playing ball games, playing guitar and enjoying social company. There appear to be no cultural barriers to the formation of groups. Nor is there any indication of intimidation.

7.4   The role of MSS in supporting students

MSS teachers, welfare and career staff and principal wanted to participate in this research. Sixteen members of staff were interviewed. The principal of MSS was the first person to be interviewed. Another 14 staff participated in one of the five allocated focus group sessions. One teacher was interviewed on her own seeing that the focus group sessions did not accommodate her teaching schedule. Staff spoke about young people facing issues such as: caring for parents that were dying or who suffered from mental illnesses; and students working afternoon shifts to provide for the family because parents could not. For these young people school became their haven, a safe place where opportunities to mitigate adversity could be realised through supportive structures located within the school environment. For some students MSS was a place of solace where attendance was not necessarily based on doing schoolwork. As noted by a teacher some students needed the social interaction available to them at school to get away from 'the terrible things that are happening to them in their life' (Ms L 2010 p.15).

MSS had a high proportion of students from lower economic status and a diverse ethnic mix. 'Thirty per cent of students' were funded for assistance through English as a second language program (Principal MSS, 2010, p.6). The cultural mix and difficulties facing refugee and asylum seekers presented MSS with a range of issues that extended beyond pedagogical considerations. During interviews with school staff the picture painted was that of students experiencing family poverty, fractured families, families damaged by trauma and a significant number of students living alone. There were also social issues within the school such as boys wanting to go to mosque during Ramadan and Muslim girls experiencing school for the first time in their lives. The principal with many years of experience as an educator exclaimed "I never thought about it until five years ago, that there could be 15, 16, 17, 18 year

olds alone in the country" (Principal MSS, 2010, p. 9). Teachers and welfare staff repeated similar words. For instance, a teacher (Ms H, MSS, 2010, p.3) related "...they come here, they have no friends, they have to make friends, they find everything difficult". Recognising that basic needs such as school attire and educational resources were required to assist students in need, the school put aside discretionary funds in the region of $125, 000. This money assisted students with books, uniforms and other educational resources, and, as the principal noted, "it's a lot of money but the results of that [is] the minimum that you would do" (MSS principal 2010, p.12).

7.4.1 Students enjoyed being at MSS

The eight MSS students who participated in this research enjoyed being at school, had a sense of belonging to the school community, engaged in school activities and had good relationships with staff. For instance, asked what they liked about their school Blanca noted the social aspect of school, seeing her friends. Connie called school her second home and spoke about it as being 'just so much fun'. Yohan (MSS, 2010, p.1) said:

> it's a good school, good teachers, good friends, good environment. Students are friendly...they like each other. I don't see anything I don't like about this school. I love everything at this school.

Dani was more philosophical about her school claiming the diversity of ethnic backgrounds made it a unique school and provided good insight for life outside of the school environment. As an institution, MSS was a resource that offered the opportunity to engage with others. It was a place that provided young people with the opportunity to develop a supportive network of friends, teachers and wellbeing staff.

7.4.2 Connecting and using social capital

Participating in school activities occurs when young people have secured a sense of connection to the school. At MSS students were given the opportunity to participate in accelerated learning, leadership programs, sporting events, peer support leaderships roles, singing and dance events and VET programs. Three of the eight students interviewed engaged in VCE Year 12 units of studies whilst in Year 11.

Four students discussed participating in school sporting events at some time whilst being at MSS; one student was involved in drama; and another discussed her role as a school leader.

Students also formed connections with school staff for various reasons including accessing advice or information about future directions and utilising the social capital that staff had to offer. As an example, Connie spoke about seeking out support from a particular teacher as follows: "If I need help I'll go talk to her, like, with my courses or my future I'll go talk to her" (Connie, MSS, 2010, p. 6). Connie also talked about getting assistance from a teacher to align her work experience with her future post VCE goal of becoming a physical education (PE) teacher. Connie rationalised it would be best for her to do work experience within a school environment to get a feel of what is what like to be a teacher so she approached her PE teacher stating to her: "Miss I want to do work experience but as a teacher" (p.7). Her teacher accommodated her wish and Connie did experience at MSS.

As noted by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) the educational field requires from young people that they know how to play the game to maximise the most opportunities that the field has on offer. Schools and schooling are two elements present in the educational field. However schooling requires more that than just attending, participating and doing your best. Young people who participated in this research demonstrated how they used resources at school as one of the means for obtaining explicit objectives. For example, Dani, a well-spoken, confident young woman consciously builds up social capital by connecting with teachers who may be of assistance to her in the future. On two occasions in separate interviews Dani clearly articulated that at school she befriends teachers and works at engaging in conversation. Dani says "...I always become friends with teachers so they're always easy to approach afterwards" (Dani, MSS, 2010, p. 5). On another occasion Dani stated "...when I go through school I usually make friends with my teachers" (2011a). Dani's engagement with teachers was deliberate and in nurturing these connections she was enhancing her social capital by making an effort to engage with teachers who no longer taught her. "When I see them, I talk to them and I've got a good memory, so like, I can be, like, oh so how blah, blah, and all of that" claimed

Dani (2010, p.5). The effort made by Dani does result in pay offs such as achieving a position of leadership (Dani was a vice school captain in Year 12), attaining good grades and receiving recognition such as school awards for her contribution to school activities.

Another student, Yohan, also demonstrated a conscious approach toward building social capital. Yohan explained "Well, I tend to hang out with mostly people that I think are smarter than me because I will have the opportunity to ask them questions" (2010, p. 4). Both Yohan and Dani developed connections to procure benefits from the relationships either in the short or long term. Yohan who had been in Australia for a relatively short time wanted to secure his goal of getting into university and hanging out with smart people gave him the opportunity to further engage in academic dialogue. Whereas Dani built a reservoir of connections with teachers that provided her with status and a source of support to call upon if needed.

7.4.3 Teachers and the wellbeing team

At MSS students' habitus was shaped to seek out assistance from those who have the resources to assist. Teachers noted that the first port of call suggested to troubled students was the chaplain or the welfare team seeing that this team had the expertise as well as connections with community agencies outside of the school to support students. The principal was also very clear in delineating the roles of teachers and welfare staff. He noted:

> the philosophy that pervades the school is the teachers do teaching, and other people do other sort of work...So our wellbeing team of about probably a net of 7 people including guidance officers and others who come to us part time from the regional structure is made up of chaplains, social worker, psychologist, and so forth, so a good diversity of people with professional skills (principal, MSS, 2010, p. 10).

The wellbeing team were positioned to take care of students' welfare and transitional needs and the makeup included a chaplain, social/welfare workers, vocational advisors, health nurse and psychologist. The issues seen by the welfare team included self-harm, dieting, problems with parents, problems with school work and school refusal. They noted that they do not see much substance abuse and put that down to the cultural mix. To engage students the wellbeing team talked about

undertaking home visits to connect with families and young people who were not attending school. They also ran programs such as breakfast clubs, lunch time sport sessions, allocated books and uniforms to students in need, and connected with young people by walking around talking to them in the school yard. Consciously implementing strategies for connecting with young people sends out messages that the school cares as well as dissolves the hierarchical boundaries that segregate staff from students. The young people in this study felt comfortable in approaching and interacting with the welfare team. For instance, Dani reported that she had a good relationship with the chaplain and talked about him as someone that she could go to discuss personal issues that occurred at home, which she found distressing. Another student, Ana, talked about finding support through the chaplain when a school friend became pregnant in the previous year; Ana approached the chaplain to ask for advice on how to support her friend.

Elana twice spoke about her bout of depression during the early years of secondary school. Elana said "I was really, really depressed. Like I just wanted to die, I hated myself" (2010, p.6); "I wanted to commit suicide" (2011a, p11). It was the welfare team who assisted her and contacted her parents who were unaware of the situation. However it was not Elana who navigated her way to these services. Rather Elana's friends approached the wellbeing team through their concern for her and then the welfare team approached Elana and informed her parents. The welfare team supported Elana which Elana noted as being 'really helpful' (Elana, MSS, 2010, p. 7).

7.4.4 Safety at school

Feeling safe and secure offered students the opportunity to participate effectively at school and promoted connectedness to schooling. MSS expected conformity to school rules and this resulted in young people understanding their role within the school. Students in this study applauded the fact that the school implemented regulations rigidly. This made their school a safe place and a positive learning environment. Implementing 'zero tolerance' in a consistent manner meant that students clearly understood the boundaries of their actions and the consequences that followed if breaches occur. This provided students with the comfort of knowing that

their safety was paramount. Ana noted that the school was very strict when it comes to issues such as bullying and uniform. Asked if she thought that was a good thing, Ana (2010, p.9) responded: "Yeah it's a good thing, like, if someone was to be bullied at school, they would take it seriously".

The issue of safety emerged as a topic from both staff and students. For instance welfare officers referred to MSS as being a "safe place". The welfare officers put this down to the zero tolerance on fighting policy that was interpreted as follows:

> If there is[sic] any physical altercations then the kids are just sent home straight away that day to cool down and there's no discussion. Both sides of the party are sent home to cool down basically (Ms D, Mr E & Mr F 2010, p 4).

Similarly students talked about MSS being a safe school. For instance, without any direct questioning Connie (2010, p. 9) introduced the issue of safety as follows:

Interviewer:	*Do you have a sense of belonging to the school?*
Connie:	It's just like my second home. Like, I've been here for 6 nearly 7 years next year. It's just my life. Like, we go school, home, back to school, back to home. Just like a second home but I feel safe. Like, it's so much fun.
Interviewer:	*When you say you feel safe, what does that mean?*
Connie:	With the people around me. I just know I'm in a safe environment; the teachers and stuff. It's pretty cool.

According to the principal suicide has not been an issue at the school for number of years and many factors operated in the school that were likely to be responsible for this record. Firstly, the school's zero tolerance approach was clearly articulated to students and practiced by the school. Secondly the school had a peer related program titled 'caring for friends'. This peer support program involved training select groups of young people in Years 11 and 12 on basic counselling skills such as listening techniques, showing interest and referring on to the wellbeing team if the issue is serious. Thirdly, the school had a wellbeing team that teaching staff could refer students to when young people were facing issues. Fourthly, students appeared

comfortable in approaching teachers and wellbeing staff to discuss personal issues or to socialise.

7.4.5   Accelerated studies

MSS offered accelerated studies and four young people (Ana, Dani, Elana and Tony) completed Year 12 subjects while in Year 11. Participating in accelerated studies had many benefits. It offered young people the opportunity to fast track studies, extended the range of subjects that were studied at school, allowed for a higher ATAR score and provided students with a feeling that they are doing well at school. Participating in accelerated studies also freed up time in Year 12. For instance, undertaking Year 12 English and Further Maths whilst in Year 11 meant that Elana could concentrate more on art subjects during her final year of secondary school. This benefitted her long term goal by providing her with time to build up the art folio required to get into a graphic design course.

7.4.6   Engaging parents

MSS struggled to engage parents. This resulted in difficulty in getting together a school council. Also staff noted difficulty in getting parents to attend the school to receive information as to how their children were progressing or to receive career information that may assist transition post secondary school Staff provided examples to illustrate the non-engagement of parents. For instance, one staff member talked about recent parent teacher interviews for 380, Year 12 students noting that one parent showed up; another staff related "I had nobody, I sat there for three hours"; another staff member talked about a careers evening with parents where only "three families out of 2000 kids" attended; and another staff member spoke about a careers expo which attracted the attendance of 1000 students but not parents (Ms A, Ms B & Ms C, MSS, 2010, p.15). As the researcher I also experienced similar difficulties with involving parents as research participants. Letters were sent to parents via the school system and an information session was organised to explain the research however no one attended. The reluctance to be involved in school activities (or this research) may be [mis]interpreted as parents showing a lack of interest. However this was unlikely, seeing it was evident from student interviews that parents did focus and did have an interest in their children's education. This means that other factors were

keeping parents from participating in school-organised functions. One explanation may be the limited English language skills of parents, for instance, Blanca stated that "they [her parents] can't really speak English" (2010, p. 6). Other explanations are that parents lack confidence in associating with secondary school staff. For instance, Connie talked about her mother being involved in her younger siblings' primary school helping with reading programs. However her mother only attended to her secondary school to pay fees. This suggests that parents may not see how they could contribute towards their children's secondary level education other than providing general support and encouragement. When I asked Connie whether her mother would be interested in being interviewed for this study, Connie hesitated and responded with: "She's not really... like she'll get shy'"(2010, p.16) indicating that the experience would be socially alienating. Hence while the school worked at ensuring students have a sense of belonging, work was still required in finding ways of engaging parents.

7.5 Engagement with community based social structures

In addition to resources and systems located within MSS, shaping the trajectory of students who were demonstrating resilience during a time of transition, were the connections that students had with structures outside of the school. These are discussed within the section. In this cohort young people engaged in a range of activities as follows: participating in sporting activities (n=7); part time employment (n=5); attending church services and/or church youth groups (n=4); undertaking dancing, singing or music lessons (n=3); using health/welfare government support structures for counselling and other welfare needs (n=1); and engaging in educational programs out of secondary school (n=4). Whilst these structures may not be perceived by all young people as providing direct support (hence not all young people plot these onto their ESNMs), participating in activities outside of the school played an important role for the following reasons: building up social connections (as seen in the case of Will detailed previously in this chapter); developing communication and social skills; generating a sense of belonging to a community (as noted by young people undertaking language school); and widening the knowledge repertoire of possibilities in life through hearing and seeing what others are doing.

7.5.1   Religion

'A lot of kids get into church or mosque or religious support network' noted a teacher (Ms J, MSS, 2010, p. 7) and for the MSS cohort church featured in the lives of Blanca, Yohan, Tony and Elana. Practicing in religious rituals and/or belonging to a congregation provided these students with the opportunity to: develop and/or retain social contacts; have a sense of belonging to a community; access supportive networks; and engage with a way of practice that encouraged civic compliance. These students engaged in a range of church based activities such as church services, sharing meals and attending youth groups.

Yohan discussed being a Christian and belonging to an international ecclesiastic church. He goes to bible education and church on Sundays. Church was also a place where he '*hangs out*' (Yohan, 2010, p.7), where the congregation shared meals and where people had the opportunity to converse with others of similar beliefs. Belonging to a religious denomination shaped habitus towards a lifestyle that was morally based on the practice of 'being good' as positioned in terms of biblical tenets. I asked Yohan what he got out of going to church and he replied:

> They teach you about the bible, the word of God, the right things to do, what not to do. You live in a society where you be good, not like evil things, stuff like not to drink, not to smoke, those things (2011, p. 7).

For Tony, church was a part of his life that offered both the opportunity to socialise and to seek guidance. Tony attended church regularly but he was not a baptised Christian. During the first interview Tony discussed why he went to church as follows: "I have problems in life, like serious situations, I can go and talk to the pastor or someone in church" (2010, p.7). For both these young men who have been in Australia for less than five years, religious involvement provided channels to extend social connections with similar minded people in a new country. Blanca's talked about going to church during Easter and Christmas, fasting and saint's day celebrations. Blanca explained saint's day as a Serbian Christian Orthodox ritual where families and friends partied and celebrated their Christian heritage. From her explanation over 100 people would come to the family home bearing traditional gifts.

Elana talked about having a strong commitment to her religious faith and throughout her interviews spoke about God and church frequently. She spent around 14 hours per week in church based activities which included attending church services, singing in the church choir and attending youth group. Elana discussed how religious teachings influenced her thinking and actions in terms of what she perceived to be morally acceptable. She discussed the importance of being a good Christian and noted that she did not go out partying neither did any of her friends at church. Participating in church activities, such as youth group had been part of her life since she was 8 years old, however, for Elana participating in church based activities became relevant for her when she was feeling depressed and wanted to die in her early teenage years. Being a member of a church congregation provided Elana with a network that she could access for support that aligned with her religious principles. For Elana religion fulfilled her spiritual needs and was also a cog in life that functioned as a structure to guide everyday actions such as sexual activity, respect for parents, and practicing good citizenship. Her religious affiliations provided opportunities to congregate with and receive support from others with similar beliefs.

All four young people were dedicated towards achieving an ATAR score that with get them into tertiary study; and it is known that three (Elana, Tony & Yohan) received offers into tertiary education. Also two of the four (Tony and Elana) did Year 12 subjects during Year 11; and two young people (Elana and Blanca) attended language schools do Year 12 language courses. However it is difficult to conclude from this study that 'religion' played an exclusive or even an extensive role in shaping habitus towards academic attainment as found in Barrett's (2010) study.

7.5.2   Sport

As related in Chapter 2 a range of researchers (Coakley, 2011, Kay & Bradbury, 2009; Spaaij, 2012) argue that participating in sporting activities works towards shaping socially desirable behaviour, commitment to a training routine, team contribution, self-control and listening to and obeying instructions. Participating in sport required knowing the strategies to play the game, knowing how to use available resources and materials, sticking by the rules and seeking out guidance from a coach.

Hence the advantage of participating in sports includes the development of skills and knowledge, which may be transferable into other life arenas.

In the MSS cohort seven of the eight young people mentioned participating in sporting programs such as soccer, basketball, table tennis, tennis and netball prior to being in Year 12. Elana who suffered from asthma did not participate in competitive sport. By Year 12 the majority were no longer playing competitive sport with the exceptions of Tony who played soccer for a local club; Dani who participated in school sporting events; and Connie who spoke about playing basketball and soccer. But students were still participating in sports for fun. In addition to the benefits as noted above for the students in the MSS cohort participating in sports provided students with opportunities such as: furthering the opportunity to extend social capital as in the case of Will whose story appeared in section 7.3; Connie who does not see herself as academically inclined but does recognise that her sporting abilities may lead to employment pathways; and Dani who through participating in school sporting events is recognised and receives an award from MSS for being an active participant in extra curriculum activities

7.5.3 Part time work

Across Australia it is not usual for young people to have part time jobs whilst studying VCE (Mission Australia 2013) and when first interviewed (at the end of Year 11) six students at MSS were working part time. By the second interview, which took place whilst in Year 12, five (three of which were the same as the six) students were working in retail, hospitality, cleaning or in a factory. Young people generally found work through cold calling or through family members. The hours worked by young people in paid employment during Year 12 varied. For instance Connie worked casually during school holidays, Yohan worked five hours per week; Elana and Tony worked 12 hours per week; and Blanca worked 32 hours per week.

For some young people being in paid part time employment was necessary. They required income to sustain themselves as in the case of Tony who stated: "I can't rely on my parents. My parents have to take care of the other kids" (2010, p.6). In some cases young people contributed part or all money earned towards assisting in

maintaining the household. For instance, Yohan (MSS, 2011, p. 9) used his income to "share a little bit of responsibility" by paying for his younger sister's books, paying his transport cost and contributing towards household bills. Blanca's (MSS, 2011, p16, youth allowance and part of her income from her part time job went towards supporting the family household. Connie resided in a household of nine people (parents, five children and paternal grandparents) who were supported by her father's income and noted "... if I have money I give it to mum" (2010, p.12). The image presented by these students was one of family unity as well as families struggling financially. Yet the challenge to complete schooling was met with enthusiasm provoked by a strong family commitment to completing an education seeing this was regarded as a way out of poverty.

7.5.4   Studies outside of MSS

In addition to Year 12 studies, four young people took on studies outside of their secondary school. As previously noted three did language courses and the fourth, Connie did a VET program. Connie found studying towards her VCE difficult and throughout interviews she stated that she would not achieve the ATAR score required for university. Rather than dismissing the possibility of achieving her career goal (as noted previously to become a PE teacher) Connie through discussing options with her PE teacher built up information regarding pathways into this profession. During an interview Connie stated:

> Yeah, I've planned it. Like, if I don't get to be a PE teacher, if I don't get my ENTER score to guarantee uni, then I'll go do a personal trainer course...and then hopefully if I work my way up, [in the field of] personal trainer, I can become a PE teacher (Connie, 2010, p.4).

Several months later Connie's plan was in motion and the determination behind Connie decision was clear as demonstrated in the extract below where she related discussing her pathway post VCE with her mother:

> I sat down with mum and I said mum I'm doing a certificate this year instead of going to uni and starting fresh I'm going to finish my diploma, get that out of the way, so my TAFE is done. And then I'm going to, I don't think I can use my ENTER score the following year so I would have to apply as a mature student but in some uni's you have to be 20 and in some uni's you have to be 21. So they don't accept me the following year

I'll work in the gym build my experience more in the gym and then the following year I'd apply as a mature student... Yeah, I was telling mum...I was like don't stress me out about uni next year cause I'm not going. I'm going to do my TAFE course... (Connie, MSS, 2011b, p.9).

The vocational course was at Certificate III and IV level in Personal Training delivered through a local Register Training Organisation (RTO) using a mix mode method involving attending classes three times per week (Tuesday, Thursdays and Saturdays) as well as online delivery which Connie could access at any time. Prioritising vocational studies ahead of her secondary school studies worked for Connie and gave her the benefit to experience success. Connie navigated towards an academically achievable option that would be of benefit to her with employment in the future and with transitioning into higher education as a mature aged student later in life. Factors which shaped Connie's trajectory included: the school environment which provided her with workplace experience as well as information regarding how to achieve her goal; a supportive family that provided encouragement and financial support to reach her goal; and the training program being readily available within her community. Connie finished the vocational program and was awarded her certificates and as she predicted did not do so well in VCE with an ATAR score in the low 30s.

7.6   Post VCE (Year 12) outcomes

In terms of post VCE outcomes, as noted above, Connie successfully completed a vocational course and in July 2012 was working in retail. Blanca could not be contacted and Ana had not received an offer when telephoned in January 2012. In addition to Will another four students (Dani, Elana, Tony & Yohan) received tertiary offers. Seven months post VCE Dani and Tony were still engaged in their higher education courses. I was not able to connect with Elana or Yohan. As noted previously, Will's name appeared in a Victorian newspaper as receiving a tertiary offer. However I could not contact him to confirm whether he had taken up the offer.

For Dani and Tony the transition to higher education differed. Tony received a lower ATAR score and hence opted to undertake a bachelor degree at a private registered training organisation. He spoke about the educational experience in a positive way: "They all listen to us and they're really helpful" (Tony, 2012 p.4). He spoke about doing well, and noted lecturers as supporting students with their studies and

providing good feedback. Dani, despite being a top student and receiving several awards for academic excellence at MSS expressed not being able to adjust at university, lacking in motivation and getting grades of credits or low distinction that she considered to be mediocre. Dani stated "I kind of miss high school so I don't like uni that much" (Dani 2012b p.2). Whilst at secondary school she worked at befriending and remaining in contact with teachers she talked about connecting with university academic staff as being 'pointless and awkward' (Dani, 2012b p.13). Dani perceived that developing relationships with tutors and lecturers were useless particularly when the association was only for a semester. Additionally the opportunity to do so was difficult as Dani expressed 'lecturers, like, God, they're out of the lecture [theatre] before you (2012b p. 13). "They're out of the lecture before you" basically indicates that Dani perceived staff as not wanting to form relationships and this in turn meant that Dani was powerless to access the support from lecturers to assist her with settling into university. The experience of transition is smoother when relationships with staff can be formed quickly as in the case of Tony. This provides students with the opportunity to confidently ask questions of their lecturers and clarify information.

7.7   Conclusion

MSS students' lives illustrated the complex interplay of factors within and outside of school which included positive social relationships, familial attachments, positivity being experienced at school and within community life, opportunities to experience success, welfare support structures and collaborative processes operating between MSS and agencies outside of school. At MSS, students had a sense of belonging and enjoyed being at school. Features of MSS included good teachers and wellbeing staff who provide advice, support and information that assisted students transitioning out of secondary school, the opportunity to develop friendships with other students, policies that work to reinforce safety at school, and opportunities to participate in programs that offered a sense of achievement. Outside of the school environment students experienced connections with a range of agencies including church, sporting clubs, ethnic specific organisations, training environments as well as government departments such as Centrelink and Migrant Resource Centre. Affiliations with

structures within and outside of school provided students with opportunities to engage with others with whom they could call upon for advice, comfort and support in times of need.

Whilst the majority of parents were employed students noted the burden placed upon family finances by being at school and students worked part time to support themselves and at times to supplement the family income. Government payments such as youth allowances also meant that students could continue at school. Parents and family were sources of affirmation providing young people with encouragement to pursue educational goals but generally were not in a position to advice students about options post VCE. However as noted in this chapter students were generally focused on continuing studies after completing VCE with the majority aiming at getting into a university course. Integral to shaping trajectory towards university studies was alignment to career teachers, accelerated learning structures, out of school language courses and the networked relationships with two local universities. In particular accelerated learning and out of school language courses worked towards increasing students' ATAR score hence further reinforcing university as a pathway post VCE. Additionally, career teachers were highlighted as significant sources of support and students spoke about attending university information sessions.

The analysis reported in this chapter signified the significance of social relationships together with a range of community, institutional and social supports being critical to shaping students' sense of agency towards resilience and positioning transition. The following chapter features students who exit the secondary school system and pursue VCE studies at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institution. The experiences of the TAFE cohort illustrate how structures within the secondary school system alienated students and how at TAFE structures were found to be supportive and inclusive. The TAFE experience demonstrates how *Learn and Earn Policy and* Youth *Guarantee policy* (as reviewed in Chapter Four) are designed to keep young people from disadvantaged backgrounds engaged within the school system.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE TAFE COHORT

8.0   Introduction

Regional was situated approximately 70 kilometres from Melbourne and within the heart of the town was Regional Technical and Further Educational Institution (TAFE). TAFE had three campuses two of which were located in Regional and another in Rural. The Regional campuses were inviting and provided opportunities to study many para-professional and trade related courses. Facilities were modern and many of the buildings on each campus had recently been refurbished. The Rural campus was less inviting and only offered a couple of trade courses. The building was old, in need of repair and at the time of this study TAFE was looking at relocating to other premises in Rural.

The Regional township was picturesque and quintessentially provincial. Throughout the town were many examples of late 19th century architecture that emitted the affluence bestowed upon the area during its establishment phase. On the outskirts of town were manufacturing industries owned by multinational companies which, at the start of this study, were a major source of employment for the town and its suburban residents. Yet as detailed in Chapter Five, at the start of this study Regional was a town troubled with unemployment rates higher than the state average (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Additionally, greater percentages of young people left secondary school prior to completing Year 12 when compared to overall Victorian students. For example, the school retention rate to Year 12 in Regional was at 70 per cent (%), which was much lower than retention rates across Victoria at 82% (DEECD 2012b). Yet little was actually known about young people residing in Regional who left the secondary school system and who either transferred or re-engaged in education at TAFE to complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE).

This chapter analyses how structures within a regionally based TAFE assisted three young women. In this chapter I explore the experiences of the three young women who are studying towards completing VCE at TAFE and their life several months post VCE. Their told stories highlight how their habitus accommodates to the

changing field of education during their time of transition and how social capital comes into play as they strategically negotiate the field. As detailed in Chapter Four retaining young people within the education system until Year 12 has been a focus of policy changes embedded at State and Commonwealth levels. For instance, the Victorian *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* mandated young people to remain in school until 17 years of age; and the Commonwealth *Social Security Amendment (Training Incentives) Act 2009* required young people under the age of 21 years to *learn or earn* to be eligible for the Youth Allowance government subsidy. The Youth Allowance subsidy was available to young people who resided in circumstances deemed to be financially disadvantaged. Legislation introduced by the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006,* commonly referred to as Youth Guarantee Policy, also assured a training place in non-secondary institutions such as TAFE was made available to all young people under the age of 20 who had not completed Year 12 (DEECD n.d. c). The way that these policy changes play out in real life in the education field is the focus of this chapter.

In this chapter I review why these women left the secondary school system, the life difficulties facing TAFE students, welfare support at TAFE, the importance of friendships, and the relationships that these students had with teachers and their families. The chapter concludes with Leah's story. Leah presented a graphic account of her life, including her struggles with a drug addiction, suicide attempts and homelessness. Her story illustrates how resources 'within' and 'out of' TAFE assisted her to move away from drugs.

8.1   Experience of schooling before going to TAFE

As noted in Chapter One, Australian studies show a wide range of reasons as to why young people do not continue in secondary school including the desire for work and familial problems (Lamb et al. 2004); school suspensions having an alienating effect which discourages young people from continuing within the system (Boon 2008); and young people experiencing social coldness from other students and staff (Bottrell 2007). This TAFE cohort had varying reasons for selecting TAFE instead of remaining within the secondary school system but predominantly the message voiced

by participants was that secondary schooling was an alienating and humiliating environment.

The three young women who made up the TAFE cohort were Janie, Leah and Natalie. Janie, aged 17, experienced bullying at her former secondary school and talked about being bisexual. Leah, aged 17, used drugs, lived on the streets and had attended multiple secondary schools. Natalie, aged 18, suffered from depression and anxiety, had a brother in gaol and had a family history of ill health. Janie worked part time and was also financially supported by her parents. Leah and Natalie were youth allowance recipients. Staff members at TAFE regarded these three young women as demonstrating resilience. They demonstrated, as one teacher put it, "the ability to bounce back or keep going when obstacles are placed in their way" (Ms W 2011, p.1). Each met with me twice whilst undertaking VCE, spoke to me on the phone when VCE results become available and met with me several months post VCE to be interviewed for the final time. Their biographical accounts detailed a range of interacting factors relevant to shaping resilience and transitional outcomes.

Each young woman had attended a different secondary school and left for different reasons. For instance Natalie related two reasons for leaving her former secondary school. One being a change in class timetabling which triggered a situation that, for Natalie, meant experiencing problems with going to school. Natalie spoke to school officials about the timetable change and stated that:

> they [school officials] practically told me to go and not come back. Leave school. So I did. ...I felt like, okay, well they don't care, so I'll just go (2011a, p.1-2).

The other reason was related to being socially isolated at school. Natalie talked about the 'pressure to fit in' at secondary school as follows:

> ... I wasn't smart enough to be with the smart people but I was too smart to be with the cool people cause I like to read' (2012, p. 15). Natalie completed Year 11 and left the school system for 12 months before re-entering to do VCE at TAFE.

Janie reported being continually bullied at her former secondary school and to emphasise the extent of bullying Janie talked about four students committing suicide

in the year prior to her departure, three of which were in her year level. To check Jamie's information I scanned the Internet for reports and found that indeed the prevalence of suicide at her former school and the link to bullying was reported in Australian newspapers[44]

Janie could be regarded as an accelerated learner having completed a Year 12 subject in Year 11 at her former school and she noted that her marks were generally in the 80 plus category. However, Janie's habitus (Bourdieu 1990) was incongruent with that of other students.

> I didn't fit in. I wasn't part of the crowd. I would listen to different music. I didn't wear cool clothes...so I got really badly picked on...to the point where I was crying...people wouldn't talk to me cause they thought I was an angry person' (Janie 2011a, p.7).

What annoyed Janie most about secondary school was that "the ones who bullied people, were the ones with poor results [who] didn't try, and nothing was really done about it [the bullying]..." (2011a, p.8). Janie's impression was that "the school didn't really care" (2011a, p. 8). During her time at secondary school Janie suffered from depression but she 'never spoke to anyone at school about it' (Janie, 2012, p15). Janie noted that professional counsellors were not available at her former school; instead, teachers and a chaplain were responsible for welfare support. In terms of the chaplain, Janie appeared unsure about the role and did not seek out the chaplain for assistance[45]. In terms of teachers providing welfare support Janie's expressed "it would have made me feel uncomfortable with them [referring to teachers] knowing sort of personal things" (2012 p.15). In her view, teachers were there to teach and not to counsel young people or give them life advice.

Leah disliked secondary school and emphasised that she did not like teachers telling her what to do and having to do homework. Leah coloured her view of school with statements such as "I never get along with teachers" (Leah 2011b. p. 7) and getting "kicked out of [her former secondary school] because I got into a serious fight with a

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[44] Citation for newspaper reports are not included within the reference list as this effectively identify the location of the TAFE

[45] The issue here is that the chaplaincy program funded by the Federal Government is not meant to be religious and is not really a welfare position seeing that chaplains may not have welfare qualifications

girl and I was rocking up to school with alcohol and with drugs" (Leah 2011a, p.4). TAFE is the fifth educational institution that Leah attended over a six year period.

For the TAFE participants, ostracism at secondary school was not based on social class bigotry or racial marginalisation as discussed in other studies (Bottrell 2007; Ungar et al. 2008b). Janie and Natalie were marginalised at secondary school because they did not fit into the mould referred to as 'cool'. Leah's alternative behaviour gave out clear messages that the secondary school system was not working for her. Throughout the interviews all three young people understood, as Bourdieu (1990b, p.68) puts it "the countless acts of recognition which are the small change of the compliance inseparable from belonging to the field". In other words, gaining acceptance within a particular field required understanding the explicit and tacit rules and actively participating according to the requirements of such conventions. However, the TAFE participants, particularly Janie and Natalie, refused to play the games such as 'acting cool' or in the case of Leah 'being told what to do'. These females did not want to compromise their sense of self and individual dispositions. They chose instead to navigate to TAFE in an attempt to experience personal autonomy, a sense of belonging within the educational field and social connectedness with other students and staff.

8.2   VCE students at TAFE: The WO's impression

As the TAFE Welfare Officer (TAFE WO) noted:

> We use to have a real mix in Year 12. I've been here, what, seven years, the first couple of years there was, you know, lots of mums, lots of grandmas, and all sorts of that age group. Over the last three or four years it's mostly young people...Year 12s mainly 17, 18, 19 [years old]...this year we're got all young people except for our Vietnam vet who's on his last subject (TAFE WO 2011, p. 8).

Traditionally the aim of TAFE training was to provide educational services to adults or to young people who were apprentices. As noted in the introduction of this chapter the Victorian state government's *Youth Guarantee* Policy (DEECD n.d. c) made provision for young people to continue their education to Year 12 at TAFE or other publicly funded adult education training providers and this altered the demographics of VCE students at TAFE. The option of TAFE as a field in which to pursue Year 12

was opened up to all young people aged over 16 years but as indicated by the TAFE WO it tended to be attractive to young people who were experiencing life crises or young people who come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds.

TAFE VCE students had a general demeanour, as described by the TAFE WO, of sadness and wanting desperately to have an education: "to stop that cycle that their family or their friends have been through" (2011, p2)

> ...a lot of them feel dumb, they say that ... A lot of it is just self-doubt and very low self-esteem. A lot of them have depression and huge anxiety issues so even to come into a classroom is really, really hard (TAFE WO 2011, p.2).

> A lot have been bullied so they don't want to go back to school. A lot of our kids are a bit alternative perhaps and so they get picked on at school. They don't want to go back there (TAFE WO 2011, p.8).

As detailed in Table 9 the TAFE noted numerous issues including depression, money difficulties, estrangement from parents, serious familial health issues and coming from families that had four or more children. Students who suffered from depression were on medication and two had engaged in self-harm. Two students also noted that their parents wanted them to find a job rather than continue at school. For instance, Natalie talked about her father's motor mechanic business being in financial difficulty and how that created friction between herself and her father. He wanted her to leave school to relieve the financial burden. TAFE however provided Natalie with more than an education. It provided social and well as welfare support that she recognised as strengthening her wellbeing. The ongoing arguments with her father resulted in Natalie leaving home towards the end of Year 12 and living in a caravan at the back of a friend's home for three months. Another young person, Leah, whose story is featured later in this chapter, had not resided with her parents for over 12 months. In Leah's case her parents wanted her to find a job rather than remain at school and made this a condition for her return into the family home. However both Leah and Natalie continued at TAFE and this was mainly attributed to the support found within that environment from the WO and teachers.

Table 9 TAFE cohort: types of adversity experienced

	Suffers from depression requiring professional intervention	Bullied at former school	Not living with parents during Year 12	Limited family income	Serious familial health issues or injuries	Four or more children in family	No support at former secondary school	Young person on welfare support
Janie	X	X			X		X	
Leah	X		X			X	X	X
Natalie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

8.3 Social welfare support at TAFE

Interagency mechanisms worked to connect young people with TAFE. For instance, in Natalie's case navigating to TAFE was through accessing other community resources. Natalie related:

> ...I dropped out of high school in 2008 and for a whole year I didn't know what to do with myself so the next year I got involved in this [names a locally based program] and it's for people that have, like, depression and stuff and try and get back out into the world and stuff. And I wanted to do VCE but I was too afraid, but [a professional at the program] helped me get back into VCE so that's why I am here this year. Ever since coming here [to TAFE] I've felt much better and I have more goals now. I want to go to uni (2011a, p.1).

Throughout the interviews, students indicated that welfare support within the TAFE system was highly valued. This was also reflected in the positioning of the TAFE WO on the Eco Social Network Maps (Figures 6 & 7) that are reviewed later within this chapter.

At TAFE the student body had access to TAFE counsellors however the TAFE WO was specifically employed to cater for the needs of VCE students. Her office was located next to classrooms rather than within the mainstream student support services which were located in another building and somewhat remote from VCE classrooms. The TAFE WO used an open door strategy to develop rapport. Students wandered in and out of her office either alone or in groups during their breaks to chat and access tea and coffee. Thus the TAFE WO became aware of student issues and quickly put strategies in place to avert student conflict or student/staff conflict.

The TAFE WO's attitude toward her role was expressed as follows:

> I don't mind what I do for the kids if it helps them get through their years with us and have good thoughts about their school years...when they look back, I want them to look back and feel that this was a really warm and comfortable place (TAFE WO 2011, p. 2).

Pragmatically the TAFE WO's role involved keeping students connected to education by supporting them in accessing fee assistance, money for books, assisting them in finding accommodation and connecting young people to community based welfare agencies. For instance, the TAFE WO talked about referring students to the Drug Treatment Services and Youth Substance Abuse Services to assist students to get off drugs; ringing up employers to find young people jobs; following up on students if they had been away from TAFE for a few days; and assisting students when transitioning either into or out of Year 12. In the TAFE WO's view, young people who were doing VCE at TAFE faced adversity in their daily lives and they wanted to know that "someone cares if they live or die and they get that here" (TAFE WO 2011, p. 5).

The role of the TAFE WO effectively kept students within the education system. In Leah's case, the WO was referred to as an adult in the school system with whom she could communicate, who cared about her wellbeing and who demonstrated mutual respect. These were the essential ingredients for sustaining her within that learning environment. Janie regarded the role of the TAFE WO as a vital source of support and noted that having a similar role in her previous secondary school would be invaluable to supporting students' mental health and emotional being.

8.4   Friends in and out of school

Gaining a sense of belonging in a large educational institution with multiple campuses, endless rows of classrooms, students attending at various times and different groups of students within different classes can result in students finding it difficult to make friends. The opportunity to develop friends requires that physical structures be in place so that students can meet and get to know each other. This did occur at TAFE and was mainly due to smaller student numbers and the opportunities for students to constantly interact. For instance, TAFE did not have an extensive offering of VCE subjects; VCE (Year 12) students' number totalled 90 (TAFE WO

2011, p. 5); and VCE classrooms were adjacent to each other. This meant that students did see each other frequently and hence got to know each other well. The space where VCE was offered worked well for students, in particular, for students whose desired objective was to be accepted by school peers as valued group members as in the case of Janie and Natalie.

TAFE provided the opportunity to extend friendship networks. "I've made so many friends it's a real shock…practically everyone in the class, we're all friends, it's just awesome" related Natalie (2011b, p10.). Similarly, Janie stated, "Everyone is friends. Like all of the Year 12 kids all hang out, we all spend time together, we all get along" (Janie 2011a, p.3). That is not to say that students did not encounter personal conflict with other students. On the contrary, Janie and Natalie both described clashes with fellow students. However, at TAFE students could seek out support from the WO. For instance, Janie (2011b, p.9) who talked about a conflict situation she had with some students noted the support she received from the WO as follows:

> I didn't tell her about the situation with the other students but she sort of came up to me and said oh how you going, and she just knew about it and obviously whether other students or teachers were letting her know, and she does know us all individually and know our backgrounds and stories so it's really easy to go to her and talk, even if you're having a bad day, someone to talk to who has an overview of the whole program and other students here. I just don't think you get that at a high school. There it's more the teachers and the students are very separate.

Despite students talking about making new friends at TAFE this was not reflected within Eco Social Network Maps (ESNM) in Friend Quadrant (refer to Figures 6 & 7). This was understandable at the beginning of the year. The students were new to the TAFE and unlikely to have formed close and supportive friendships (refer to Figure 6). Yet, the pattern was repeated in the second ESNM undertaken in third term (refer to Figure 7). Rather TAFE classmates were positioned within the circles in the Peer Quadrant suggesting one of three things: that the students were wary in nominating TAFE based people as close friendships given their past experience at secondary school; that friendships take considerable time to develop; or that positioning as peers was an artefact, that is, TAFE participants thought they had to go there because they were peers. People positioned as friends on ESNMs tended to

be those with whom students had long term or intimate relationships. For instance, in the first ESNM Janie positioned her gay partner whom she met at TAFE as a close friend and others who had been in her life for some time, such as a friend from kindergarten or friends through family connections. Similarly Natalie's friends were people she first met in primary school as well as family friends; and Leah included her boyfriend and a long-term female friend. In terms of support Leah talked about her friends assisting her through suicidal ideations and noted, "it's just been my friends that have stopped me" from killing herself (Leah 2011a p.3). Likewise, Natalie discussed receiving support from a friend who also suffered from anxiety whom she noted as a source of comfort and someone who understood her ailment.

As reported in another study many students were not comfortable in seeking the services of school counsellors, community agencies, telephone hotlines or counselling services preferring instead seeking support from friends (Mission Australia 2013). This was not the case for the TAFE cohort. The TAFE students embraced welfare support at school. However their accessing of community-based agencies received mixed reviews. For instance, Leah when first interviewed resented the intrusiveness of community agencies and preferred to remain homeless rather than be connected to a youth worker. However, Janie and Natalie spoke about the essentiality of health care professionals located within the community. In the case of Natalie she positioned a psychologist and a connection to a not for profit welfare agency as being supportive in her first ESNM (refer to Figure 6 – purple dots).

As indicated in Figure 7 welfare support at TAFE was considered as being important by the second interview. This demonstrated that strategies such as the proximity of the WOs office and an open door strategy did work to engage students with welfare services available to them at TAFE.
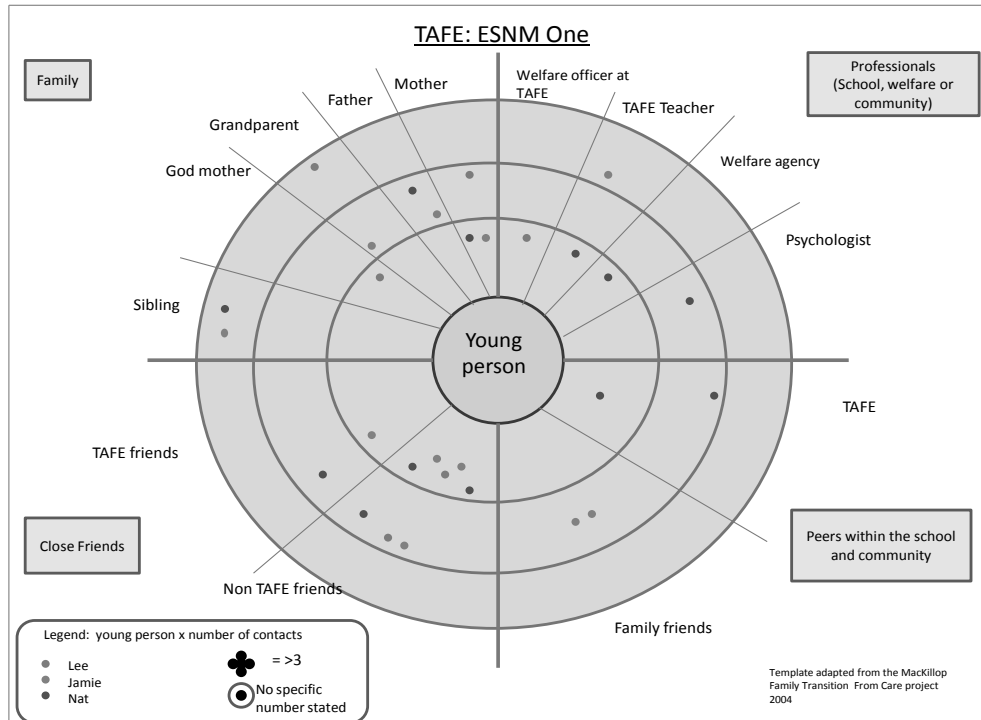
Figure 6   Eco Social Network Map: Interview One TAFE participants
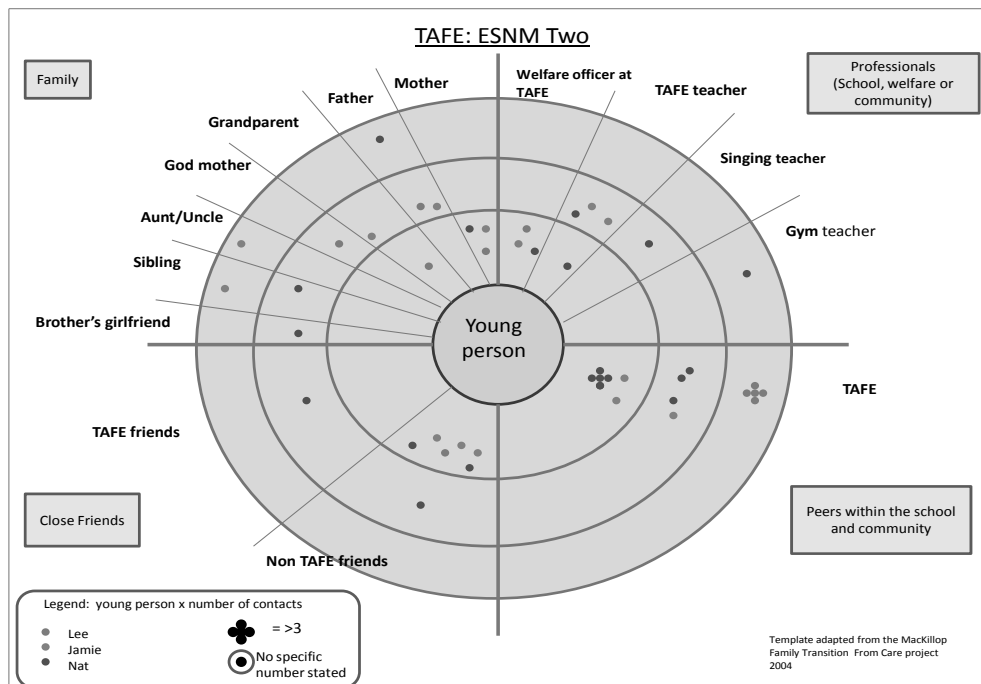
Figure 7   Eco Social Network Map: Interview Two TAFE participants

8.5 Relationships with TAFE teachers

Participants spoke highly of their TAFE experience and this was due to a range of opportunities afforded to young people including relationships with teachers. Similar to other studies of resilience (Demie 2005; Howard & Johnson 2000b; Gilligan 2007; Morales 2008) teachers were regarded as important sources of support as indicated by the way that two students positioned teachers on ESNMs (refer to Figures 6 & 7). Students stated that at TAFE the teacher/student formalities were toned down. "There's no formalities... [such as] good morning sir...everyone is kind of on the same level" reported Janie (2011a, p4). Young people talked about forming positive relationships with teachers, seeking out teachers for additional academic assistance or advice, and teachers socialising with students during non-teaching time. For instance, Janie (2012) related how teachers used "... their lunch hour to sit down with you and talk to you about things".

In terms of assisting students with their learning needs, TAFE teachers incorporated different teaching and learning styles to meet the various requirements of students. For example, Ms X, a TAFE teacher, used several techniques to grab students' attention such as 'You Tube' snippets, hands on activities, and worked at making the teaching content relevant to students' current lives. The same teacher talked about a range of supportive structures made available to students outside of the classroom to assist them transitioning into TAFE such as the role of the TAFE WO who supported students wellbeing, the student/teacher mentor program where students could discuss school-based issues with teachers who volunteered to take on the role of mentor; tutorials on study techniques; and classes designed to develop basic academic and student skills such as English and grammar, research skills, referencing, time management, dealing with stress and organisational skills.

Janie and Leah felt that TAFE did not academically push students to the same extent as secondary schools. Consider for instance, the following account by Leah (2011b, p.8) when comparing TAFE to secondary school:

> Here they (being teachers) don't have such a high standard cause they don't expect everyone to be perfect. And like they don't put you in a category that you are all going to pass everything and you're going to be really smart and get the best grades

However it was difficult to decipher whether TAFE did actually have lower academic expectations or whether this was perceived to be the case because of the casual environment. For instance, Natalie's experience of TAFE was one that promoted goals to higher education.

8.6   Options post VCE

Over time the three women's thinking regarding post VCE options shifted. For instance, at the start of VCE, participants discussed aims about going to university after completing Year 12. However TAFE did not offer the pre-requisite subjects for some of the higher education courses that the women nominated. For instance, Leah and Natalie both discussed the possibility of undertaking veterinary science but TAFE did not offer the pre-requisite subjects such as VCE chemistry or physics. By the end of year both participants considered vocational options.

In Natalie's case her thinking was shaped through extending her social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to include TAFE teaching staff. For instance, Natalie's Year 12 outdoor education teacher also taught in a diploma course that was of interest to her. Through knowing this teacher she was able to utilise his social networks to meet other teachers delivering the diploma program and she got a feel as to whether student/teacher relationships would develop, thus enhancing her own social capital. Toward the end of VCE Natalie discussed her intentions for the following year as follows:

> I want to do conservation and land management at the [TAFE]...and then when that's done I want to go to [names university]...if I do it at the [TAFE] for two years I get a year worth of credits towards my [names university] course. ..I'm one of those people that need to make sure that I have the knowledge before I go into something really hard...plus my outdoor teacher, he teaches [the TAFE course] as well so he said he'd refer me (Natalie 2011b pp. 4-5).

Over the year Natalie had gained a sense of belonging at TAFE. Natalie was now what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p.127) refer to as a 'fish in water'; her habitus fitted with the educational field. Factors operating to shape agency to remain at TAFE included her prior experience at TAFE, the articulation process into university upon completion of a TAFE diploma and the opportunity to activate resources such as teaching staff to assist her with diploma level studies. As seen in the above

excerpt Natalie regarded the TAFE diploma as the vehicle that would aid her success at university. Natalie received and accepted an offer from the TAFE to study conservation land management at diploma level. I interviewed Natalie six months post VCE and she reported that she was happy at TAFE and progressing successfully in the diploma course.

Upon completing VCE Janie received an offer to undertake a bachelor degree in geology and wildlife at [Regional] university but she decided to defer the offer. Six months post Year 12 Janie talked about joining the police force stating that

> ...I know a few people that I've worked with at Safeway they're got degrees and they can't get jobs and they're still stuck at Safeway but they wasted, not wasted I suppose, but they spend these years at university, have been working part time at Safeway and then have come out with sort of nothing. Whereas if I go to the police academy I'll be paid for that time and come out with a job guaranteed ... you can always get promoted (Janie, 2012, p.19).

In Janie's case employment prospects outweighed the status that came with being tertiary qualified and six months post TAFE Janie was on her way to obtaining a manual drivers' licence and maximising her physical fitness in preparation for her application for the police academy. Janie's experience gained through her part time job as well as residing in an area where the percentage of unemployed people is doubled the state average (ABS 2011) attuned her habitus towards employment possibilities for Regional folk. Janie focused on employment with assured outcomes and structured career pathways hence her statement about 'promotions'. Janie premised her thinking about this decision on two things: a friend who is in the police force who provided her with information; and witnessing job outcomes for Regional young people who graduated from university. Hence social experiences more so than educational outcomes worked at shaping her habitus towards focusing on pragmatically long term employment with minimal risk of unemployment. The police academy offered Janie the opportunity to be paid for training, guaranteed a job upon completion and the option to continue being trained to diploma level.

8.7   Families as a source of support

In addition to supporting structures found within TAFE and the community, the young women acknowledged the importance of family members as providers of

emotional, financial and physical support. In terms of family, the TAFE young people noted the importance of parents and extended family members such as grandparents, uncles and siblings. TAFE participants also extended family membership to include a godmother and a brother's girlfriend. In particular, participants appeared to have close relationships with their mothers. All three participants engaged in sporting activities with mothers and all three noted discussing personal issues with their mothers. For instance, Janie noted:

> My mum we're really close...we use to play volleyball together so we spent a lot of time together...at night me and mum sit up watching TV with a cup of tea, chatting about the day and whatever is going on...she always has that word of advice...talking to her makes me feel better (2011a, p. 8).

Similar to findings in other studies (Morales 2008; Resnick 2000; Turner 2001; Ungar 2004b.), when relationships with parents severed, as did Leah's for several months, young people turned to surrogate family members for support. In Leah's case, after several months of living on the streets, she turned to her godmother who provided her with shelter, guidance and emotional support. Her godmother was her mother's best friend whom Leah had known since birth whose support was conditional on Leah abstaining from taking drugs.

8.8 Leah's story

There were many welfare agencies operating across Regional to support young people and the majority were centrally located hence not too far from where TAFE was situated (Regional LLEN environment scan, 2010,[46]). But, having access to numerous services did not automatically mean that young people regarded the services being offered as supportive. For instance, prior to commencing TAFE Leah lived on the streets. She was aware of services available to assist homeless young people but refused to participate seeing that meant in Leah's words: "I had to go through social workers and youth workers and I couldn't be bothered. So I didn't" (Leah 2011a, p. 10). Leah also talked about rejecting health related support from other organisations such as a centre that specialised in youth suicide that was called in by a hospital after her last suicide attempt; and refusing to talk through issues with

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[46] This environmental scan is not detailed in the reference listing to protect the identity of the LLEN TAFE and participants.

the psychiatrist that the hospital appointed. Leah showed me scars on her wrists, the tell-tale sign of her most recent suicide attempt and related that she had faced much adversity in her life. During interviews she related near death experiences such as her father's ex-wife driving her car through her mother's lounge room a metre away from hitting her when she was an infant; physical altercations with her sister that resulted in hospital admissions; having arguments with her parents; leaving home; living on the streets; taking drugs; stealing food to survive; being in trouble with the police; and being diagnosed with depression.

Participating in VCE at TAFE provided Leah with social/welfare support without the requirement of entering into situations demanded by other social/welfare agencies located outside of TAFE. At TAFE, Leah did not need to tell her story to welfare staff, provide familial information or make formal appointments. Access to social/welfare support was readily available whenever she required it without questions being asked.

Leah attended TAFE because she knew another student who was already at TAFE. The TAFE WO had been working within the welfare system throughout Regional for over 30 years and had spent the last seven years working at TAFE. Upon meeting the TAFE WO Leah became aware that the TAFE WO assisted her mother when Leah was born and Leah immediately formed a relationship. As Leah stated "My mum trusts her so I trust her...like, she was there when my mum really needed her" (Leah 2011a, p.5). Leah found the system at TAFE conducive to her needs, particularly the role of the TAFE WO. The relationship was unstrained from any formalities. For instance, Leah related "If I'm not doing anything I just go and sit in [the WO TAFE] office and talk to her...it's good to sit there and know that she's there" (2011a, p.5). Leah's affiliation with the TAFE WO provided her with someone to talk to about personal dilemmas. The TAFE WO was the person that Leah went to for assistance with subject selection, information about transitionary processes post Year 12, and for advice and support when issues arose with teachers.

TAFE as a resource assisted Leah in a number of ways including developing friendships and engaging productively with others. As noted by Leah, TAFE teaches

you "things without actually having a teacher" (2011b, p. 16). She talked about gaining an awareness of different cultures due to the various cultural backgrounds of students and discussed how virtues such as patience emerged through participating at TAFE. For instance she explained "[the students from] different cultures can't speak English as well as we can, so like, you learn patience if you really want to have a conversation with them" (2011b, p. 16). Leah spoke about the TAFE teachers in the following way:

> As a student I'll never get along with my teachers but compared to mainstream school they're a lot more easy going. Easier to get along with, like, at mainstream school they're kind of seen that they're only here cause they have to be (2011b, p. 7).

Towards the end of Year 12, Leah (2011b) expressed:

> Compared to where I was at the start of the year or this time last year, everything has just gotten better. Like my relationship with my family, my housing, like, I've got a boyfriend and school is going really well. And I'm playing A grade [netball] for [names the team]. So everything has worked out (p.13)...

In addition to her TAFE experience Leah (2011b) acknowledged the role of family and friends as follows:

> My family have been there for me to talk to, and like my friends were there for me to hang out with, and my Nan was there if I was in desperate need of something. Everyone kind of contributed in their own little way, and like, I think most of the time it was without realising. Like, I didn't realise it until, like, I looked back and that's when I realise it and it's like wow, you guys did a lot for me (p. 15).

Access to a range of supports assisted Leah. As highlighted in ESNMs above (refer to Figures 6 & 7 - blue dots) welfare support at TAFE was regarded as important during the year she undertook VCE. During that year her parents and TAFE peers became more significant in providing her with emotional support. Whilst Leah experienced three secondary school changes during Year 11, she remained at TAFE for the duration of Year 12. Towards the end of Year 12 Leah was in a secure relationship with her boyfriend and residing with his family. She resumed playing and umpiring netball and met up with her parents several times during the week. She stated that she no longer took drugs or had suicidal thoughts.

The final interview took place six months post Year 12. Leah remained connected to her parents but considered living apart was a good idea. Leah claimed "me and mum don't get along when we are under the same roof" (Leah, 2012, p.3) indicating that maintaining an amicable relationship with her family outweighed residing in a family unit that was dysfunctional. This finding reflected, as Unger (2004c) found, that young people want their parents to be part of their life and to provide assistance despite relationship difficulties. Leah was now 18, still residing with her boyfriend's family and she was due to give birth to a baby girl in seven weeks. The pregnancy was not planned and Leah noted that the decision to continue with the pregnancy was after due consideration as to whether they could afford a child as well as the stability of their relationship. She talked about the necessary physical resources for the baby being in place acknowledging the support that both sets of future grandparents were providing in buying in preparation for their granddaughter. She also talked about receiving mental health support to assist her during and post the birth of the child. This was considered by Leah to be extremely important since she suffered from depression.

In Leah's case becoming a mother provided her with a purpose for utilising opportunities that were available in Regional. During her pregnancy Leah completed a Certificate III in Business Administration. Her aim was to find employment within a related field and commence work when her daughter was six months old. Reflecting on her past, Leah was philosophical:

> ... the way I look at it now is I wouldn't be where I am if that hadn't have happened. Like, I wouldn't be who I am and I wouldn't have my daughter on the way. I guess I can count myself lucky that through everything I can still be happy and enjoying my life (2012, p.4).

Community institutions in Leah's life since leaving TAFE include: Centrelink (a Government department that authorises welfare payments), a Job Network (a Government funded agency that seeks out employment opportunities and pathway options for job seekers), a registered training organisation (delivers nationally accredited vocational training programs), and the local hospital. Centrelink connected Leah to the Job Network and this network connected her to a registered training organisation to undertake Certificate III in Business Administration studies.

At the local hospital Leah was connected to a midwife who referred her to a prenatal counselling service that assisted young mothers who may be prone to depression. Leah stated that she willingly and actively participated in counselling sessions seeing that her wellbeing was also important for the wellbeing of her unborn child.

In Leah's case being free from drugs and connected to her family were criteria for success. A range of services including TAFE that provided access to welfare support aided Leah. The association with the TAFE WO assisted Leah in recognising the benefit of professional support. Leah also acknowledged that the teaching approach used in TAFE suited her learning style. Hence critical to agency were resources located across several fields (for instance, education, health, community, Government, family).

8.9   Conclusion

For the three young women detailed in this chapter accessibility of resources such as TAFE made available through legislative changes and embedded in policy rhetoric referred to as Youth Guarantee meant that they remained in touch with education. For two young women welfare payments were contingent upon remaining within the education system. The TAFE environment promoted a sense of belonging and opportunities to extend networks. The cultivation of social networks in TAFE between students as well as between TAFE staff and students was contingent on the effectiveness of the TAFE to structure systems to encourage a sense of belonging where students felt safe and were heard. Successful outcomes in the terms of the TAFE cohort included being able to develop friendships. Additionally, success was seen in terms of wellbeing such as not using drugs, locating shelter, not having suicidal ideations and coping with depression. Assisting resilience towards this success were within school and out of school structures which included welfare support within school and a range of agencies assisting students out of school. Parents were also regarded as being supportive sources despite two students at some time during the school year not residing within the family home.

As detailed throughout this chapter students contrasted their experiences at TAFE to their prior experiences at secondary schools. Being at TAFE did not free the students from experiencing conflict situations with the potential to threaten emotional wellbeing however TAFE did have in place welfare support exclusive to VCE students. The structuring of the welfare support role framed by an 'open door ' (that being accessibility to support at anytime during school hours) meant that students had ongoing support whilst at school; the welfare role was also set up to address issues of confrontation quickly. This provided students with an avenue to turn to when issues arose. Teachers at TAFE were noted by students as being supportive and approachable as well as sources of social capital as in the case of Natalie discussed earlier in this chapter. The experience of TAFE shaped habitus towards remaining within the vocational training system post VCE as defined by the outcomes of two students.

The following chapter reviews the experiences of students attending a secondary school in Regional, which is referred to as Regional secondary school (RSS). Three parents, all female, and one male were selected by RSS staff to participate in this study. The experiences of students at RSS highlight how systems within the school environment worked to support resilience and transition.

CHAPTER NINE: THE REGIONAL COHORT

9.0   Introduction

In the previous chapter the participants who presented their stories attended TAFE positioned in the Regional town centre. In the current chapter the participants were from a Regional Secondary School (RSS) located 10 kilometres from the TAFE. RSS was situated in a public housing area and visually the area appeared to be home to people with little to spare on luxuries. The houses were predominately modest dwellings constructed using public funds to accommodate the poor in the 1950s and 60s. Parks and reserves were scatted throughout the area but not lavished. One reserve nearby RSS had high voltage power lines running through the centre and appeared to be more like a clearway to which a walking track and some park benches had been added. Other parks also lacked the ambience that more affluent areas demanded such as extensive playground equipment or flora to attract native birds and animals.

Near RSS were an abattoir, heavy and light manufacturing industries, hotels with gaming machines, mega size retail outlets and franchised food chain stores. The proximity of the factories and chain stores were so close to RSS that transition into retail, unskilled or trade professions after leaving secondary school could be inferred and ultimately maintained through the inadequacy of public transport (discussed later in this chapter). This area within Regional also had many factory shells now left unmaintained and dilapidated. The issue thus becomes how students gain employment or access to future study in a community that is undergoing deindustrialisation and a region with high poverty.

In this chapter the stories of young people are complemented by interviews with a RSS welfare officer, the principal of RSS and a Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) executive officer. Invitations were forwarded to RSS teachers to be involved as participants in this study however no one put their hand up to be interviewed. The supposition made by the researcher was that RSS teachers were feeling the impact of change that was occurring throughout the school system within

Victoria. At the time of data collection schools in the area were in the process of being amalgamated into one large mega school with multiple campuses. Some schools in the region were to close, some staff positions were being reallocated and changes were being made to the curriculum.

It is anticipated that the restructuring did impact on staff as it did on students (to be detailed below). Whether the timing of the research simply did not correlate well with what was occurring at that school at the time or whether teachers were not interested in the study remains unknown. However, the principal and welfare officer who had many years of experience within Regional did participate and were indeed in a position to provide valuable data.

I commence this chapter by introducing the four students who make up the RSS cohort. I then review students' hardships, supportive networks located within RSS and supportive structures with the community. I conclude with Zac's story, which details how a young man experienced transition from a feeder secondary to RSS and then into university. Zac's story highlights the shaping of habitus towards the Information Technology field and how the structures within the educational field and the social media field were integral to shaping habitus. Throughout this chapter comparisons are made to TAFE and the MSS cohorts.

9.1   The RSS students

Zac was male and without children, Fiona, Gabby and Helena were young mothers. Zac was interviewed five times. He was17 years old and RSS was his third secondary school. In Years 7 and 8 he attended a Catholic College and gave three reasons as to why he left that school. These included the cost of school fees which at the time would have been approximately $70 per week, and which placed a burden on the family's financial resources. Zac regarded not being allocated his preferred subject electives as the school being dismissive of right to choice. He also acknowledged that the academic pressure was burdensome. It made him cry at night to the extent where Zac said he was close to depression. Years 9 and 10 were undertaken in the former feeder school to RSS.

11 February 2011 – First interview round with young parents at RSS

I was interviewing Helena when suddenly someone started to yell and scream. It was Fiona who was screaming. Helena opened the door to the interview room calling out to Fiona to relax saying 'If they want to smoke then it is okay'. Resonating were Holstein and Gubrium's (2011) words about knowing the details of the narrative occasion that influence the flow of the dialogue.

Fiona was interviewed after Helena and during the interview she was quietly spoken. However she saw someone who grieved her and instantly ran out the interview session yelling abuse and using profanities for about ten minutes. It was a younger student who was the target of this vocal barrage. I suspended recording during the incident. I actually did not think that Fiona would return to the interview and I was somewhat confused in terms of my sense of duty. I actually thought at one stage that a physical fight was about to erupt and no school staff were present. This did not occur. Fiona returned to interview room saying she did not want students to smoke near the children's day care facility and also alluded that the young person being confronted was in a relationship with her son's father. I asked her if she wanted to continue with the interview, which she did, and I was amazed as to how quickly her temperament changed to again being quietly spoken.

RSS had systems in place to assist young parents to remain or return to school such as a crèche and parents' centre. However the young parents in this study could not access an adult educational alternative to complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) even if they wanted to. The inefficiency of public transport constrained residents who did not have their licence and/or access to a car to predominantly use services and structures that were only available to them within the local vicinity. TAFE, which was located in the Regional town centre was another alternative for students but was difficult to access. Also TAFE did not provide a crèche on site. It took between 45 minutes to an hour to travel to Regional town centre by bus. While travelling by train was more time efficient taking eight minutes to get to the town centre, the system was not accommodating. Every second or third train bypasses the local station between 9.45 am until 5.00 pm which meant that residents had a train service that ran every two hours.

As discussed by the welfare officer (RSS WO) generally young parents at RSS presented with a multiplicity of issues including dealing with the social stigma of

being a young parent, loss of peer group, financial issues, health related concerns, lack of familial support, lack of parental role models in their family of origin, social isolation, and the inability to obtain private rental accommodation due to lack of income and/or their age. The young parents who participated in this research experienced a number of these issues. Fiona, aged 20, was a mother of a 15 month old girl. Fiona had never experienced paid employment and prior to having her daughter completed a Year 12 subject whilst in Year 10. When first interviewed Fiona resided with her father, grandmother and brother but stated that she would rather be living independently. During the interviews she only mentioned her daughter's father once saying that he had access every second weekend. Fiona was interviewed three times at school and twice after leaving school. She left school when she was 17 years old and half way through Year 12 but now wanted to complete VCE to set a good example for her daughter and stated "I don't want her to not go to school cause I didn't. So she can't use that as an excuse" (2011, p.6).

Gabby was interviewed three times at school and twice post Year 12. At the start of the research Gabby was aged 28 years and had three children aged 2, 4 and 7 years. Gabby was determined to complete Year 12. For her completing VCE meant be merited with the status of completing secondary school. Gabby also recognised that completing VCE alone would not get her a job. At the same time as studying for her VCE, Gabby was undertaking a vocational course, a Certificate III in Children's Services, which upon completion would qualify her as a childcare worker. When first interviewed Gabby was residing with the children's father. However Gabby spoke about the relationship as being strained. Gabby talked about her partner's verbal abuse, excessive drinking, lack of support in managing the children and his belittling of her attempt at completing VCE. In the past they had separated however being ridden with guilt of depriving the children of their father she reunited with him.

When first interviewed Helena was 18 years old and her son was 18 months old. Helena participated in three interview sessions. Two interviews took place at school and the third after completing VCE when results became available. When first interviewed Helena had recently moved to the Regional area with her father and stepmother. Prior to residing in Regional Helena lived in Melbourne and prior to her

pregnancy was being educated within the private school system. Helena conceded that pregnancy whilst still a student was something that was frowned up by her former school. She completed Year 11 at a Melbourne based Technical and Further Education Institution (TAFE) while she was pregnant and commenced VCE (Year 12) at RSS. Throughout the interviews Helena very much wanted to demonstrate that she belonged to a different social class to that of other students. For instance, over the first two interviews she mentioned being educated within the private school system 10 times, commented on eating out frequently, stated that her family was wealthy, and talked about her current residential address as being temporary due to the construction of a new house. She noted that father was an electrical contractor whose business serviced prestigious companies.

Detailed in Table 10 were difficulties that RSS students related during interviews. Some notable similarities to MSS and TAFE cohorts were evident (refer to Chapters 7 & 8). Seeing that areas were selected on the basis of Vinson's (2007) classification of disadvantage it was not surprising to find that participants across sites relied on welfare payments for financial support or young people noting that family income was limited but suffering from depression and being victims of bullying was not expected. However these were recurring themes for MSS and TAFE participants and again reported by the RSS cohort.

As indicated in Table 10, Helena suffered from depression to the extent where she had previously attempted suicide. Similar to the participants from TAFE cohort Helena saw a health care worker, in her case a psychologist, regularly. Three young people (Helena, Zac & Gabby) also spoke about being victims of bullying at former schools and each dealt with the situation differently. As Helena (2011b p.18) recounted:

> ...at one of my old schools I had an issue with a girl and the school just didn't deal with it and just didn't deal with it and didn't deal with it! So I got to a point one day where I was just over it so I egged her on to punch me in the face and she got instantly expelled. So I'm like what's worse...as long as I don't break anything, it's fine.

In a former school Helena rationalised that the situation was unlikely to cease unless drastic action was taken. Zac spoke to the bully about the experience and ended up befriending the person whereas Gabby resorted to not acknowledging the actions of the bully. Zac had not experienced bullying at RSS and Gabby talked about some students at RSS being unfriendly but did not indicate this to be bullying. Helena (2011 p.18) did acknowledge being bullied at RSS through statements such as "people had a go at me" and "someone throw a textbook at me". However, Helena also stated that she was "pretty protected here" [here being RSS] seeing that the RSS WO who supported young parents would, as Helena put it, "advocate for me" if requested. The accessibility of RSS WO provided an avenue for supporting resilience. Furthermore Helena's habitus had developed a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p 66) based on past experiences of bullying and would use available resources such the WO to mitigate threats to wellbeing.

Table 10   RSS cohort: types of adversity experienced

	Suffers from depression and suicidal	Bullied at school	Limited family income	Single parent	Previously disengaged at school	Welfare support recipient	Abusive partner
Helena	X	X		X		X	
Gabby		X	X	X	X	X	X
Fiona				X	X	X	
Zac		X	X				

9.2   Supportive networks

The plotting of supportive networks on Eco Social Network Maps (ESNM)[47] was interesting when compared to other cohorts. The first ESNM (Figure 8) was plotted at the beginning of the school year during Term One and the second ESNM (Figure 9) was plotted towards the end of Year 12.

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[47]Details regarding interpreting the plotting on ESNM are located in Chapter Seven, Section 7.2.

9.2.1 Friends and peers

School was the only place where Zac socialised face to face with other young people. Zac's plotting of friends was similar to the MSS and TAFE cohorts (as reported in Chapter Six). For example, over the year Zac's number of supportive friends at school increased. The MSS students also plotted more support as the year progressed from school friends and school peers; and for the TAFE cohort there was an increase in receiving support from TAFE peers as the year progressed[48]. Zac's experience of life was very different to the young males in the MSS cohort. The MSS males had a supportive network of friends outside of school whereas this was not indicated in Zac's ESNMs. When asked what he did outside of school, Zac's responded, "basically stay at home, maybe play on computer a bit, watch a bit of TV, perhaps play with a little cousin...I don't do anything special" (Zac 2010 p. 6-7).

Zac occasionally travelled to the regional town centre but rarely travelled to Melbourne stating that he was "not a big fan of going out" (2010, p.13). His form of socialising was through social media and in particular playing games with others via the Internet. He talked about playing games with people from various places throughout the world, within the region, people at his school and with other students from his VET program. Zac's way of being engaged with others was reflective of modern life where technology opened doors for social connections. Zac however did not position 'game players' he met on the Internet as friends rather these were people who provided him with a source of entertainment and a social outlet.

The plotting of school friends and/or school peers for young parents was different. For instance, Helena did not plot any friends from within RSS but did include Fiona as a peer in her first ESNM (refer to green dots in Figure 8). Close friends that Helena plotted in the first ESNM tended to be students from her former private schools in Melbourne and her boyfriend. At the second interview Helena claimed that she did not come to school to socialise. Her impression was that other students thought, in her words, that she was "up herself" because of "the fact that I drive a

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[48] Refer to ESNMs in Chapters Seven and Eight.

very nice car and things like that, they don't understand...it's just normal to me" (2011b, p.17). Helena's father provided her with a car from his business fleet.

As portrayed in the following excerpt Helena grappled with social differences:

> I struggle with the cultural differences because I've come and still do come from, like, a really wealthy family. It has caused issues here because I've said things. I say things still apparently and I don't even realise…like I don't mean it in a vicious way…and they (referring to other students) find it hard to understand my points, about, that actually is just how I lived my life. It's not that I'm being fake or being up myself. Like people actually do live like that. So I find it difficult to see the fact that people here live in poverty and struggle to go from week to week" (Helena 2011b, p.17).

As noted by Bourdieu (1986) sociability is a dimension required to convert social capital into usable capital. For Helena (although unlikely to be perceived consciously by her) the formation of school friendships at RSS would not produce financial or cultural gain in the short or long term. So it was not surprising to find that when completing the ESNM during the second interview Helena did not note any friends or peers from RSS within her support network (refer to green dots in Figure 9). In the second ESNM her supports comprised: a couple of non-school friends; and one Melbourne friend and her boyfriend who were also noted on her first ESNM. Helena maximised the benefits of RSS by aligning to the chaplain, WO and teacher for emotional and/or academic support.

Prior to having children Gabby resided on the other side of town approximately 15 kilometres away. Since moving she found it "harder to find a good network of friends" (Gabby 2011a, p.2). In terms of her former friends Gabby related, "we're kind of distant, we're not as close as we use to be. I don't feel the support I use to have with them and the connection I use to have with them" (2011c, p.15). At the start of the year Gabby plotted three school friends on her ESNM (refer to Figure 8 blue dots). But the plotting of supportive networks on the second ESNM (refer to blue dots on Figures 9) together with narratives found that as the school year progressed Gabby's support resources altered. During that period her relationship with her partner deteriorated and by the end of the year the relationship had ended. The social capital that various welfare officers who worked at the school could extend to her had become important. Having access to welfare staff within the school

environment assisted her to access physical resources, emotional help as well as referrals to welfare agencies to support her and her children during this difficult period.

Fiona maintained a supportive network of RSS friends (refer to red dots on Figures 8 & 9). When first interviewed Fiona and Helena appeared to have been good friends. However, during the second and third interviews Fiona spoke about verbal altercations between herself and Helena. The situation between herself and Helena became so unfriendly that Fiona refused to be interviewed in the office adjacent to the young parents' area just in case Helena was likely to be in the vicinity at the time of the interview.

Social relationships also changed for Fiona after she had her child. According to Fiona, her friends "weren't on the same page anymore. They would go out clubbing and stuff, drinking and all that and I stayed home ..."(2011b, p.4). When asked what she did during the holidays or when she is not at school, Fiona responded:

> Mainly just stay at home or go shopping or something. I'll just go for a bus ride just for the sake of it. Something to do. I don't really socialise. I don't really talk to many people anymore (Fiona 2011a, p.8).

Regional Secondary School ESNM One

Family
Professionals (School, welfare or community)
Close Friends
Peers within the school and community

Mother
Welfare Officer at school
Father
School chaplain
Grandparent
Sibling
Teacher
Aunt/Uncle
Cousin
Step parent
School Well being team
School friends
School
Non school friends

Young Person

Legend young people x number of contacts
● Zac
● Gabby
● Helena
● Fiona
= > 3
No specific number stated

Template adapted from the MacKillop Family Transition From Care project 2004

Figure 8   Eco Social Network Map: Interview One RSS

5 May 2011 – Return to RSS to complete Eco Social Network Maps

The time allocated for the first interview with young mothers was insufficient and I had to return to RSS to complete the first eco social network maps at a later date with Fiona and Gabby. In many ways this worked well seeing it provided another opportunity to interview students through asking questions about the plotted networks. The surroundings were now familiar and I no longer felt like a stranger. I was recognised at reception. I felt at ease.

My observation of Fiona and Helena's friendship during the first interview was that both shared a good relationship and during the first interview they indicated that they were friends who socialised outside of school. When I returned so that the two students could complete the first eco social network Fiona did not want to be interviewed in the office located in the parents' centre.

8 August 2011– Final school based interview with Fiona

The interview takes place away from the parents' centre. During her interview Fiona talks at some length about being discontentment with teachers favouring Helena. She sees this as being preferential treatment and is visibly angry. In many ways Fiona is articulating Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) view where middle class teachers favour middle class students.
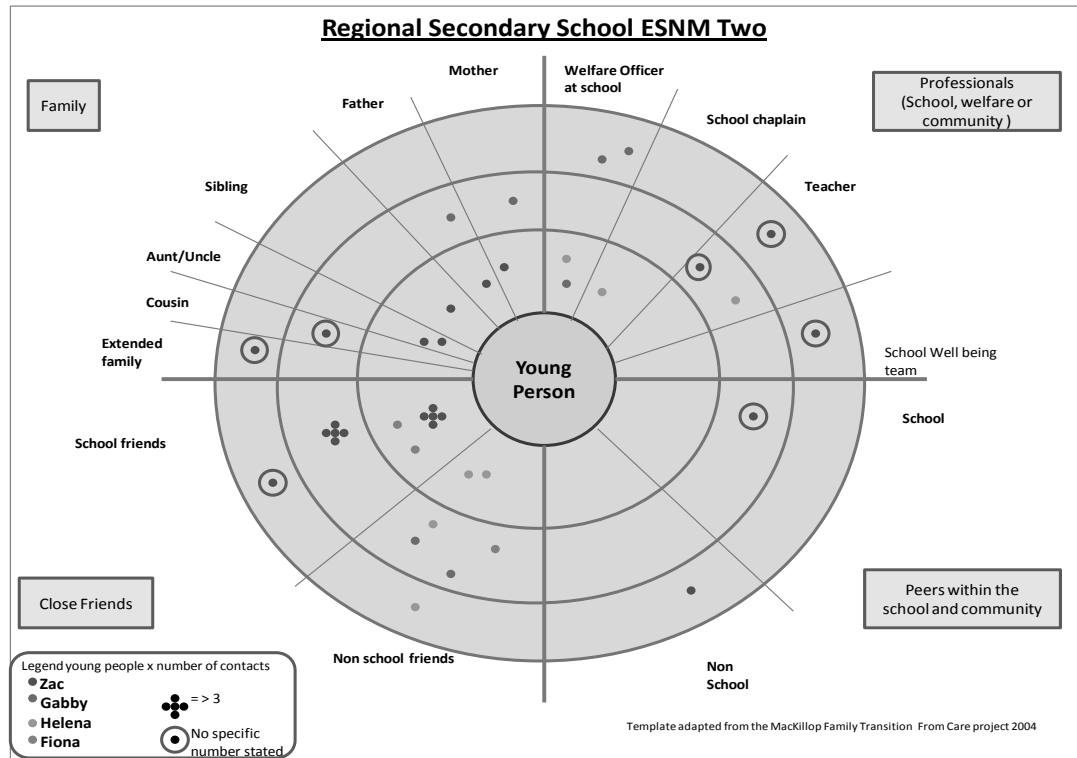
Figure 9   Eco Social Network Map: Interview Two RSS

9.2.2   Family

Similar to MSS and TAFE students Zac's ESNMs displayed receiving support from a range of family members. Young parents differed. Their ESNSs indicated that over time there was a shift in receiving support from families. In the first ESNM two young parents (Fiona & Helena) plotted familial support with Gabby being the only participant not receiving any support from either her family of origin or from her partner. Fiona qualified what she meant by support when plotting family members and emphasised that her father was supportive in a financial way only stating "if I needed just to talk, I'd talk to my grandma" (2011b, p.1). In the second ESNM, Gabby acknowledged her parents as supportive. Gabby's parents provided her with support to see her through the difficulties of a relationship break up. Helena and

Fiona did not plot any family members. At the time of the second interview, Helena had left her father's home and was now residing with her new boyfriend whom she plotted in the inner circle. Fiona was in the process of obtaining her own accommodation. However there was no suggestion from either Helena or Fiona that familial connections no longer existed. Indeed Helena, as noted above, had access to car supplied by her father and during her post VCE interview Fiona talked about seeing her family regularly.

9.2.3   Professionals

RSS students noted welfare officers, chaplain, the wellbeing team (the collective term used by students to include all welfare officers, career advisors & chaplain) and/or teachers located at RSS on ESNMs but did not plot any professionals outside of RSS in their support network. Yet as discussed later students did utilise services outside of the school.

9.3   The school

There were two unique features about RSS, the first being that until recently it was solely a VCE (Years 11 and 12) campus. Generally students came to be at RSS by transitioning from the feeder campus that provided secondary schooling from Year 7 until Year 10 or through transitioning from other secondary schools in nearby neighbourhoods. However in 2011 nine primary and secondary schools within the area merged to into one school with multiple campuses. The school became a campus catering for Years 9 to 12 and at the start of this research RSS had begun catering for Year 10 students and Year 9 students commenced in the following year. The second feature was that RSS was the only secondary school in the region that supported young parents returning to school through providing on campus child care and a welfare officer specifically employed to assist young parents with school related and personal needs.

The buildings on the school grounds reflected the hurried approach given to erecting space to teach the multitude of young people that grew up in the housing estate where RSS was located. When I entered the reception I found little to reflect

educational pride or past achievements. Similar to the surrounding houses, over the years little money was spent on making the school grounds or teaching areas attractive. However, unlike the findings of Fine and colleagues (2004) (referred to in Chapter Two) the students at RSS did not appear perturbed by the appearance of the school and no one noted maintenance issues or beautification when asked what improvements could be made to the school environment. The need for upgrading buildings was a non-issue and the expectation for anything different at RSS was not envisaged. As noted by Bourdieu (1990a, p. 130) the "familiar world tend[ed] to be 'taken for granted', perceived as natural". The buildings comprising RSS reflected the ambience of the area.

However, based on past school experiences, the students did express concerns about the lack of social activities, subject limitations at VCE level (such as language studies) and the change from being a VCE campus to now admitting younger cohorts. For instance, social events beyond the traditional debutante ball were not available. Helena put forward suggestions to the student committee regarding other possible social activities. This resulted in responses such as "we don't do that and ... no school does that" which Helena found astonishing seeing that a range of social activities were very much highlighted at her former schools (Helena 2011a, p.5). In terms of admitting younger cohorts Fiona complained about feeling displaced "I feel like I shouldn't even be here because I'm over 20" (Fiona 2011a, p. 4). Zac noted "I probably preferred last year because the Year 10s weren't around and it did feel more like a senior environment but now it's feeling more like a school" (Zac 2011, p 9).

9.4   'In school' structures supporting resilience and transition

The RSS principal talked about various strategies employed at the school to support and sustain young people within the school system. These included inviting guest speakers to the school to tell their life stories. These were usually well-known identities who came from similar backgrounds to students and were now doing well. Other strategies included: workshops on positive self-esteem, facing adversity and resilience; moving the barometer for the meaning of educational success away from celebrating only academic outcomes to acknowledging accounts that commemorated various achievements (such as gaining an apprenticeship or traineeship with a local

employer); and structuring timetables that enabled young people to take up workplace training options.

Similar to the findings at other schools that participated in this study engaging with parents was difficult. The principal talked about connecting with parents as a

> challenge because often those parents have had negative school experiences...they would rather blast you over the phone and get you to a point where you just have to hang up rather than coming in [to the school]' (Regional Principal 2010, p. 10).

He noted a strategy he put into place at another school to engage parents that worked well to break down the communication barriers. This required teachers to telephone three parents each week with good news stories about their children. The phone calls generated positivity between teachers and parents making it easier to discuss student issues if these occurred and encouraged parents to attend to the school to support their children's learning.

9.4.1   Teachers

In resilience literature much has been written about the relationships that students form with teachers (Werner & Smith, 1992; Howard & Johnson, 2000b; Harker et al., 2003; Semo & Karmel, 2011). Relationships with teachers can make a difference as to whether students find their experience at school worthwhile or non- rewarding. For instance, within the first 10 minutes of being interviewed for the first time Fiona noted "I don't really like this school" (2011a, p.3) but later says "I like my teachers. The teachers are nice" (Fiona, 2011a, p.5). Her favourite teacher offered her support, understood what life was like for a young parent, and comprehended that returning to school was difficult for young parents. Fiona explained why she favoured a particular teacher:

> ...she understands that some people, like me for example, can't come to class on time because I have to do all [named daughter] day care and if she's sick I have to take a class off to keep her home, so she understood all that. She'd give me extra help and explain things to me easier... she actually took the time to get to know her students (Fiona, 2011a, p.5).

The other three participants also spoke positively about particular teachers. These were teachers who participants acknowledged as being supportive, took the time to make subject content interesting and explained content in ways that they could comprehend. Principal (RSS 2010, p.3) regarded that teacher-student "relationships are paramount" for the process of resilience and emphasised that sometimes teaching staff needed "re-educating and re-aligning" to understand that "having a relationship with a student doesn't have to mean that you're a pushover". In the case of Fiona's favourite teacher, Fiona commented about her strictness however this was not an issue seeing that this teacher "really cared about her students" whereas other teachers gave the impression that they were fronting a class because "they're being paid" (Fiona, 2010a, p. 5). Hence the conclusion being made here was that teachers who demonstrated dedication to their profession and who worked at assisting the learning process through understanding the learning needs as well as the personal needs of students were more likely to be considered favourably by students. This is not to say that these teachers become students' friends, but rather, they were friendly towards students, knew how to structure teaching to accommodate students' learning needs and recognised that students have lives to live outside of the school system.

9.4.2   Tutors

The availability of tutors at RSS provided participants with additional support to succeed academically. Fiona accessed tuition for English and Gabby for Maths. Tutors were volunteers who provided their time outside of school hours. Volunteers came to be within the school through being affiliated with a not for profit (NPO) organisation. Fiona talked about a tutor working with her and teaching her how to analyse, dissect and simplify English literature into a graphic format. This systematic approach assisted Fiona in understanding complicated literature and without the assistance of this tutor Fiona acknowledged that she would have failed English.

9.4.3   Child Care

When first interviewed not one of the young parents had their licence hence having the child care facility on campus, close to classrooms and close to the young parents' centre assisted young parents to remain at school. Having the facility close to the school meant that parents could spend time with their child(ren) when not in class.

For instance, parents could visit the facility during the day or bring their children to the young parents' centre.

9.4.4   Year 12 options

At RSS students had the opportunity to complete Year 12 through completing studies towards VCE or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). RSS also provided the opportunity to study vocational education training (VET) programs in addition to VCE on the campus site. This advantaged students such as Zac who undertook a Certificate II and III in Information Communications and Technology to further his chances of post-secondary studies or employment in that field.

9.4.5   Parents' Centre

Young parents at RSS were provided with their own space where they could socialise as well as bring their children into the area when they are not in class. Up to 40 young parents could be accommodated annually at RSS. The majority of parents who attended RSS were female and at the time of this study RSS had two male parents. The dedicated space, which I refer to as the Parents Centre, comprised a portable, classroom type building refurbished to include a kitchenette for making lunches, toy equipment for children and an office for the welfare officer. The amenity offered parents the opportunity to socialise, access to welfare support as well as be in close proximity to their children.

9.4.6   Social Welfare Support

Social welfare support was highly regarded by young people. As noted by Helena when talking about accessing support at RSS "I can come 8 o'clock in the morning, 4 o'clock at night and she's (the RSS WO) still here" (Helena 2011b p22). The role of the RSS WO was integral in retaining parents within school. In addition to having readily available counselling and welfare support, the RSS WO who was located at the Parents Centre had many years of experience working in Regional that could be called upon to support students. The RSS WO also provided assistance with 'in school' problems such as issues with teachers. For instance, Helena spoke about experiencing negativity from a teaching staff member and called upon the RSS WO to be a conduit to resolve the issue and advocate on her behalf.

The RSS WO formed collaborative working relationships with NPOs and Government departments. In addition to services provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (such as dental, psychological and speech therapy) the school through the RSS WO was connected to a range of organisations that provided assistance in the areas of mental health, housing, drug related issues and NPOs that provided money to students through the school for essential needs. Specifically designed to cater for the needs of young parents were services and programs delivered at the Parents' Centre that were organised through the networks that the RSS WO had developed. These included: maternal and health services provided by the regional municipality; and parenting and play groups delivered by a not for profit parenting group.

Another aspect of the RSS Welfare Officer's (RSS WO) role was to network with a range of organisations outside of the school to present information about educational opportunities available to young parents at RSS and to refer RSS students to services as needed. The first aspect involved presenting information to young parents (and parents to be) about the Parents' Centre and VCE at a range of venues, which included other schools, maternity hospitals and community based organisations. The second aspect meant that RSS young parents, through the networks brought into the school and introductions organised by the RSS WO developed the knowledge to navigate systems and seek out needed social welfare support. Hence the benefit of being a student at RSS was that connections to agencies outside of the school were formed.

9.5   Out of school welfare structures supporting resilience

Participating in activities run by community based organisations[49] was essentially what brought young parents back into the school system. As related by Fiona:

> I've been to the [names organisation], it's sort of like a community thing. That's how I got back into school cause they have a program over there called Me and My Baby, it's for young pregnant women, and I went there, and then [RUSS WO] was involved in it as well. And she was like, oh I help people get back into school, so I'm like yeah, so I came

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[49] As per note 37

back. If I didn't go there I probably wouldn't have even thought about coming back (2011a, p.7)

Aiding young people (not only parents) to remain in school were a range of NPOs that provided students with materials and/or money to buy materials required to remain at school (such as funds to buy books, uniforms and other school type resources). Other NPOs aided students with welfare support or housing needs[50]. For instance Gabby was connected to several organisations that provided support such as food hampers and money vouchers to assist her in the providing for her children's needs. She also received assistance through the connections of the RSS WO to accommodate her needs as a student.

9.6   ATAR, the meaning of success and transition

In Victoria schools are commonly compared against each other in terms of the number of students transitioning to university studies. Successful students are equated achieving a place in university and successful schools those with the highest retention rates and offers to tertiary education. All students studying towards the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) are able to attain an Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking (ATAR). Universities use these rankings to select students, with high status courses and usually high earning occupations (such as medicine and law) requiring high ATARs. For many Victorian schools this requires a disposition to channel teaching resources towards preparing students for their VCE outcomes. Less consideration is afforded to the transitional requirements of students who do not go university or a further education institution other than a phone call tracking via On Track data collection for a year after students exit from secondary school to inquire whether they need further guidance (DEECD n.d. f).

Remaining at school until Year 12 does not always translate to viable employment opportunities as pointed out in an interview with the Executive Officer (EO) at the Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) servicing the region where RSS was located. The LLEN was contracted by Victorian and Australian Governments to improve the education, training and employment outcomes of students who leave

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[50] The names of organisations unique to the area are deliberately withheld to protect the identity of the school

school and were at risk of not gaining employment or going on to further education or training. The intent of both Government levels was to retain young people within the school system until they achieved Year 12 or its equivalent. The job of the LLEN was to strategically connect industry bodies, training and educational institutions, and community agencies to develop and implement strategies to avert young people's disengagement from learning. This LLEN has a broad based community membership. However, as conceded by the EO, over the last 10 years, between 2001 and 2011, strategic objectives proposed by the LLEN had not been as successful in retaining young people at school to Year 12. During that 10 year period retention rates to Year 12 in the Regional remained stagnant at 70 per cent (%) and when compared to Victorian wide figures the results were disappointing. The overall retention rate across Victoria government schools between Year 10 to Year 12 was reported to be at 82% for 2011[51] (DEECD 2012b). In 2012 the retention rates across Victorian government schools increased to 83 % however dropped in Regional to 67% (DEECD 2012b). One explanation as to why more young people in this region leave school early was the lack of opportunities for Year 12 graduates. For instance, as reported by the LLEN EO, across Regional Year 12 graduates were doing

> part time, very casual work. Here they are 13 years[52] of school and working 20 hours a week in retail and they're not connected any longer to education cause they've chosen work (Regional LLEN EO, 2011, p.9).

Confirming the Regional LLEN EO was OnTrack data which showed that in Regional many of the 2011, Year 12 graduates (32%), were employed but not in any form of training post Year 12 and that another 10 % were unemployed (DEECD n.d. d)[53]. Hence, Year 12 graduates were still likely to become the working poor or the long-term unemployed resulting in the perpetuation of the cycle of disadvantage within that location. Being engaged in work without additional training leading to further qualifications (be it trade or professional) did not give young people a viable employment pathway. The Regional LLEN EO vocalised that the reality in Regional

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[51] 2011 was the year that students in this study were completing VCE

[52] In Victoria the first year of school is referred to as a preparatory year and subsequent years as Year levels 1-12.

[53] The data was published in 2012 for 2011 outcomes – the year in which the cohort being reviewed undertook Year 12.

was that 35% of students went to university but 85% of school resources went into preparing students for university. The Regional LLEN EO (2010, p.10) noted

> the schools that we're working with they want to offer VET and VCAL and VCE but they're worried that if they start focusing on some of that applied learning that the parents will be choosing to take the kids elsewhere, where there's a more academic program.

That is, market forces pressure schools to favour academic over vocational curriculum despite the needs of students. As noted in the *Review of Funding for Schooling* (DEEWR 2011b) funding available for Victorian schools incorporates teaching and running costs and targeted initiatives however individual "schools have a high degree of autonomy over the allocation of funds" (p. 40). Hence principals within schools ultimately dictate the type of curriculum offered. Since funding is based on student numbers principals focus on marketable courses that may not always be in the best interests of students in terms of transition outcomes. Vocational courses such as VETiS and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) are also expensive to offer and coordinate.

At RSS, however, students were offered several options for completing Year 12: VCE and sit for external examinations to receive an ATAR score; VCE with school based assessment only which means that students do not receive an ATAR score; combine VCE studies and a vocational certificate; or study the VCAL for trade pathways. In terms of RSS' students transitioning to university, the Principal noted "if you look at the overall student population, well, uni isn't for everyone, in fact it's probably a minority [that go to university]" (RSS 2010, p.17).

The principal questioned the emphasis that the school system has on VCE examination outcomes and stated:

> it's cruel to put kids in situations where they don't have much chance of succeeding. So if they're not the sort of student that is interested in an ENTER[54] score...they don't have the motivation for an ENTER score, then why put them into VCE to try and get an ENTER score, and the ENTER score ends up being 11, what does that do...put them in to somewhere where they can succeed so that success then is rubber stamped and celebrated, and acknowledged, cause that, relative to where you were, that's success...

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[54] ENTER refers to the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank - ENTER has been replace by Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR)

> Now if a kid wants to be a builder and they don't need an ENTER score, and they do VET[55] building and construction as part of their VCAL and they do a work placement with [names a national building company] and they get an apprenticeships why should that not be celebrated (Principal RSS, 2010, pp. 16-17).

However the above excerpt opens up debate. By considering these two arguments the debate centres on whether location determines what was being offered and promoted within a school and whether this offered young people equitable opportunities in terms of employment perspectives. One argument being that VCAL programs benefit young people by introducing opportunities to develop social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) seeing that young people who do vocational studies were required to do workplace training and hence this may work at extending contacts within a potential field of employment. However the success of the VCAL program was reliant on industries offering young people on site training to complement VCAL studies. Young people who through networks had contacts within industries had a better chance of gaining workplace training. The counter-argument is based on a Bourdieuian perspective reflecting pedagogic action (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) whereby the promotion of VCAL (rather than VCE and the gaining of an ATAR score) shaped the trajectory of young people from less privileged backgrounds to focus on trade or lower end (assistant type positions) vocational outcomes, hence maintaining class reproduction.

Actions such as the promotion of VCAL over VCE, or questioning the value of an ATAR score are critical in shaping not only young people's trajectories but also attitudes of staff. Helena, who has been exposed to secondary schooling in the private system, questioned the attitudes of staff. In Helena's view RSS "needs to lift up its standards" (2011a, p. 4). She regarded staff as not encouraging students to perform academically and stated that teachers were "using everything as an excuse [as to] why they didn't expect students to perform" (2011a, p.4). Helena further expressed:

> I think they [referring to teachers] just need to up their bar a little bit and say we actually expect this. Like, when I told my teachers last year I need 89.55 this year, they all laughed at me and said it's not going to happen. They don't really have faith in the school to be able to give the education that you need for that (2011, p.4).

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[55] VET refers to Vocational Education and Training and form of training that requires students to do work placement and in school training.

'Lifting standards' had nothing to do with the quality of teaching or the provision of physical resources. For instance, when asked about the differences between RSS and her former private school experience, Helena expressed that "in a way all schools are the same...like you're at school so you still do your classes, you do that so all schools are the same" (2011b, p. 16). Surprisingly, physical resources at the RSS did not focus in Helena's account. Rather it was the ethos of the teaching staff that was of concern. The account presented by Helena reflected what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) referred to as pedagogic work where attitudes by power holders (such as teachers) tacitly reinforce that social backgrounds position destiny. Hence at RSS teacher attitudes were critical in discouraging and undermining any aspirations for higher education. Being steered away from considering higher education as a choice through the actions of RSS staff (as noted by Helena in the previous paragraph) did little to stimulate students' agency towards higher education studies.

In terms of participants each pursued studies or further training post Year 12. However Gabby and Fiona opted to complete VCE without sitting for public examination. This meant that neither received an ATAR score and neither applied for university courses. Post Year 12 Gabby continued to study Certificate III in Children's Services and Fiona studied a Certificate II in Aged Care. Helena did study towards attaining an ATAR score however during the third interview she refused to disclose the score but said it was not high enough to get her into university. Post Year 12 she applied to TAFE to study a Diploma level program. Zac whose story is featured in the next section does transition to university.

9.7 Zac's story

Zac was an articulate young man. His aim post VCE was to study information technology at bachelor level and find employment in that area once qualified. His parents were supportive of his decision to remain at school and wanted him to do well in life. He noted that if he needed something for school his mother would "go out of her way to get it" (2011a, p. 15) and stated "I've been blessed with getting what I need. I try not to ask for more than what I need. I'm very aware of that"

(p.15). His parents demonstrated their support of schooling in other ways. For instance Zac spoke about his mother's involvement on local school committees at primary and middle school year levels and both parents attended parent teacher interviews. Zac talked about his parents having 'honest jobs' that provided enough income to pay the bills. His mum worked as a cleaner in his uncle's cleaning business and his dad worked at Qantas where his job shifted from being an electronic mechanic to a computer operator which Zac explained as "getting the planes out on time and preparing timetables". Zac considered his home life as relaxed and he was able to enter into dialogue with his parents about numerous issues. He would go to them to discuss problems. Zac relied on his parents for financial support despite the fact that, according to Zac, his family did not have much money.

Zac regarded RSS as being pretty good. At school he formed good relationships with teachers, had an extended range of friends and two close friends with whom he could discuss personal issues. He enjoyed the Year 12 subjects he was undertaking particularly Information Technology (IT). Whilst doing VCE, he also undertook vocational studies at Certificate III level in Information, Communications and Technology (ICT). Only four people studied ICT and Zac was the only student from RSS despite this course being delivered on the school campus. The three other young people came from other regional secondary schools[56].

Out of school Zac enjoyed playing interactive video games, something he had been doing since Year 8. Playing these games provided him with a worldwide network, which in turn meant that he could enter into discussions with a diverse range of people. He noted that playing interactive computer games in groups of 10 or more people developed his organisational skills because as Zac stated, "you had to do things as a group...I was known as what you'd call a leader in one of the games so basically I had a role where I had to lead about 10 people...and basically had to communicate what had to be done and how it should be done" (2012b, p. 15). Playing computer games required him to verbally communicate online which Zac found helped him to overcome shyness and being socially nervous.

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[56] VETiS and VCAL studies attracts students from other public and private schools in some regions

Zac was interviewed five times: twice during Year 12 and three times post Year 12; the third interview was when Year 12 results were announced. Zac initiated the fourth interview when he commenced university and the fifth interview, six months post Year 12 was instigated by me. During the first and second interviews, both of which were conducted when he was attending RSS, Zac talked about studying information technology (IT) at university.

As noted previously Zac seldom travelled to Melbourne and as a consequence he was adamant that he would not travel outside of the region to undertake a university course and only applied for IT courses listed at the local university. When VCE results became available a telephone interview was conducted. Zac was pleased with his ATAR score of 49.85. This score secured him a position in an IT course at the local university.

Zac initiated the fourth interview shortly after he commenced university, approximately 10 weeks after the third interview. He located my name and telephoned me stating that he was thinking about whom would he know within the university system and my name came to his mind. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) noted many working class young people find the experience of university alienating and Zac indicated during this interview that he was feeling isolated seeing that his friends had not succeeded in gaining entry into a course at university. He wanted a social connection, someone to talk to about his experience to date at university. At this interview he spoke about bright students at RSS not going on to university. He also noted experiencing difficulty in searching out faces within his introductory lectures for other students from RSS.

Zac also enjoyed being interviewed and likened the experience as cathartic

Zac	I usually don't like to talk about myself if I feel like it's going to burden someone so I usually keep to myself...but with this [being interviewed for this research] I can just let it all go, and go yep, this is me...so I suppose it helps me.
Interviewer	*In what way, what do you mean?*

Zac   I really don't know how it helps but I feel like it does help cause I get to see what I like or what I feel I like. So I suppose I just improve on what I think is wrong or right, and just see what I am doing and just go okay, maybe I shouldn't do this anymore. Or maybe I just do something a little different. Just whatever I'm talking about I'm sure I can find something in it...it's also like a self-reflection I suppose (Zac, 2012b, p 17-18)

There were a number of occasions where Zac demonstrated how he utilised his contacts to support him. For instance, if he did not get a place at university Zac intended to get a retail job in nearby shops but he rationalised that he would have "great difficulty" in obtaining such work without any experience. That being the case Zac intended to use family connections to obtain work such as working in his uncle's cleaning business or getting an apprenticeship at Qantas using his father as contact. In addition, to utilising familial connections, other examples of enhancing his cultural capital and building social capital included participating in social activities available at the university to further widen his social networks such as joining a social group that played board games bi-weekly as well as making an effort to engage with others at the recreational centre. When I interviewed him six months post Year 12 toward the start of his second semester at university, he had made about 10 new friends at university who provided social and/or academic support; "one or two in each class" (who he can) "talk with or sit with" (Zac, 2012b, p.3). Forming close friends and having other friends were regarded as important to Zac. Zac navigated towards resources to sustain his resilience such as utilising me as a social resource; an acquirement to his social capital that could be of benefit in supporting his resilience during the early transitional stages between secondary school and university.

During secondary school Zac noted that his close friends were people he would go to if he had difficulties that needed discussing and if it was a serious issue at school then he would seek out teachers or someone he knew well to obtain their advice. However Zac's two best friends at secondary school did not get a university offer. Zac reported that one has left school and was not in employment; and the other was repeating Year 12. Whilst he kept in contact with his secondary school friends Zac related that he was travelling in a different direction to that of his friends. Hence in the case of Zac, his friends did not influence his trajectory to university nor was he

perturbed about the fact that going to university may mean that secondary school friendships were likely not to last. Whilst the following excerpt is rather long I have included it because it details Zac's thinking as to why university is important:

> The path I'm taking is going to get me somewhere which I'll be happy with ... Slightly different, beneficial I suppose, or upwards... I feel like by going to uni I will be able to get somewhere better...upward and better... By upward I want something, not just paying the bills but being able to use that money to do other things like going out more or buying what you want, rather than need. It doesn't need to be too much but enough that I can go travelling places if I wanted or just don't have to worry about the money I guess. Rather than having to, like, try and save up that little bit here and there just to make sure that it is enough. And better, well I think, some would say it's self-explanatory but it can be used in a different context so basically better than what I am now. So better than what my parents are at now and hopefully...yeah just be successful (Zac, 2012b p. 13 -14).

Zac regarded an education as the roadway to a better lifestyle than the one currently experienced. He wanted the benefits of a better social position, and a better income. Going to university was regarded as a resource required to achieve that goal. VCE as an outcome was insufficient. Attaining VCE will not remedy money issues which in his experience meant doing without goods and services. Systems and structures in Zac's life that positioned his trajectory towards university included playing interactive computer games, studying IT at secondary school, undertaking a vocational course in ICT, and having parents who provided the encouragement and material support so that his goal could be achieved.

9.7   Conclusion

The biographical experience and trajectory outcomes of Zac compared to the young parents were immensely different with gender (and the women being young mothers) playing a key difference. However all students within this cohort aimed to better their lives through the education system. Zac aimed for and attained his goal of going to university; and young parents positioned their goal towards vocational courses, which fitted their responsibilities for children. These young women's choices were framed by familial obligations and they had less mobility. Featured in the lives of RSS students were systems within the school and the community to a support student's particular trajectory. VET programs and VCE undertaken together whilst at secondary school provided Zac with a taste of what further study or a career in IT

would be like. However Zac's disposition toward the CIT field was also shaped by interest in social media as a source to connect with others.

Operating within RSS to support students were tutors provided by a NPO, child care facilities, supportive teachers, welfare staff and a parents' centre. In particular, the role of the RSS WO and the space dedicated to young women that I referred to, as the parents' centre, appeared to be vital in sustaining young parents within schooling. The space worked to develop a sense of belonging to school environment, which for young women who are parents, may be alienating. The space also meant that they could remain near their children. In addition to being a source of emotional support, the role of the WO was also a resource connecting young parents to structures outside of school as they built their social capital within a more limited geographical, temporal and material frame than Zac.

The next chapter illustrates and analyses life experiences of students who reside and attend school in Rural. The experiences of students at Rural Secondary School (RUSS) are different to Regional and Metro students. As the review of the Rural cohort will show, resources in Rural and at RUSS are less abundant. However shaping the trajectory of the Rural cohort are systems that require collaborative processes between RUSS, vocational providers and employers to be in place.

CHAPTER TEN: THE RURAL COHORT

10.0   Chapter Introduction

The old cliché, which speaks about appearance being deceiving, is very much true for Rural. Rural reflects the pleasantness of Victorian countryside featuring picturesque, pastoral landscapes and botanical parklands but as will be detailed within this chapter, Rural is an area that has a range of social issues and minimal welfare support. Rural is located 150 kilometres from Melbourne and approximately 11,000 people live in this township (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b[57]). It is regarded as one of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged locations in Victoria (Vinson, 2007).

At the commencement of this study two publically funded secondary schools, a technical school and secondary school, merged to become Rural secondary school (RUSS) catering for the needs of 700 Rural students. The newly erected school was positioned in a civic and community precinct. The location of RUSS provided access to community based resources including the community library and sporting facilities, and simultaneously provided access for community based groups to use the school's facilities when not required by the school. The new buildings were a vast improvement from the former structures but the school still faced enormous challenges.

In this chapter I review the challenges facing RUSS as articulated by school staff. I discuss RUSS VCE outcomes and destinations after completing VCE, which I compare across sites. I review what is happening in students' lives that shapes transition post VCE. I appraise VETiS programs undertaken with VCE studies and the role of Rural workplaces supporting students through reviewing the experiences of two students. I conclude this chapter by drawing on Mandy's story to highlight the role of habitus, field and social capital in shaping resilience and transition.

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[57] Note that the exact location is not provided to protect the identity of the school and participants.

Three students, eight RUSS staff and the executive officer (EO) for Rural Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) were interviewed. RUSS staff and Rural LLEN EO were interviewed on one occasion. In terms of students Olanda was interviewed on one occasion; Mandy three times and Penny on four. Olanda telephoned me and politely told me she could not continue in the study seeing that she wanted to concentrate solely on her studies and religious commitments. She was happy for me to use the information from the first interview. Mandy and Penny were interviewed twice whilst attending RUSS; and for the third time a couple of months after completing Year 12. Penny was interviewed for the fourth time six months post Year 12. After the third interview I was unable to reconnect with Mandy.

10.1 A school facing significant challenges

The RUSS principal (2010) commenced his interview by saying that "you need to dig down a bit to see what's really going on and there is sufficient research that alarm bells should be ringing" (p.1). He continued by saying "retention rates are low even when kids are successful in their studies. They tend to not go on to university" (p.1)[58].

Funding was spoken about as being insufficient to assist the learning, physical and social needs of students. For instance, the principal spoke about a number of social concerns stating that "the type of issues we're dealing with are not your normal adolescent developmental problems, we're talking about really deep seated challenges that these kids are facing" (p. 9). To emphasise what was occurring in the region, the principal talked about "young girls disappearing for a few days and parents not knowing where they are" and noted that "violence in girls is growing...I've got a growing number of parents who are coming into the place [the school] saying [they]cannot cope" (p. 8). RUSS accommodated the non-tangible 'un-countable' issues that budgetary allocations seldom consider such as being the venue that worried parents seek out in the absence of other resources within the location.

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[58] In 2011 4.7 per cent (%) of Rural's population were attending a tertiary institution and 7.1% were at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institution; whilst across Victoria the figure was 15.2% at a tertiary institution and 7.3% at TAFE (ABS, 2011c).

The principal talked about 30 students having "severe learning disabilities" that required personalised and individual care from 10 aides funded through the school's budget (Principal, 2010, p. 8). Echoing what the principal said, school staff pointed out "There's a lot more people at risk" (Focus group 7, 2010, p. 11) and spoke about students confronting issues in their lives such as such as sexual abuse, homeless, parents with mental illnesses and parents with drug addictions.

The major dilemma for RUSS was the lack of resources both within the school and the community to assist students during times of need. The school did not have a qualified school counsellor. Instead a chaplain, a part time school nurse or teachers handled students' problems, none with the necessary training for such deep-seated issues. Out of school support, whilst noted as being good by teachers and the chaplain was also regarded as being inadequate because it was generally delivered on a part time basis. For instance, the chaplain noted that emergency accommodation was difficult to secure and young people facing urgent situations, such as homelessness, were put on hold until support could be sourced from one of the neighbouring and better resourced regional towns. In verifying information about local community services available to young people I found that support was generally via the local area health services, delivered on a part-time basis and that waiting lists were a reality noted on websites. [59]

Teachers with contacts played a key role as to whether students accessed support. For instance, Ms R, a teacher, spoke about utilising a personal contact in the Salvation Army to help a male student who was living out of home and noticeably required assistance:

> I just rang the number. I said hello [named the Salvation Army contact], got this kid, this is the story, and handed over the phone... I had to initiate it but now he's got the connection and he's happy to continue on with that (Ms R, 2010, p.13).

In addition RUSS student numbers were decreasing hence less funding was being attracted. Staff noted that parents were choosing to send their children to the local catholic secondary school. The trend towards secondary education being undertaken

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[59] Information about website is not referenced to protect the identity of the school and location.

in the Catholic sector was higher in Rural with 13 per cent (%) attending the local Catholic Secondary School compared to 5% across Victoria and 4.7% across Australia (ABS, 2011c[60]). This was not likely to be due to religious affiliation since only a slightly higher proportion of people in Rural (27.3% of residents) identified with Catholicism when compared to Victoria (26.7%) or Australia wide (25.3%).

The ramification of lower student numbers meant that RUSS attracted less funding and RUSS could no longer afford to offer VCE offerings in subjects such as English literature, French or Physics. This result reiterated that in rural areas less student numbers meant less subjects were made available to students and limited funding resulted in rural students doing without what metropolitan students take for granted (see Chapter Three - Welch , Helme & Lamb et al. 2007; Creswell & Underwood 2004; Cuervo & Wyn 2012). Olanda spoke about the subject range in VCE as being "pretty limited" and talked about "fighting for a couple of subjects...Literature and Philosophy" to be included in the curriculum nevertheless she was told "it's not going to happen" (Olanda, 2011, p. 9). She related her experience of undertaking English literature in Year 11 via distance education and stated that it was not ideal. For instance, Olanda found that although a RUSS teacher was appointed as her mentor when Olanda had free periods, her mentor was in class teaching. Olanda's experience deterred her away from studying that subject in VCE, an area of study that Olanda declared she thoroughly loved.

Considering that RUSS is the only public secondary school available to young people in Rural the decision not to include, or more precisely the inability to include due to finding limitations, certain subjects undoubtedly shapes choices about future careers and can impact on Rural's labour market skill set. It also delivers messages that certain types of careers are not meant for public school students. For instance, the Rural LLEN EO (2011) noted a skills shortage across the region in engineering. Not offering subjects such as physics as part of the VCE curriculum means that students do not develop the underpinning knowledge for subjects relevant to engineering courses at university.

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[60] 2011 reflected the time that the data was collected

10.2   Intentions post VCE: RUSS compare to other cohorts

As noted in the following excerpt by Mandy, completing secondary school was not a priority for many RUSS students.

Mandy	It got to the middle of Year 11 and one left, and then in Term 4 there were about 10 of us, and now there's only me and one other. They've all left... I don't see the point. Like, they nearly finished Year 11. Why wouldn't you just finish Year 11?
	Like you'll only have Year 10 on your resume sort of thing, but it's their choice
Interviewer	*Why do you think that's important?*
Mandy	For jobs and career, and the rest of your life basically (Mandy, 2010, p.9)

Mandy's comments were not surprising since as indicated in Chapter Two Rural young people leave the school system earlier than metropolitan students and percentage wise less apply for tertiary studies when compared to metropolitan students. (DEEWR 2010; McMillan 2008). A similar pattern appeared for the schools involved in this study. As seen in Table 11 for the year ending 2011 (which is the year in which students in this study completed VCE) patterns of VCE completion rates and VCE median scores were similar between MSS and RUSS students and a higher percentage of RUSS and MSS students completed VCE when compared to TAFE and RSS. Despite the median VCE study scores[61] being not that dissimilar MSS students were more likely to apply and take up tertiary offers and enrol in bachelor level courses than RSS, RUSS and TAFE students.

As explained by the Rural LLEN EO young people in Rural do not continue studying post VCE because of financial, geographical and social limitations. The Rural LLEN EO further pointed out that in addition to educational resources, Rural students required living away from home expenses that many families in disadvantaged circumstances could not afford and, secondly, young people did not want to leave behind their friends, homes and comfort. RUSS students who participated in this study reflected the sentiments of the Rural LLEN EO. None considered university

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[61] Units of studies (subjects) are scored between 0 to 50

studies as an option post Year 12 and during the first interview only one spoke about continuing in study post Year 12 at TAFE. This finding was very dissimilar to the Metro cohort, for instance, the majority of students interviewed at MSS wanted to continue onto university. However the reason stated by RUSS students for not wanting to continue studies at university level had more to do with jobs not requiring university studies. Similarly the majority of TAFE and RSS students (all of which were also women), did not focus on bachelor studies post VCE.   Employment destinations with current job prospects within their locations tended to govern the transition direction of TAFE, RUSS and RSS female students.

Table 11   VCE enrolments and outcomes for 2011

School	2011 total number of students completed Year 12	VCE completions in 2011 %	Tertiary Applications VET, TAFE or University	Tertiary offers %	Bachelor enrolled in April 2012 %	VET or TAFE enrolled in April 2012 %	Medium VCE score
RUSS	78	91	31 (39.7%)	100	14	21	25
MSS	181	91	155 (85.6%)	96	54	29	26
TAFE	37	88	17 (45.9%)	88	16	20	22
RSS	44	86	16 (36.35%)	100	6	23	24

(Sources: DEECD n.d. d); Victorian curriculum & assessment authority 2012a)

10.3   Supportive relationships and structures

The responses to the first question where I ask students to 'Tell me a bit about yourself' provided great insight into how students positioned themselves in life and what they were willing to share within the first few minutes of the interview. For instance consider the following responses:

I've just started Year 12. I help run a youth group down at [names church] which is in [names place] and I've been helping out for about a year so that's been good. My birthday is on Valentine's day (Olanda, aged 17 years, 2011 p.1).

I'm 17 and it sucks having a birthday at the end of year but you get that. I work at [names pet supply store]. I go to school here. I like animals. Doing TAFE as well as school (Penny, aged 17 years, 2011, p.1).

I go to school. I do a school base on Wednesday so I go working one day a week at a dentist so I'm training to be a dental assistant and then I do schooling for my dental assistant traineeship. I do four week blocks over the two years (Mandy, aged almost 17 years, 2010 p.1)

The three students included features in their lived lives that colour experiences of uniqueness. Olanda made a point about being a Christian and doing volunteer work. Penny enjoyed being around animals and was completing VCE as well as a Vocational Education and Training in School (VETiS) program. Mandy focused on training and pointed out the commitment that is required.

Participants were asked to plot supportive people or structures onto an Eco Social Network Maps (ESNM)[62] during school based interviews. As noted within Figure 10 all three participants regarded both parents as sources of support; Mandy included siblings; Penny, who is an only child included her aunt; and Olanda plotted her parents and her uncle but leaves out her siblings. Friends included people at RUSS as well as non-school friends and for Mandy and Penny an increase in supportive friendship networks was plotted during the year. This trend was similar to young people in other cohorts except for young parents at Regional. Similar to some MSS students, Olanda connected to the school chaplain whom she plotted within the inner circle of her ESNM and stated that he would be the person she would go to within school if she had a serious problem (refer to Figure 10). However, Mandy and Penny did not include the chaplain.

In terms of teachers, in the first ESNM Mandy included teachers from the Melbourne based TAFE as well as RUSS (refer to Figure 10), but in the second ESNM only a RUSS career teacher was plotted (Refer to Figure 11). Penny did not plot any teachers on either the first or second ESNM but reported having good relationships

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[62] Details regarding interpreting the plotting on ESNM is located in Chapter Seven, Section 7.2.

with teaching staff when being interviewed. Workplace personnel, to be discussed later in the chapter, were regarded as good sources of support by Penny and Mandy.
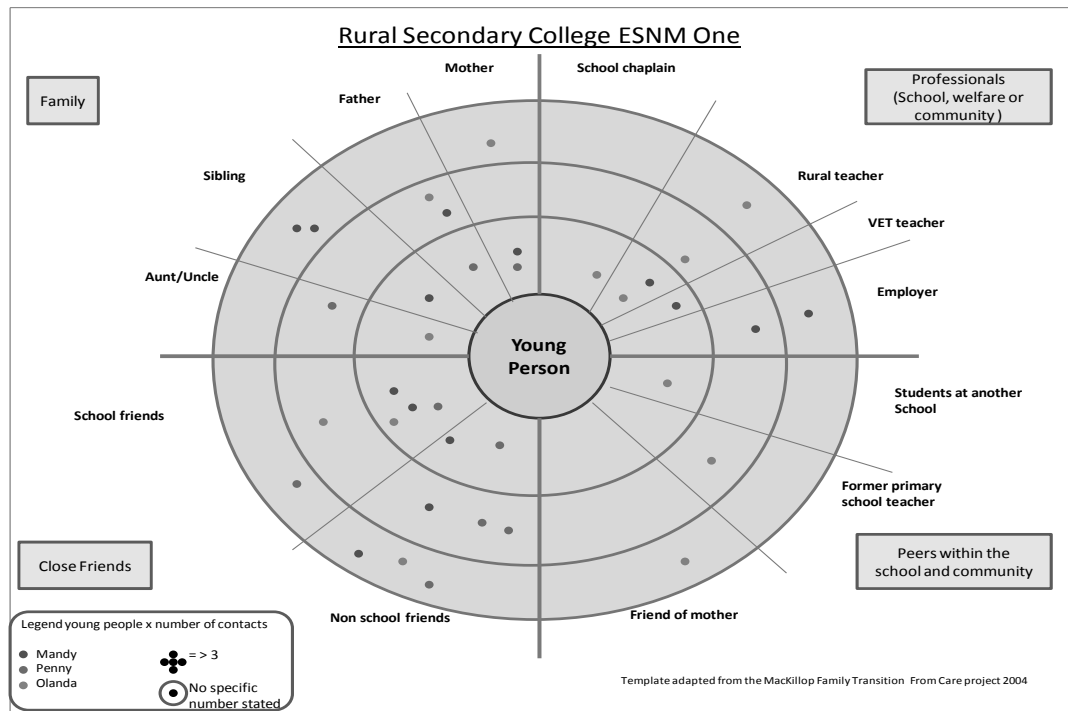

Figure 10   Eco Social Network Map: Interview One RUSS participants
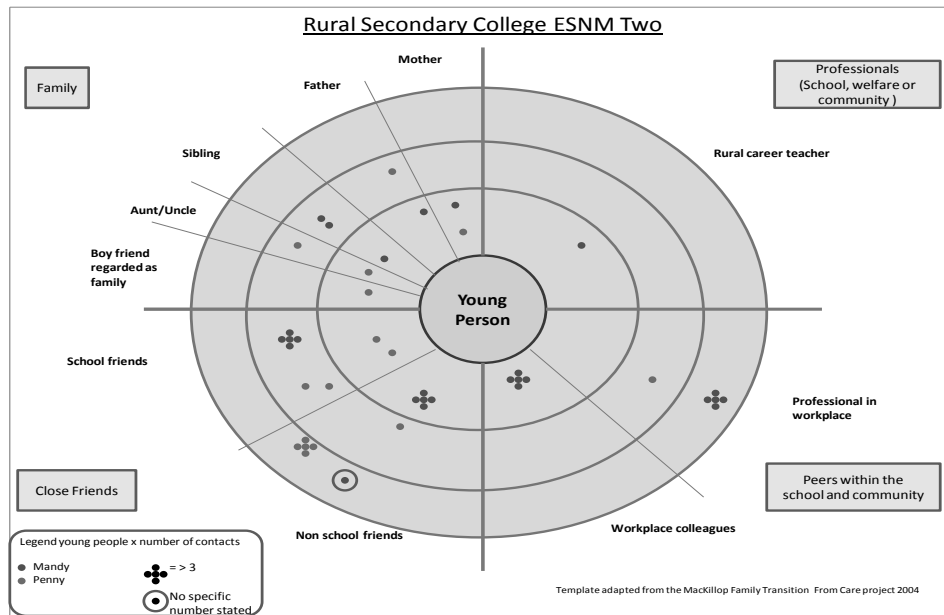
Figure 11   Eco Social Network Map: Interview Two RUSS participants

10.4   The shaping of individual trajectories

To better understand the shaping of individual trajectories during a time of transition the experiences of Olanda and Penny's lived lives are detailed in this section. (Mandy's story is presented later in this chapter). In Olanda's case, participating in church based activities was noted several times throughout her interview. Olanda painted a portrait of a close family that enjoyed being together. Teaching personnel (Focus Group 7, 2010, p. 18) discussed Olanda in terms of being "very quiet" and coming from a "well balanced family". However they noted that in Year 7 she had no friends and was bullied. Now in her later years in secondary school, Olanda wanted to help young people who were in Years 7 and 8. They concluded that 'she's come through all that'. Olanda was the second eldest of four children and her parents both worked. Her mother milked cows part time and her father was an abattoir worker. Her older sister did not complete Year 12 but did undertake a childcare course and worked in that field. Her younger siblings were in the early years of secondary schooling.

Out of school Olanda participated in old time dancing, badminton, Pilates, meditation and church based activities. She worked part time at a local bakery and

stated that she worked because she "needed money" (2011, p. 11). Post VCE Olanda intended on taking a gap year to save money and then to go to TAFE to study Youth Work. In addition to her VCE studies Olanda also studied a theology/leadership course called Vetamorphus. Both of these courses complemented her life style. Olanda was a youth leader at her local church and her role involved running activities for children and young people. She was introduced to Christianity and church activities as a child through her grandmother and noted that her parents do not participate. Olanda related how participating at church provided the vehicle to experience solace and helped her face challenges such as the death of seven close relatives and friends within a short period of time. She talked about being in a "dark place*"* (Olanda 2011, p. 3) and how the church community helped her through this situation as follows:

> It's great, because it's such a strong thing and it's such a strong community to be with the youth group, and to know that it's there and you know, it just helps you get through the week and everything (Olanda, 2011, p.4).

In Olanda's case there was little to indicate a relationship between religious involvement and school retention as being a moral imperative to do well as noted by Barrett (2010) in his study (refer to Chapter Two). Rather, involvement with church based activities provided the structure to support resilience through connecting with other people and to "…have open discussions about what's going on" (Olanda, 2011, p. 4). This provided her with the opportunity to be heard in a supportive environment Her habitus was drawn towards a career in youth work through her experience at church as both a participant and recipient of services. Church based activities provided her with the opportunity to experience the role of youth leader and continuing at church within this role set up her resume which she hoped will assist her in getting into TAFE to study youth work. Hence in Olanda's case, church was a supportive institution that enhanced her cultural and social capital, assisted resilience and shaped how she imagined her future career.

Penny was an only child and referred to herself as a "stay at home type of person" (2011a, p13) and noted, "I don't do much out of school" (2011b). She did not belong to any local clubs or organisations and tended to enjoy the company of a few close

friends with whom she went horse riding or to the movies. Penny talked about being born with a clubfoot, enduring surgery, and having one foot considerably smaller than the other. She discussed that at times it did cause her pain but pushed that aside in blasé way, "I put up with that for my whole life. It's just going to be ongoing problems so there's nothing I can really do about it" said Penny (2011a, p.16). Penny enjoyed family life and talked about having good relationships with her parents and enjoying family occasions such as holidays together. Penny's father was employed as a rubbish recycler and her mother maintained a three acre hobby farm. Penny loved animals and during the second interview noted that the family maintained 50 animals that needed tending to on a daily basis hence holidays were restricted to destinations of no more than an hour away.

Penny worked part time in a pet store as a sales assistant and dog groomer. She got this job through the work experience program that students undertook in Year 10. The person who owned the pet store was impressed with her work and offered her a job. Penny spoke highly of the support and opportunities provided to her by her employer. Her employer was knowledgeable about training options and pathways for employment available within the local community. Penny's employer assisted her in locating potential jobs in veterinary clinics; wrote her references; and provided Penny with accommodation contacts when required to live away from home as part of her VETiS course. Additionally she encouraged Penny to stay at school beyond Year 12, telling Penny "… if you go to uni you'll always have a job here during the holidays" (Penny, 2011b, p. 27).

In Penny's case the familiarity with animals coming from her family background was linked to her current part time job as well as her vocational studies (which will be discussed in the next section). As will be portrayed in the next section, resilience to continue study was shaped through VETiS as a resource made available through her school and through network channels which assisted her post VCE.

10.5   VETiS supporting transitional outcomes
As noted in Chapter Three, VETiS programs are available to many young people across Victorian (and Australian) secondary schools and in 2011 the Rural LLEN's

environment scan reported that 65 young people across Rural were enrolled in VETiS[63]. VETiS studies required a greater commitment from students (and their families) than their counterparts in non-rural areas where TAFE institutions[64] were nearer to their home. Hence there were costs in terms of time and expenses. For instance, students were required to pay transportation fees of $400 per year (Principal, 2010, p.12); and Rural students were required to travel vast distances to undertake theoretical studies or block placements.

In addition to VCE, Penny was studying a VETiS course organised through her school and Regional TAFE. The VETiS course was a Certificate II in animal studies, which Penny noted could lead to studying veterinary nursing post VCE. However at the first interview Penny did not see herself as furthering her studies. The commitment required of Penny to undertake the VETiS training was tedious, requiring her to travel to Regional TAFE weekly. In Penny's case the journey to Regional TAFE was 90 kilometres from where she resided. Her VETiS program was delivered on Wednesday and transport was via a bus organised by RUSS. Penny noted that approximately 12 students from RUSS went to the TAFE to undertake a variety of VETiS courses. VETiS classes finished at different times so the bus picked up students at 6.30 pm from the campus where Penny was studying then continued to another campus. Penny's classes finished at 4.30 pm so she waited for two hours for the bus and got home by 8.00pm. As part of the Certificate II in animal studies course students were also required to do a one week block of training at a Melbourne based animal training facility. For Penny this meant locating and paying for accommodation to stay in Melbourne and, as previously noted through the social connections of her employer Penny was accommodated by someone her employer knew, hence easing the cost.

When first interviewed Penny was unsure as to whether she would continue schooling beyond VCE. At the second interview Penny talked about studying post

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[63] This environment scan is not cited in the reference list so that the identity of the LLEN, school and participants could be ensured.
[64] Often TAFE institutions provide the vocational training side of the VETiS course

Year 12 at TAFE in Regional or at a TAFE located in suburban Melbourne. However the cost of fuel was regarded as a deterrent as noted in the following:

> I was looking at TAFE courses in [Regional], doing the next one up from animal studies but travelling from here to [Regional] like three times a week is going to be hard especially with the price of fuel (Penny, 2011(b), p.9).

The train trip between Rural and Regional was a cheaper option for a student costing at the time $7.80 for a return trip with a student concession but the service only ran three times during the day in the early morning, middle of the day and evening. The one hour trip to or from TAFE located in Regional would mean that Penny would arrive at Regional too early for class and not get back to Rural until late in the evening.

Penny completed VCE and the VETiS course and during interview three she discussed applying for courses in the animal studies at Regional TAFE and a suburban Melbourne TAFE. Six months post VCE a number of changes occurred in Penny's life. Penny had moved out of home and was living with her boyfriend in a town closer to Regional TAFE where she is studying Certificate III in Companion and Animal Services. She now had her licence and worked two part time jobs which fitted around her TAFE course schedule: one at the pet store; and another on a dairy farm as a general farm hand and milking cows. Penny got the job on the farm through her boyfriend who worked on the farm and introduced Penny to the owner. Post VCE Penny had a gruesome work-study timetable. Her week comprised of farm work on Monday (6.00am to 6.00pm), Thursday and Friday (9.30am to 5.30pm), Saturday (9.00am to 3.00pm) and Sunday (6.00am to 8.30am and again from 4.00 to 6.00 pm); Pet store on Sunday (9.00am to 3.00pm); and TAFE on Tuesday and Wednesday (9.30 am to 5.00pm).

Social networks and resources were critical for Penny to be able to capitalise on her disposition towards a particular occupation and her accounts detailed the way that synergies worked. VETiS for Rural young people would not function without cooperative arrangements between Regional LLEN, RUSS, Regional TAFE, an employer and the bus company. Her employer was also a source of encouragement

supporting her to remain at school by guaranteeing her employment post Year 12 studies. Similarly, her boyfriend's connections meant that after leaving RUSS Penny was provided with the opportunity to gain employment. This in turn meant that Penny could afford to live closer to the TAFE and purchase a car so that she could continue studying.

10.6   VETiS and School based apprenticeships and traineeships

I conclude this chapter by presenting Mandy's story, which demonstrates the interrelatedness of field, habitus and social capital. Her story details: the way that young people experience education; how young people plan for the future beyond secondary school; how they build up and use social connections; how social and locational experiences influence trajectories; and how community connectedness works to assist young people during transitional stages. The first interview with Mandy was held just before Mandy completed the school year when she was in Year 11; the second interview in Term III of the school year, just before the commencement of the final Year 12 examinations; the final interview was held approximately eight weeks after Mandy had left RUSS.

Mandy had three older siblings and only one completed year 12, her sister Jackie with whom Mandy had a close relationship. Jackie, aged 26 years, had travelled, lived and worked overseas for several years. Jackie now lived in Australia and worked as a receptionist at a dental clinic located in Rural. Mandy's brother aged 24 years, was a truck driver and her other sister, aged 19 years, was a hairdresser. Mandy's mother was overcoming cancer and had two part time jobs, as an aged care worker, and as a nurse working in pathology collecting blood. Her father was a self-employed sand blaster and also milked cows since sand blasting was dependent on the weather.

Mandy's parents did not venture into RUSS despite living across the street; not even to attend parent/teacher interviews. Nor did they get involved in Mandy's academic choices. During most of her VCE year, Mandy was residing with her boyfriend, nevertheless parents and her siblings were spoken about by Mandy as being sources

of emotional support and people she would seek out for advice about her future. Friends, teachers and workplace colleagues were also critical to her social network.

In Year 10 Mandy gained a job though a friend's friend working part time in a bakery. Mandy asked her employers to take up the option of putting her on as a retail school based trainee. The opportunity of undertaking a traineeship had recently been introduced in her secondary school. Her employers agreed and Mandy completed studies towards a Certificate II in Retail. As seen in the following excerpt Mandy saw VETiS training as credentials assisting her possibilities for future employment:

> ...I finished that [traineeship] in Year 10 so I was qualified in retail, Certificate 2, and I just liked it and wanted to do another one and then dental assistant came up (Mandy, 2010, p.2)

The experience of undertaking a Certificate II in Year 10 and in her words 'so I was qualified' predisposed Mandy into taking up a two year traineeship while also completing VCE. Contrary to her nine friends who left school without completing Year 11, Mandy rationalised the importance of staying at school and obtaining a recognised qualification. According to Mandy an Australian qualification in dental nursing was globally recognised and gave her the opportunity to travel and work overseas. Her desire to travel was inspired by her sister, Jackie, with whom Mandy had a close connection. The added bonus to undertaking a traineeship was that Mandy received a wage for the 'on the job' component of the training.

The dental traineeship opportunity was made available through her school and a regionally based publically funded health service. The traineeship involved practical training and theoretical components. As part of her traineeship, Mandy undertook workplace training within a dental clinic one day per week. The theoretical side of the course involved online classes and attending block training (intensive one week academically based training and examination sessions) at a Melbourne TAFE four times over two years. To complete her VCE, Mandy attended secondary school four days per week.

The block training aspect of this traineeship was not delivered at a nearer TAFE. Getting to and staying in Melbourne was not an easy task. To begin with Melbourne was alien to Mandy. Secondly, accommodation was costly. Melbourne was approximately 150 kilometres from her home and required Mandy to travel by train, locate the TAFE where training was being held, and find accommodation. In terms of accommodation, during the first block placement Mandy stayed in a motel that was costly. For subsequent block placements Mandy secured accommodation through social connections that her sister, Jackie, had in Melbourne.

At times Mandy experienced problems with coursework units for her traineeship and when that occurred she sought assistance. For instance, Mandy talked about having trouble with her first aid studies. She had failed a test in this area and was determined not to fail again. She rang and emailed the TAFE teachers but had difficulty in understanding what was required. So she sought assistance from her teachers at RUSS. Mandy told the story as follows:

> I needed to find someone with a first aid [certificate] and I wanted them to show me physical positions, cause I could call my [name of TAFE] teachers but they could only tell me over the phone...I didn't know any family that had first aid so I went to the teachers [at secondary school]... 'I went to another teacher and I said who's got their first aid certificate and she suggested Mr R [the PE teacher] (Mandy 2010, p.16)

Mr R was not one of her teachers but was available and had the practical and theoretical background that Mandy required to succeed. Mandy's case demonstrates what Bourdieu (1990a) refers to as 'structuring structures' where he draws attention to actions simultaneously shaping and being shaped by social worlds. Mandy mobiles her own sense of agency (setting up her own VETiS certificate in Year 10, undertaking a traineeship while also doing VCE) and seeks out resources to assist her in attaining her goals (workplace commitment, teacher support). Yet her actions were simultaneously shaped by the availability of resources (government policy focused on traineeships) and the social capital established through collaborative partnerships (secondary school, TAFE, workplaces).

Mandy's two Eco Social Network Maps (ESNMs) provided an insight regarding supportive relationships during a time of transition. The first ESNM was undertaken

during the first interview (Figure 12) and the other at the second interview (Figure 13). As can be seen in these tables, family were stable sources of support and over the duration of the study her mother and sister, Jackie were positioned within the inner circles of each ESNM on both occasions despite Mandy not residing with either during most of her VCE year.

Mandy's friends varied in terms of backgrounds. She had friends that went to RUSS, others that attended a regional private school, friends who had left school and others that she had befriended through her boyfriend. In addition to providing her with a social outlet, friends provided Mandy with other sources of assistance. For instance, a friend's mother helped her secure work at the bakery, which resulted in Mandy's first traineeship experience. She also noted that importance of mutual support as follows: "They help me with my school work when I need help. I help them. If I need anything they're always there" (Mandy, 2010, p. 14). Reinforcing the findings of Mission Australia (2013), if Mandy experienced personal difficulties at school she would seek out her friends in preference to a teacher to assist her with the issue.

Professional supportive structures changed as the year progressed. Mandy noted teachers and employers on her first ESNM that was completed at the end of Year 11 (refer to Figure 12) and the career teacher at RUSS on the second ESNM (refer to Figure 13) during Term III of her VCE year (Year 12). The Bakery Boss on her first ESNM provided her with an essential source of income to self-support. The career teacher provided her with advice about her future.

During the VCE year Mandy plotted dental nurses and dentists with whom she worked as supportive peers (refer to Figure 13). They became sources of support in building social capital required for employment within the dental field and were also critical in shaping her habitus towards the dental nursing field. Mandy used their experience and knowledge to assist her with her studies as well as future employment. As Mandy noted dentists and dental nurses "are really helpful...they explain everything" [that was relevant to her work and schooling needs] (Mandy 2011, p. 26-27). Mandy also regarded the dentists as good contacts for securing future employment seeing that they were likely to become aware of dental nursing

vacancies and she was confident that they would provide her with a reference. Hence through undertaking the dental traineeship Mandy had developed social relationships that translated into social capital that she could use to position her future career.

Securing employment and gaining qualifications to ensure future employability was of importance to Mandy. Apart from family and friends, other people she regarded as being supportive were those who could provide her with employment or a means towards obtaining her goal either through providing advice, training or contacts. Upon leaving secondary school Mandy had completed her VCE, a retail qualification and a qualification in dental nursing. When I contacted Mandy several weeks after she had left RUSS she was employed full time as a dental nurse in a clinic different to the one where she had undertaken her traineeship.
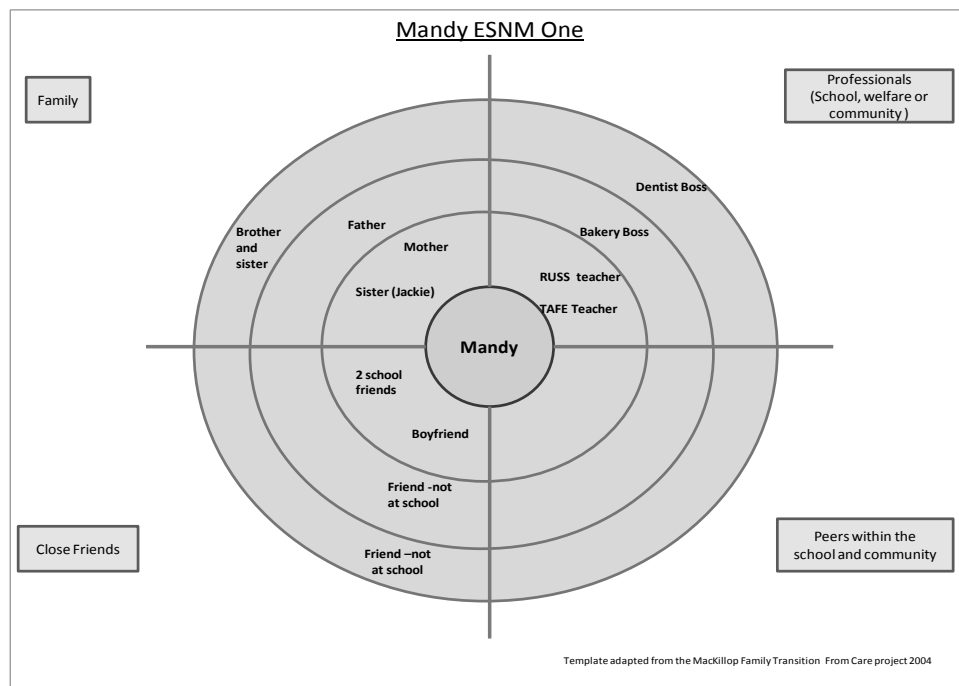
Figure 12   Eco Social Network Map: Interview One Mandy
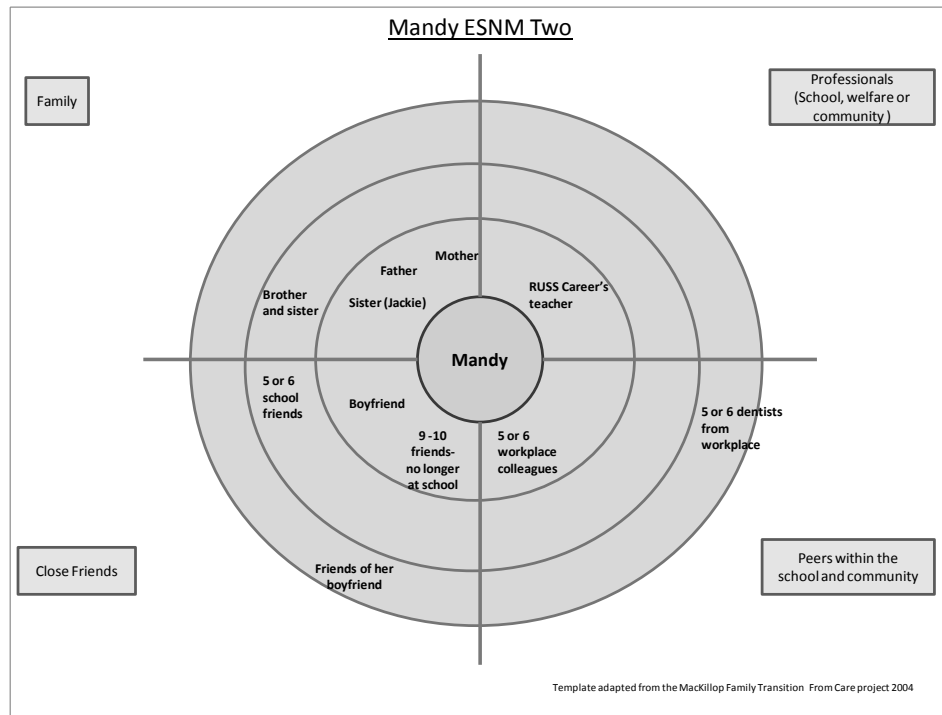
Figure 13   Eco Social Network Map: Interview Two Mandy

Mandy's experience demonstrates how schools were part of a changing social field of education where there was an emerging seamlessness occurring between school/work/training and partnerships with government sectors and non for profit organisations. Mandy's traineeships required that collaborative networks were formed and coordinated by her secondary school and between various employers (which in Mandy's case included a small business owner and a state funded health care provider), and TAFE. Mandy used the traineeship policy structure as a way of transiting into a career. She used social capital available within her context as a resource to acquire sources of support to attain goals. In Mandy's case, resilience and transition were contingent on resources being available.

10.7   Conclusion

Schools can no longer be regarded as solely places of learning. Schools are the hubs of community and play a significant role in driving resilience through uniting communities. Students' and staff accounts provided insight into the conditions, relationships, strategies and resources that supported resilience and assisted in

developing pathways towards life post VCE. VETiS as a resource required collaborative synergies. RUSS was integral in forming relationships with TAFE and employers and this assemblage did shape the possibilities for student trajectories into employment or further studies. Although these students had forms of cultural capital that did not align with the overall academic disposition of the school system, and fitted better with TAFE provision, and RUSS struggled to find resources to provide relevant comprehensive curriculum, the students in this study accrued valuable social capital through their social networks.

In comparison to other schools reported in the three previous chapters RUSS lacked specifically allocated and trained welfare professionals as part of the school team to accommodate for the social and emotional needs of students. Additionally in Rural support for students facing crisis was further hampered by limited welfare services being made available to young people within the area. This leaves one to wonder what happens to young people residing in Rural who are destitute and in need of care and questions the distribution of welfare service provision.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: LESSONS LEARNT

11.0   Introduction

 Many young people in disadvantaged locations face adversity (Vinson 2007) and as detailed throughout this thesis this again was the case for the students who participated in this study. However, these students were demonstrating resilience when confronted with difficulties in everyday life. The current study unravelled the lived experiences of students across three diverse and disadvantaged Victorian locations and four school sites to answer *what biographical experiences shape the trajectory of students demonstrating resilience during a time of transition.* This study captured information on students who were demonstrating resilience at the post-compulsory school age. It drew on charting the material conditions of their agency, the structuring structures, in terms of the role of their schools/TAFE and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). The findings pointed to supportive social relationships together with community and school resources and educational policies being critical to shaping agency. Bourdieuian theoretical tools of field, habitus and social capital guided the dimensions for exploring lived experiences with the focus being on the education field. The community and government fields were seen as overlapping social fields with their own structuring structures and discourses.

As detailed in Chapter Six, a thematic process was used to analyse data and patterns of commonalities that emerged relevant to resilience during a time of transition. When grouped together seven themes were formed, which are briefly reiterated below:

> *Social connectedness* – students participated in a multiplicity of social networks formed through school, work, family connections, sport, church and recreational activities. The material context in terms of opportunities created by infrastructure provided conditions to enhance social capital which students could call upon for a range of issues including support during times of need, employment opportunities, companionship and help with school work.

VCE is insufficient – students engaged in extra studies whilst simultaneously completing the VCE to better position transitional outcomes producing a flexible habitus, the ability to work across fields, to mobilise resources available in those fields (work, education and government) and to build the forms of social capital that were characteristic of resilient identities.

School a safe haven – schools provided a place of safety, a form of emotional support, which protected students, while simultaneously facilitating engagement with the field of education.

Success equals wellbeing – developing a sense of security, self-respect and wellbeing precedes learning and is developed through social engagement. The disposition of these resilient identities was achieved through opportunistically and strategically building social networks.

Money matters – agency is about making choices with constraints. The sense of agency gained through financial independence was critical to the capacity to make important strategic choices.

Collaborative synergies aid resilience and transition – collaborative partnerships formed between schools and agents within the community created synergy that enhanced student wellbeing and school retention. Interagency activity expanded the schools' capacity to develop and explore student resilience.

LLENs an unidentified strategic linchpin – Schools recognised the pragmatic role of LLENs but failed to recognise LLENs as strategic key players shaping resources for school retention and transition.

The themes emerging from the current research indicate that resilience during a time of transition is a product of interplaying factors. An individualistic paradigm is regarded as being too limited because it fails to recognise that infrastructures and

social conditions 'within' and 'across' fields play an important role in producing resilient dispositions. The remainder of this chapter considers the study's contribution to (i) understanding resilience during a time of transition; (ii) the methodological contribution for future research; (iii) the limitations of the current study; and (iv) a future research project worth consideration.

11.1   Understanding resilience during a time of transition

Resilience is not solely related to being a product of environmental circumstances nor is it solely related to the individual's capacity to navigate available resources. Resilient young people in this study indicated the agency to seek out resources to promote wellbeing. But such agency requires that resources are available to develop that capability. While individual factors play a role in resilience, such resourcefulness is contingent on the social, economic and political context in which the individual is located because these shape the extent and type of resources. Social relationships together with a range of community, institutional and social supports were critical to a sense of agency.

~ Social relationships

Positive relationships with family, friends, peers, work colleagues and school personnel were evident in the lives of students demonstrating resilience as seen in many other studies of resilience (see also Howard & Johnson 200b; Turner 2001; Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch & Ungar 2005; Ungar 2004b; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman 2002; Jeynes 2004/2005). Family was also important in the lives of this cohort despite a third of the students not residing within family households at some time during the VCE year. Many young people talked about parents being sources of affirmation in that they provided encouragement, that being emotional capital, to pursue educational and career goals even if they lacked economic or cultural capital.

Learning environments were secure and caring. The secondary schools and TAFE in this study consciously implemented strategies to connect staff with students as well as students with students. Both in secondary schools and TAFE the strong message was that there was no hierarchy between school staff and students. They worked at eliminating processes of 'pedagogy action' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). At two institutions, intentionally designed spatial configurations of the facilities were

conducive to students forming social relationships with staff as these spaces encouraged ongoing social interaction. For instance at TAFE the VCE classrooms, teachers' offices, VCE administration and welfare support were adjacent. This constant flow of people traffic meant that students and staff were consistently crossing paths throughout the day and socially connecting. The purpose built centre for young parents at RSS was adjacent to childcare facilities. This space also housed a welfare support worker specifically dedicated to supporting parents. Having this space provided young parents with the opportunity to interact with their children during non-class time, congregate with similar others, access support from a welfare officer (WO) on an 'at call' basis and engage with 'out of school' support services that were organised through the school to support parents. At both TAFE and at RSS the WOs used what I will refer to as an 'open door' arrangement to encourage students to use welfare services provided by the school. Students could access support at any time to discuss any issue as well as develop social relationships with WOs. Appointments were not necessary.

Teachers were generally regarded by students to be supportive, approachable and genuinely interested in assisting them. In the eyes of students good teachers were those who made themselves accessible, explained information, and who allowed reasonable concessions be made when issues arose in students' lives. Across all schools and TAFE, these students were comfortable when socially interacting with teachers or approaching them for advice. Students talked about teachers providing additional academic support and advice on educational pathways.

This study also demonstrated many examples across sites of teachers and welfare staff extending students' social capital through: introducing students to other teachers who could support their learning/training needs; introducing students to teachers who taught in diploma levels to aid transitional pathways; and connecting students to agencies outside of the education system to aid financial, health and welfare needs. This required that school staff worked across different professional fields: TAFE, workplaces, welfare, government departments and so on, and in doing so they built their own social capital.

Harmonious relationships and a sense of security and belonging are paramount within any environment but particularly more so in schools where students are enforced to attend until the age of 17 years. Acts of violence such as bullying do deter students away from the secondary school environment; two TAFE students left their former secondary schools due to being humiliated and ostracised. This study found that the Youth Guarantee policy (DEECD n.d. c), which provided secondary school, aged students with options to undertake VCE in institutions such as TAFE worked to sustain students in the school system.

In the current study many students reported feeling safe within their current school environments however many students noted being bullied at former schools. Feeling and being safe at school meant that a) students could channel their activities and capitalise on resources to extend social networks with students and school personnel; and b) students remained connected to schooling. Overt and covert processes that were operating across school sites underpinned safety at school. At MSS zero tolerance to conflict being enforced in a consistent manner did work to provide students with a safe school environment despite students reporting incidents of physical assault or abuse outside of the school environment. Covertly at RSS and TAFE the WOs, through being physically located in areas where cohorts congregated were sources of support to mitigate issues that threatened the safety of students. That is, the built environment was a major factor.

Students across sites did signify the importance of friends. In particular, TAFE students who were bullied at former secondary schools emphasised the importance of being able to make friends within the education environment. There was no indication within this study that friends influenced whether young people remained at school nor was there any indication that friends played a role in a student's trajectory post VCE. However, the current study found that friends (within and outside of the education system) were sources of comfort, companionship, provided help with schoolwork as well as sources of social capital providing channels for employment and accommodation.

~ Health and wellbeing services within and outside of school

As noted in Chapter Two, a survey conducted by Mission Australia (2013) found that many students were not comfortable in seeking welfare or counselling support. The findings reported in this thesis differed. Students viewed health and wellbeing structures located 'outside' of the school differently; students either embraced or resented the intrusion of community agencies. One student preferred to remain homeless rather than be connected to a youth worker and other students noted the essentiality of various services including health care professionals, community agencies and government departments.

Assisting resilience required that the education field extended beyond teaching formal curriculum. Many students expressed the importance of welfare support staff within schools and TAFE. Young parents, students who were victims of emotional abuse or bullied at former secondary schools, and students who personally suffered or had lived with family members who had serious health issues strongly voiced the necessity for qualified welfare officers to be located within school environments. RSS, MSS and TAFE did employ experienced welfare staff and the philosophy that prevailed at these three educational institutions was that teachers did the teaching and welfare staff looked after the welfare and emotional needs of students. The welfare officers at these three schools brought into the school environment expertise gained from working in the welfare/counselling area outside of the school environment.

Both the Mission Australia (2013) research and this study indicate that the presence of welfare support within a school does not automatically mean that students are driven towards using the services made available. In the present research a range of strategies were employed by each institution to encourage students to use welfare services as detailed in Chapters Seven to Ten. For instance, welfare officers were allocated to cater for the needs of specific cohorts; located in spaces where they could socialise and develop rapport with students; delivered activities within the school to train students to recognise physical cues that required interventional assistance; and undertook home visits.

As discussed in Chapter Four all Victorian schools receive funding to employ welfare coordinators. This current study found that schools expended funding for welfare support differently. At the time of this study RUSS did not employ welfare staff as the role of welfare support was allocated to teachers. A TAFE student also highlighted that at her former secondary school teachers had responsibilities for welfare support. As a student she was not prepared to seek out the services of someone whom was likely to teach her in class despite that fact that she was suffering from depression and was being bullied at school. The same student noted that four students had committed suicide in the year prior to her leaving that secondary school system. Considering that is it likely that many students suffer from health and welfare issues (such as being bullied, suffering from depression, being homeless and/or drug abuse), funding for student welfare needs to be targeted towards employing staff who are highly trained and experienced welfare professionals who can bring into the system the expertise to assist students. MSS and RSS used state and commonwealth funding opportunities and employed both welfare staff and chaplains (refer to Chapter Four). Certainly this study indicated the roles complement each other and provided students with additional resources. However, the role of the chaplains appeared ambiguous focusing on both spiritual and counselling support but not necessarily requiring chaplains to have qualifications in the area of welfare.

Related to wellbeing and sustaining students within the school system was access to income. Having income to maintain one's self and/or contribute to household expenses was also essential. This study found that having money did matter as to whether or not students remained at school, especially for students who were homeless or became homeless during their VCE year.

~ Community involvement
Some of the benefits of membership to social networks as demonstrated in the current study included: mentors being accessed through participating in community or church based programs (as detailed in Chapter Seven); the accessing of lodgings through social networks to accommodate VETiS studies away from home (as noted in Chapter Ten); introduction to employers (as noted in Chapter Ten); accessing

information about resources within local communities (found in Chapter Nine); alleviating isolation (noted across all sites) and gaining knowledge about the correlation between schooling and local employment prospects (detailed in Chapter Eight).

As detailed throughout Chapter Seven to Ten students participated in sport, singing, playing music, dancing and church based activities such as youth group, choirs and social gatherings. Such activities offered students a social outlet as well as the opportunity to develop social contacts, develop a sense of belonging to a community, connections to supportive networks and the opportunity to experience leadership roles. These social experiences shaped habitus in terms of acquiring skills that could be transferable to other arenas in life such as interpreting rules and regulations, determining strategic actions, developing interpersonal skills and learning how to seek out advice and guidance.

This study demonstrated the importance of communities having structures in place where people could get to know and identify with others, as social interaction was critical for these students. Being involved in community activities and getting to know people from diverse segments of the community strengthened social capital and shaped a resilient habitus when confronted with and managing mitigating adversities. Such results could be used to inform the planning and designing of communities so that people can engage in social intercourse.

~ Interagency connectivity
The way that schools are connected with community organisations, industry and other schools did impact on the level of services and resources made accessible to students (Anderson-Butcher et al. 2010; Demie 2005; Victoria DEET & Connors 2000; Kirby 2000). No longer can schools be regarded as being solely places of learning; schools are the hub of a community critical to shaping agency towards resilience and positioning transition. The data presented in this thesis clearly indicated the importance of schools forming partnerships with community agencies that provided peer mentoring programs, language and literary skills, welfare support, access to material resources, workplace opportunities and financial support. These

combined ingredients did assist to mitigate the adversity that students from non-privileged backgrounds faced and in doing so shaped habitus in developing skills to aid transition and worked to enhance students' social capital.

However the formation of partnerships and how these partnerships were sustained emerged as being related to the social networks and capital individual staff brought into the school. The schools better connected with community based welfare institutions and not for profit organisations were able to support various students' needs related to health and/or wellbeing. These connections tended to be formed through the social networks that welfare staff brought into the schools; their social capital which had developed through their past experiences working within the community sector outside of the school environment.

The approach of schools in forming networked connections appeared to be unstructured, ad hoc and arbitrary. Potentially schools were in jeopardy of losing connections when staff members left. While the role of the LLENs, in policy terms, is designed to be the linchpin for connecting schools, industry, community based agencies and parent bodies in strategic projects to aid school retention and transition this study found that LLENs covered vast areas. Schools not aware of the strategic functions of LLENs or that are not in a position to have a voice on LLEN committees are disadvantaged in terms of informing the LLENs of specific issues, determining strategic priorities or securing the social capital through connectivity that LLENs have on offer. The current study found that the least interagency connections were with industry suggesting that schools located in socioeconomic disadvantaged areas require dedicated non-teaching positions with appropriately trained personnel to take a lead role. Such industry liaison staff could develop concrete connections with industry to benefit students' transition into the workforce, encourage local industry to be actively involved with local schools in mentoring students, and work collaboratively with local industry in shaping, designing and voicing the direction of curriculum or other strategic projects relevant to future work related trends within the locality. Hence schools being the hub of the community require their own personnel linchpin (in addition to welfare officers) to form and maintain connections with local

agencies, industries, government departments and parents to aid resilience and transition outcomes.

~ Location, curriculum and transition outcomes

The particular trajectory an individual took out of secondary school or TAFE was the product of the student habitus shaped not only by personal disposition and acquired social capital, but also accessibility of resources found within the locations in which students resided. Prevalent throughout this thesis was the way that school curriculum as a resource was instigated to position an individual's trajectory post VCE. A number of studies report that schools providing relevant curriculum are more likely to retain students within the school environment (Harker, et al, 2003; Fullarton, 2002; Howard & Johnson, 2000b; Semo & Karmel, 2011).

What is actually meant by 'relevant curriculum' was readily identified. For instance, the current study found that accelerated learning, language courses or vocational programs together with VCE studies were undertaken by students to better position their future pathways. Hence, these students who were demonstrating resilience maximised the opportunities available within the educational field that were on offer within their schools to position their futures. MSS offered options for accelerated learning and four young people completed Year 12 units in Year 11 freeing them to take up additional subjects in Year 12. Three students from MSS also did language studies at community based institutions (hence not organised through MSS) at Year 12 level that were aligned to language spoken at home. The taking up of additional units in Year 12 meant boosting up their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank which in turn provided a greater chance of entering university studies post VCE.

Three students participated in VCE and VET programs that were instigated through their schools. Two students were at RUSS: one participated in a SBAT; and the other in VETiS. For these students the objective of combined studies was to gain employability skills in areas where they could find work within the local community. The third student was from RSS. This student undertook vocational training in ICT and his long-term aim was to study ICT at university. Another two students (one from MSS and another from RSS) also undertook VET courses that provided

workplace qualifications while completing their VCE. Both of these students personally organised their training with organisations not affiliated with the secondary schools they were attending. The taking up of additional studies points to students' sense of agency that allowed them to maximise opportunities that shaped successful transition outcomes. It also demonstrates the disjunction that students faced within the education field as to what is being taught at VCE level, the skill demands required of local labour markets and whether it is possible for schools to do that work.

The data as analysed in this thesis highlights that the location in which students' resided, choices of complementary curriculum and the type of school they attended (that being secondary school or TAFE) shaped the habitus of their educational and occupational trajectory. Students residing in metropolitan areas were more likely to continue on to university than their counterparts in provincial locations where students tended to transition into vocational courses. Integral to shaping their trajectories towards university studies were differentiating features offered to MSS students compared to students at other schools. These included: alignment to career teachers; accelerated learning structures; out of school language courses; and the networked relationships with two local universities. Career teachers were highlighted as significant sources of support at MSS more so when compared to other schools; only one student outside of MSS spoke about career staff being supportive. MSS employed three dedicated career teachers and their role included at some stage throughout the year a formal meeting with students to discuss career options. Students at MSS could access career teachers at any other time via making appointments. MSS students also spoke about attending university information sessions and having parents who supported university as a pathway to employment. Hence parents, school and community consistently informed the habitus of MSS' students and this disposed them towards pursuing university studies.

There are three possible explanations as to why students residing in Rural and Regional focused more so on vocational courses post VCE than bachelor studies. Firstly, at TAFE, RSS and RUSS the shaping of post VCE trajectories towards vocational courses aligned to students' experiences during VCE. For instance, TAFE

students were familiar with the vocational system. So too were RUSS students having participated in VETiS and SBAT during VCE and one RSS had commenced a vocational course whilst simultaneously doing VCE. Secondly, going to university was meaningless if the odds for meaningful employment post university study were low within the location in which young people resided. As detailed in Chapter Five, Regional and Rural unemployment rates are much higher than the state average (ABS 2011a, b & c). Thirdly, vocational courses post VCE were regarded by some students as a feasible way of developing underpinning skills and knowledge that students perceived as beneficial for university study, that is students took incremental steps to achieve their aspirations. Students' awareness about articulation opportunities to university post vocational study was gained during their VCE year generally, through talking to teachers who encouraged them to take up vocational courses. Vocational studies also provided students with a qualification prior to articulating into university.

Schools in Regional focused the majority of funds towards preparing young people for university studies. This was despite the majority of students in Regional not moving towards university post VCE and skill shortages within Regional indicating the need for more vocationally trained young people. The reason behind the 'in school' funding distribution as noted by the Regional LLEN EO was that principals feared parents would withdraw students if schools were not perceived to be academic.

This study found that the role of LLENs was not clearly understood by school personnel. The framework underpinning the work of LLENs is strategic. However schools that mentioned LLENs saw the role as being pragmatically aligned to student workplace training or assisting in sourcing workplace personnel as guest speakers. Yet the LLENs had a lot to offer to schools in terms of locational data on employment trends. However at ground level teachers and career staff did not mention the strategic function of LLENs. This finding was similar to that reported in other studies of LLENs (Kamp 2006; The Allen consulting group 2012; Henry & Grundy 2004). Hence, opportunities may be missed by schools to strategically position curriculum to align with industry trends and in doing so to further the

success of transition out of school into training or employment where work is available. This study would recommend that the role of LLENs is vocalised and visualised better to school staff, parents and the wider community so that the strategic functions of this body are better understood and to also empower those affected by LLEN decisions to have an active voice.

~ The meaning of success

Success was highlighted throughout students' interviews. For instance, students talked about leadership roles, receiving school awards, being accelerated learners, VET courses, good grades, doing well at sport, leadership roles in the community such as the church choir and being involved in a dance troupe that toured around Australia. Overall the experience of doing something well at school or within the community was regarded as being important to students. Within personal lives the experience of success included physical, social, emotional and financial wellbeing. As detailed throughout Chapters Seven to Ten, students experienced success through developing friendships, finding accommodation, having part time jobs and dealing successfully with health related issues such as depression or drug abuse. Underpinning students' experience of success were systems set up by communities and/or schools that provided opportunities for students to participate.

Experiencing success at school was highlighted throughout interviews but spoken about differently by students. For instance, MSS students talked about school leadership roles, receiving school awards, being accelerated learners, good grades and doing well at sport. Students from other schools generally focused on results in VETiS courses and mid-year VCE examinations. Overall the experience of doing something well at school was regarded as being important to students and built their confidence.

This study also found that young people translated the meaning of 'success' in terms of wellbeing. For instance, participants positioned success by focussing on everyday life issues such as coping with depression, getting off drugs, finding accommodation when estranged from parents and forming functional relationships with school peers and personnel. That is not to say that participants did not have aspirations for studies

beyond Year 12. As seen throughout this thesis they do. However, schooling was somewhat secondary to issues such as overcoming social isolation, depression, suicidal ideation, drug addiction and/or homelessness.

11.2   The methodological contribution for future research

The difficulty with any qualitative research using narrative inquiry is that one can never be certain at the onset of the study that the methodology employed will indeed work to elicit data. As a researcher I had a number of apprehensions given the innovative nature of the study (for example eco social network maps) and the fact that I was collecting data from students at a crucial stage of their schooling. However, the methodology employed for this study provided rich data and produced valuable understandings that can inform policy and practice. In particular, if students were to be the targeted participants in a study of resilience I would recommend having school staff nominate and select students. Contrary to the findings of Green, Oswald and Spears (2007) as detailed in Chapter Five, the study reported in this thesis found that school staff understood that the underpinning features of resilience entailed students facing risks and the mitigating of adversity.

This study found that school personnel were in a good position to select participants for studies of resilience based on their relationships with students. In the study reported in this thesis school personnel (which included combinations of teachers and welfare staff) were asked to nominate and invite students of post compulsory school age who were completing the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which in the case of this study was the final year of secondary schooling. My fear in this approach was that school personnel may be inclined to focus only on academic ability and hence indicators of adversity may not be present as noted in results of a study undertaken by Green, Oswald and Spears (2007). This would have been problematic seeing that resilience literature generally accepts that for resilience to become evident one must firstly be exposed to adversity and that adaptation is present despite that exposure (Masten & Dougherty Wright 2009). However the study reported in this thesis found that school personnel were in a prime position of recognising resilience and students selected for this study related dealing with or having dealt with personal, familial and social problems. These students emerged as demonstrating

dispositions of being motivated learners, post school outcome orientated, relationship builders, support seekers and network navigators. Additionally, through twice completing the Adolescent Quality of Life 8D questionnaires (constructed by Richardson, Khan & Iezzi 2010) this study found students' self-reports of physical and mental wellbeing fall within population norms for coping, happiness, living independently, self-worth, and mental and physical health. Hence this study could conclude that students who participated in this research were demonstrating resilience at the start and towards the end of their VCE year. Despite facing the challenges of VCE and experiencing significant difficulties throughout the length of the study, the students displayed a continued capacity to mitigate adversity. This included for some students experiencing life changing difficulties such as living away from home or becoming homeless during their VCE year.

The method used and recommended for use in future studies is narrative inquiry using a semi-structured interview template complemented by eco social network maps (ESNMs). Narrative inquiry provided students with the opportunity to tell their stories. While this research did use a template to guide questions the process for interviewing was open and students provided more information than I initially expected. For instance, the interview template did not specifically ask questions about mental illness, difficulties within families, sexual orientation or money issues yet students did discuss facing depression, suicide attempts, limited family income, being gay, drug usage, homelessness, abusive home lives, and estrangement from parents. These were issues that students wanted to bring to the surface and narrative inquiry was the vehicle that empowered students and provided the avenue to direct the nature of information to be shared with readers of this thesis.

ESNMs worked to stimulate discussion and explore network links. This resource was particularly useful for dismantling the awkwardness created by the research environment, which for participants I found tended to commence the moment that the digital recorder was turned on. ESNMs provided students with a practical process to detail information and while plotting information the didactic experience between the participant and researcher continued. ESNMs can also be used in everyday practice

and as a former practitioner in the community services sector I did use similar templates to stimulate discussion and analyse social relationships.

11.3   Limitations of the current study

There are three limitations within the current study 1) the lack of teacher interviews at RSS; 2) the attrition of students over time; 3) the inability to attract parents as participants.

Whilst this study was unable to attract teachers from RSS the voices of two RSS staff (the principal and WO) did provide much detail in terms of how the school supported resilience during a time of transition. Both had many years of experience working within the education field in Regional and both interacted with students constantly. Hence the lack of teacher participation was a limitation of the current study but does not detract from its findings.

Retaining all students for the 18 months of data collection would have been ideal. However, young people do have lives to live and being involved in this study was not a priority for all students as it was for the researcher. However of the 18 students that commenced the study 17 students continued to participate while undertaking VCE. This in itself was a feat in two ways: a) that school staff did indeed nominate students at the start of VCE that remained connected to the school; and b) that students were willing to participate in this research during a crucial period of their schooling. Of the 17 students I was able to reconnect with 15 students after they had completed their VCE and when results became available. This meant that I was able to ascertain the transitional intentions of the 15 students. In terms of the other two students I was informed by one student that she would be travelling overseas; the other student had become disengaged from his parents and could not be contacted via the contact details given to me by the student nor by the school. Seven months post VCE I reconnected with 10 students. This limitation meant that I could not establish definitive outcomes six months post VCE for all students. But again, this is typical of longitudinal studies of young people (Thomson & Holland 2003).

The lack of parental involvement was expected. Schools and TAFE involved in this study made it clear at the onset of the study that parents rarely got involved in any school function. Letters and information sessions were arranged to encourage parents' participation with no response. This study also found that parents rarely engaged with their children's school. Schools could not get parents to attend meetings or information sessions; and LLENs also noted being at a loss as to how to initiate connect with and involve parents in strategic planning conversations.

11.4   Suggestion for future research

Stemming from the findings of current research are many areas that require additional exploration to further understand the critical nexus between agency and structure in supporting resilience and transition. One area of particular interest is the way that schools implement the role of student welfare coordinator. As explained in Chapter Four, funds are available to all Victorian government secondary schools for student welfare coordinators to assist with the development and sustainment of resilience by addressing students' mental, social, physical and welfare needs. In the secondary schools reviewed in this study MSS and RSS had clearly delineated roles as to how funds were used; teachers did the teaching and student welfare coordinators took care of students' health and wellbeing needs. Students at these schools reported the role of the WOs as being important sources of support within their schools.

Schools do have the discretion to use funds to release teachers from teaching duties to take up this role. Research across numerous school sites will provide information as to how schools allocate welfare coordinator funds and whether the way funds are allocated impact on the production of resilience.

11.5   Conclusion

This study demonstrated that lived lives are a compilation of complex interwoven factors regardless of age. Students' lives were found to consist of a multifaceted interplay of factors. The study reported in this thesis demonstrated the importance of research being grounded in everyday life. Though exploring lived lives and more importantly through students' willingness to share their experiences workers with

youth, policy makers, teachers and parents are now in a better position to understand the difficulties confronting students and to fully appreciate how agency and structure interplay. In particular the current study reinforced that agency alone does not suffice to produce resilience. Dispositions towards resilience are acquired through different life experiences.

This study found that resilience required that young people had the agency to seek out resources for wellbeing. But arrays of resources are required and often not available in the areas of need. The analysis indicated the significance of social relationships together with a range of community, institutional and social supports being critical to a sense of agency, of being able to make informed decisions, during a time of transition. Factors supporting resilience during a time of transition included: strong familial attachments, positive social relationships with friends/peers and school personnel, school environments designed to encourage social connectivity, structures supporting health, social and welfare needs, students connecting to community life through church, sports, recreational activities and/or additional schooling, accessibility to money and collaborative processes between schools and other agents.

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Appendix 1:   Example of Eco Social Network Map

Family

Professionals
(School, welfare or
community)

Close Friends

Peers
(school and community)

Template adapted from the MacKillop Family Transition From Care project 2004
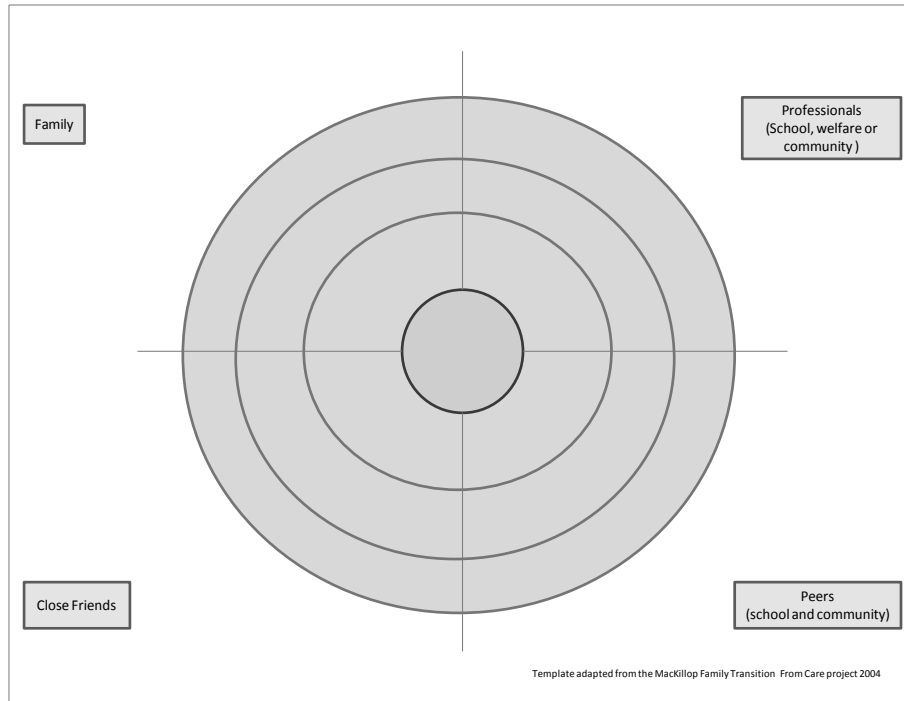
Appendix 2:   Student interviews details

	AT SCHOOL DATA COLLECTION			POST SCHOOL DATA COLLECTION			NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
Metro							
Tony	18/11/10	28/7/11		19/12/11	22/7/12		4
Will	18/11/10	28/7/11					2
Ana	18/11/10	29/7/11		19/12/11			3
Yohan	18/11/10	29/7/11		24/1/12			3
Connie#	8/11/10	12/5/11#	28/7/11	19/12/11	10/7/12		5
Elana#	8/11/10	12/5/11#	29/7/11	19/12/11			4
Blanca	18/11/10	29/7/11					2
Dani#	8/11/10	12/5/11#	28/7/11	13/2/12	2/7/12		5
Total Metro							**28**
Regional							
Zac	23/10/10	8/8/11		19/12/11	12/3/12*	9/7/12	5
Fiona	11/2/11	5/5/11#	8/8/11	19/12/11	9/7/12		5
Gabby	11/2/11	29/8/11		19/12/11	1/8/12		4
Helena	11/2/11	8/9/11		19/12/11			3
Total Regional							**17**
TAFE							
Janie	4/5/11	10/8/11		19/12/11	3/7/12		4
Leah	4/5/11	17/8/11		19/12/11	6/7/12		4
Natalie	4/5/11	10/8/11		19/12/11	3/7/12		4
Total TAFE							**12**
Rural							
Mandy	19/11/10	15/8/11		16/1/12			3
Penny	25/2/11	15/8/11		19/12/11	12/7/12		4
Olanda	25/2/11						1
Total Rural							**8**
Total– all cohorts							**65**

Insufficient time during interview one necessitated a return to the schools to undertake eco social

network maps with three students from Metro and one from Regional.

* One student who attended Deakin University post Year 12 initiated his own contact with me shortly
after commencing at university. This meeting was taped – so I have five interviews record for this person.

Appendix 3:   School personnel details

	Interview type	Staff position	Total
Metro secondary school	**Individual**	Principal MSS	1
	Focus Group1	Career teachers: - Ms A, - Ms B, - Ms C	3
	Focus Group 2	Welfare officers (WO): - Ms D - Mr E (Chaplain) - Ms F	3
	Individual	Teacher: - Ms G	1
	Focus Group 3	Teachers : - Mr O - Ms P	2
	Focus Group 4	Teachers: - Ms H - Ms J - Ms K - Ms L	4
	Focus Group 5	Teachers - Ms M - Mr N	2
		Total MSS	16
Rural secondary school	Individual	Principal RUSS	1
	Focus Group 6	Teachers - Ms Q - Ms R - Ms S	3
	Focus Group 7	Chaplain - Mr T Teachers - Mr U - Mr V - Ms W	4
		Total RUSS	8
Regional Secondary School	individual	Principal RSS	1
	Individual	Welfare - RSS WO	1
		Total RSS	2
TAFE	Individual	Teacher - Ms X	1
	Individual	Welfare - TAFE WO	1
		Total TAFE	2

Appendix 4:   Student Snapshots

Student	Age at first interview	Contacts: types & dates	Metro Secondary School
Ana	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 18 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 29 July 2011 Phone contact Interview #3 19 Dec, 2011	Ana introduced herself by saying that she was the middle born daughter and that her parents come from Serbia. Ana was born in Australia. Ana completes one Year 12 subject whilst in Year 11, as well as Serbian as a VCE subject at the Serbian School. Out of school, Ana undertakes piano lessons and during VCE was studying Grade 5 theory and practice, as well as Serb dancing. Her parents came to Australia to escape the war in Serbia. In Serbia her father worked in a post office. In Australia, her father sustained a serious injury whilst employed as a taxi driver which saw him being placed on work cover for seven years. He was also a kidney transplant recipient. He now worked one day per week as a security guard. Her mother took care of her father and was on a carer's pension. Ana received youth allowance. During the first interview Ana talks about going to university to study criminology or criminal analysis, in her second interview she was considering a generic Arts degree and post VCE talked about studying nursing.
Blanca	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 18 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 29 July 2011	Blanca was born in Serbia and was second born in a family of four children. She enjoyed writing songs, singing and played any type of sport. Outside of school she attended a language school and completed Serbian as a VCE language subject whilst in Year 11. Her parents did not speak English. Her father was employed as a manual worker and her mother sustained a permanent back injury and was on work cover. At the second interview Blanca said that her father was no longer in paid employment and was looking after her mother and receiving a carer's allowance. Blanca and her older sister received youth allowance. Blanca noted that her parents reinforced the benefits of education to secure good jobs. During both the first and second interviews Blanca talked about joining the police force however she needed to be over 20 years of age so intended to study criminology or civil law. I was unable to reconnect with Blanca after she had left school.
Connie	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 8 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 12 May 2011 Face to Face Interview #3 28 July, 2011 Phone contact Interview #4 19 Dec 2011 Email contact 10 July 2012	Connie described herself as bubbly and happy. Her attitude towards life was 'if something happens, just forget about it, life goes on'. Her father ran his own business which involved delivering skip bins. Her mother tended to family household responsibilities and did voluntary work at the local primary school where Connie's younger siblings attended. Nine people lived in Connie's household: parents, five children and grandparents. She was the second eldest in the family. Connie spoke about her family in terms of struggling financially. Connie and her parents were born in Australia. Her grandparents were born in Albania. Connie and her parents identified with the Albanian community and whilst acknowledging being muslin noted that her parent were not strict followers. Connie loved sport and her career ambition was to become a physical education teacher or a personal trainer. She rated her chances of getting into a university course upon completing year 12 as low. In addition to VCE Connie did a vocational course leading to a personal trainer qualification with the intension of working in that field post school and applying for university to study physical education as a mature aged student. Post VCE Connie was working as a shop assistant.
Dani	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 8 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 12 May 2011 Face to Face Interview #3 28 July, 2011 Phone contact Interview #4 13 Feb 2012 Phone contact Interview #5 2 July 2012	Dani was a well-spoken, confident young woman. Her parents and two older sisters were born in Sri Lanka and Dani was born in Australia. Dani described herself as driven but noted at times she felt like giving up. Dani's father was a mechanic in Sri Lanka and now bus driver. Her mother worked in a factory. There was a push by her family and herself to transcend the social ladder. This was going to occur via the school system, particularly through tertiary studies. Academically Dani was a high achiever and during Year 11 completed two Year 12 subjects. At the end of Year 12, Dani received three subject awards from her school for Classical Studies, Food Technology and International Studies. During Year 12 Dani was elected as the school vice captain. Post school she was studying an Arts degree and

			her long term goal was to study law.
Elana	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 8 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 12 May, 2011 Face to Face Interview #3 29 July, 2011 Phone contact Interview #4 19 Dec, 2011	Elana was an articulate young woman who enjoyed singing in the church choir and art at school. She introduced herself being Chilean/Mauritian and as being a devoted Christian. She was involved in church activities that consumed 14 hours per week. Elana was the eldest of four children. Her father was employed as an accountant for four years. Elana suffered from depression and talked about wanting to commit suicide when she was younger. She noted that her parents, church and school supported her during this period. This occurred a few years earlier during her early teenage years. Elana was an accelerated learner and completed two year VCE subjects whilst in Year 11. During her VCE year she also studied VCE Spanish at a local language school. Elana passion was to become a graphic designer. Post VCE she had received an offer to study graphic design.
Tony	18 years	Face to Face Interview #1 18 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 28 July, 2011 Phone contact Interview #3 19 Dec 2011 Phone contact Interview #4 22 July 2012	Tony was born in Liberia and had been residing in Australia for five years. He was the second eldest of six children. Tony was an accelerated learner who completed VCE Business Studies whilst in Year 11. Out of school he played soccer for a local team and talked about participating in church activities. Tony wanted to work in customs and his aim post school was to study criminal justice. His mother was an aged care worker and his father worked in a factory. Post school Tony was enrolled in a criminal justice bachelor course.
Will	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 18 Nov, 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 28 July, 2011	Will considered himself as a happy, outgoing, social person. He was born in Australia and his parents come from Serbia. He was not affiliated with Serbian cultural or community activities in any way. His father was a builder and Will indicated that his mother had a mental illness but spoke very little about her. His parents divorced when he was an infant. Will had no contact with his father until he was nine and at 14 went to live with his father and had little contact with his mother. During the course of this research the relationship with his father severed and during VCE Will was on welfare benefits and living out of home. Will was ambitious and wanted to go to university to study health sciences to better his social position as well as to be in a good position to support a family in the future. I was unable to contact Will post school. However his surname did appear in the listing of students offered a place to study osteopathy.
Yohan	18 years	Face to Face Interview #1 18 Nov, 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 29 July 2011 Email contact 24 Jan 2012	Yohan was a serious young man. He was a Christian and participated in Christian activities regularly His mother worked in aged care nursing. His father was a touch up painter. His family which included parents and a younger sister came to Australia from Sierra Leone four years earlier Yohan was very focused on going to university and noted choosing friends at school that he considered were smart so that he could leverage knowledge by asking them questions. Out of school Yohan played soccer for a club. Post VCE Yohan was enrolled in a Bachelor of Information Technology.
		TAFE	
Leah	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 4 May 2011 Face to Face Interview #2 17 Aug 2011 Phone contact Interview #3 19 Dec 2011 Face to Face Interview #4 6 July 2012	Leah told her story in a straight forward detailed manner. Her mother was an administrative worker and her father a police officer. Leah who lived independently was on welfare payments. She was the second eldest in a family of four children and her life had been coloured with several suicide attempts, being kicked out of home, kicked out of school, living on the streets and taking drugs. Her relationship with her parents was one where they get on better when they lived apart and Leah had not lived with her parents for over 12 months when first interviewed. During her mid teens she was diagnosed with depression and was under the care of a psychiatrist. Leah did not particularly like school before going to TAFE to do VCE. She had attended four different secondary schools. At TAFE she finds support from a welfare officer and appeared to be engaged with learning. Post VCE Leah was expecting a child and spoke about having a good relationship with her boyfriend and his family with whom she lived. Despite living apart Leah had a strong bond with her parents whom she saw regularly. Post VCE Leah completed a vocational course in business administration and intended to work in that area after her baby was born.
Natalie	18 years	Face to Face Interview #1 4 May 2011 Face to Face Interview #2 10 Aug 2011 Phone contact Interview #3 19 Dec 2011 Face to Face Interview #4 3 July 2012	Natalie suffered from depression and anxiety. In the past she has attempted suicide and during VCE was under the care of a psychologist. Her experience at secondary school was not good and she noted that she did not fit in. At TAFE Natalie found it easier to engage with other students and teachers. Natalie was the youngest of four children. Her family experienced multiple health problems. Natalie's father ran and owned a motor mechanic business. Her mother did not earn an income. Natalie was in received of welfare payments. Natalie spoke about her father's business financially struggling and during VCE Natalie was pressured by her father to leave school and find a

			job. This lead to arguments between herself and her father and Natalie leaving the family home. Her mother was supportive of her decision to continue at school. Post VCE Natalie was studying towards a Diploma in Conservation Land Management at TAFE.
Janie	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 4 May 2011 Face to Face Interview #2 10 Aug, 2011 Phone contact Interview #3 19 Dec 2011 Face to Face Interview #4 3 July 2012	Janie suffered from depression and was under the care of a psychiatrist. Her father is an accountant and her mother worked as a photographic editor. At secondary school experienced bullying and talked about being disconnected from other students. She talked about the effects of bullying upon her and other students and was angry with her former school for allowing this to continue. Janie was a conscientious student who noted that she found it difficult to comprehend that others did not take schooling seriously. Her experience at TAFE was positive and she enjoyed socialising with other students. During Year 12 Janie vacillated between choosing university or vocational studies post VCE. Post VCE Janie defers her university offer to travel and work. Six months post VCE Janie talked about applying for the police force which she considered offered her a secure job in the future.
REGIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL			
Fiona	21 years	Face to Face Interview #1 8 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 12 May 2011 Face to Face Interview #3 28 July, 2011 Phone contact Interview #4 19 Dec 2011 Email contact 10 July 2012	Fiona was a single mother of a two year old. She had successfully completed Year 11 however left half way through Year 12 but does not explain why. Fiona returned to school to be a good example for her daughter. She completed Year 12 but did not sit for any exams. Fiona did not see university as an option. During VCE Fiona resided with her father, grandmother and brother. Her father worked at a poultry factory and on the weekends fixed computers. Fiona was on welfare benefits. Her father assisted her financially and her grandmother with child minding. The only social outlet in Fiona life was school. Post VCE Fiona is undertaking a vocational aged care course and renting a home around organised through a welfare agency.
Gabby	28 years	Face to Face Interview #1 11 Feb 2011 Face to Face Interview #2 5 May 2011 Face to Face Interview #3 9 Sept, 2011 Phone contact Interview #4 19 Dec 2011 Phone contact Interview #5 9 July 2012	Gabby presented as being extremely lonely and school appeared to be her only outlet. She did not drive, her parents and 'out of school' friends lived on the other side of town. Gabby was the oldest participant in this study and was very keen to be involved. She wanted someone to hear and recognise her story. Gabby was reliant on welfare for financial and emotional support. Gabby had three children (two school aged and one toddler). Gabby had an on/off relationship with the children's father whom Gabby said was an alcoholic and abusive. During VCE Gabby is also completing a vocational course in child care part time. Post VCE Gabby and her partner separate and Gabby was continuing her part time studies in child care.
Helena	18 years	Face to Face Interview #1 11 Feb 2011 Face to Face Interview #2 8 Sept 2011 Phone contact Interview #4 19 Dec 2011	Helena was a mother at 16 years of aged. Her educational background was within private schools in Melbourne until she became pregnant. She then moved to the government funded schools and continued her education whilst she was pregnant. At the time of the interviews Helena and her son were living with her father and step mother in Regional approximately 100 kilometres away from Melbourne. Her father was an electrical contractor whom Helena said did very well financially however Helena was on welfare payments. During the second interview Helena related that she had attempted suicide as a young teenager and was under the care of a psychologist. At the start of the research Helena identified one friend at Regional Secondary School but the relationship appeared to wane during Year 12 leaving her socially isolated at school. At the start of the research Helena did modelling and promotional work to earn extra income and noted that this line of work caused her to miss school time. Post VCE Helena noted an intention to study event management at the local TAFE.
Zac	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 23 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 8 Aug 2011 Phone contact Interview #3 19 Dec 2011 Face to Face Interview #4 12 Mar, 2012 Face to Face Interview #5 9 July 2012	When first meeting Zac he presented as a shy, polite young man who used interactive video games to compensate for his shyness and as a social outlet. Zac is the eldest of two children and talks about having a good relationship with his younger brother. Zac's mother is a cleaner and Zac vaguely explains his father's work as a clerical type of job that helps to get planes in the air. He talks about family income as being limited. Zac's favourite sport was soccer which he played when younger but he no longer played seeing no one else he knew liked soccer. Zac noted that he wanted a career in Information Technology Zac enjoyed telling his story and noted that he did not get the opportunity to talk about himself often. During VCE Zac also undertakes and completes a vocational certificate in information technology. The course was delivered at his school which suited Zac who rarely travelled too far away from his home. Post school Zac was enrolled at university studying towards completing a bachelor degree in information technology.

RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL			
Mandy	16 years	Face to Face Interview #1 19 Nov 2010 Face to Face Interview #2 15 Aug 2011 Interview # 3 Telephone 16 Jan 2012	Mandy was the youngest participant and turned 17 years old during her VCE year. Mandy was the youngest of four children. Her mother was a nurse and her father a sand blaster who also milked cows part time. In addition to VCE Mandy was also completing a vocational traineeship which meant that she received a day's pay whilst she studied dental nursing. This involved working at a dental clinic one day per week and undertaking four blocks of theoretical training at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institution located in Melbourne approximately 150 kilometres from where she lived. At other times the theoretical training was delivered online. Mandy also completed another traineeship in retail whilst in Year 10. Mandy was focused on 'being professionally qualified' by the time she completed VCE. Soon after completing VCE Mandy was working as a qualified dental nurse.
Penny	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 25 Feb 2011 Face to Face Interview #2 15 Aug 2011 Phone contact Interview #3 19 Dec 2011 Email Contact Interview # 4 between 12 July to 16 July 2012	Penny was an only child and introduced herself by stating that she liked animals and wanted to work with animals after leaving school. Penny's father worked as a rubbish recycler and her mother did not earn an income. During VCE Penny was in the second year of a vocational course in animal studies offered through her school in collaboration with a TAFE located 75 kilometres from her home. Penny travelled weekly to the TAFE institution for two years to complete the course. Her life was very much animal focused. She worked at a pet store and lived on a three acre hobby farm with her parents that housed about 50 animals including horses, dogs, cats, lizards, sheep, rabbits and cows. She considered herself to be boring socially preferring home life to partying. After completing VCE Penny moved out of home to live closer to TAFE and continued her animal studies course at a higher certificate level. She also gained employment on a farm part time.
Olanda	17 years	Face to Face Interview #1 25 Feb 2011	In addition to school Olanda was focused on church based activities and God. Olanda talked about experiencing difficulties such as the death of several people who died within a short period of each other and how being connected to a church group helped. Olanda was one of four children. Olanda's mother worked at milking cows and her father was an abattoir worker. Olanda ran a youth group at her local church and talked about undertaking a theology course. Olanda was not afraid of publically voicing her opinion. She talked about hounding vice principals and coordinators to re-introduce subjects such as English Literature when these were cut at Rural secondary school; and wrote letters to the local newspaper to state her views. Socially she likes old time dancing. After completing Year 12 Olanda wanted to become a youth worker. At the time of her second interview Olanda rang me and apologised for not being able to continue. She noted that VCE was stressful and she wanted to concentrate on her studies. She thanked me for the opportunity to be involved in this study and hoped that others would learn from her story.
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENT INTERVIEWS	65		