Enhancing Year Twelve students' academic engagement in boys' schools: Students provide their perspective.

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Abstract

This study draws on the perspectives of Year Twelve students in boys' schools to examine school-wide factors that both enhance and hinder student academic engagement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 boys from three state boys' schools in the North Island of New Zealand. During these interviews, boys talked about the things that determine and impact upon their engagement, and they identified school wide changes that they believe would assist them to focus on their academic studies. The qualitative data provided shows that these boys are observing and thinking about the manner in which school structures and systems impact on their engagement in their learning. The findings clearly show that Year Twelve is challenging for many boys. They report a marked increase in the level of difficulty of the work from NCEA Level One to Level Two, and a corresponding increase in workload.

Their engagement in their studies, which they maintain varies significantly across subjects, is influenced by their enjoyment of the subject and its perceived relevance and usefulness to their future goals. The school-wide factors which the boys suggest impact most significantly on their academic engagement are: whether or not they are given the subjects of their choice, the career education programmes they have access to, the number of students in their classes, their access to computers in their regular classes and after school for study purposes, the manner in which the school sets and articulates its expectations, the structure of the school day and timetable, and how the school responds to disruptive students in class. The majority of the boys report that NCEA enhances their academic engagement, however, some of the strategies the boys report using to manage NCEA workload can hinder their focus in the classroom. These include skipping internal standards and not attempting standards in external examinations, a decision that is sometimes made well before the event itself.

The students in this study offer educators fresh insight into the factors that affect their academic engagement and suggest school wide strategies that will potentially enhance this. This study recommends that quality career education be made accessible to all students; that schools consider employing a full-time specialist careers advisor; that class size, course selection processes and school wide computer access be addressed; and that schools clearly articulate academic expectations in ways that include and inspire all students.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the scene

For the past thirty years teaching has been a very important part of my life. I have taught at a variety of levels: primary, secondary and tertiary at various times and in too many subject areas to list. My first foray into a boys' school was not planned; a middle management position came up that I wanted, it happened to be in a boys' school, I got it. I was apprehensive about my ability to teach a class full of boys, but I loved it. I have now completed ten years teaching in two different boys' schools and have been Head of the English Faculty in a school of nearly 2000 boys for a number of years. My enthusiasm for teaching boys has not waned. The boys still make me feel welcome, make me laugh, amaze me with their perceptiveness, and frustrate me. Increasingly, however, in the midst of the wonderful achievements of the boys across a myriad of spheres, I am aware that for too many of our boys, school is not a place they enjoy or a place in which they achieve the successes each of them openly or secretly desires.

In both my teaching and leadership roles in boys' schools I have taught and taken responsibility for Year Twelve boys at various times. I have become aware, both personally and through the comments of the staff in my faculty, that Year Twelve boys are often less engaged in their academic studies than their Year Eleven counterparts. It seems to be a year when a number of students struggle to stay engaged in school. This has major implications for schools as more students stay on for the final two years of secondary school.

1.2 What the statistics tell us

The achievement of our boys, at all levels, is a concern for educators. The Ministry of Education report entitled *Boys' Achievement: A Synthesis of the Data* (2007) included the following findings:

General

- Females tend to stay at school longer and have better attainment than males across all ethnic groups.
- The proportion of students leaving school with little or no formal attainment has decreased since the introduction of the NCEA. Across all years, however, males are more likely than females to leave school with little or no formal qualification.

English, Mathematics and Science

- Girls perform better than boys in all literacy measures at all levels.
- Girls are more likely to gain NCEA Level 1 literacy credits and are more likely to pass NCEA English as a subject at all levels including Scholarship.
- Girls are slightly more likely to gain NCEA Level 1 numeracy credits and pass Mathematics as an NCEA subject at all levels, with the disparity increasing with each level. Boys, however, are more likely to gain Scholarship..
- In Science the differences are minimal but girls are slightly ahead for all NCEA levels. The disparity also increases with level, however, boys are more likely to gain Scholarship.
- Boys are over-represented in the Not Achieved band in English, Mathematics and Science in external assessments.
- The gender disparities lessen in high achieving groups.

Other NCEA statistics

- Girls are 10% more likely to gain NCEA in Years Eleven and Twelve. This increases to 13% in Year Thirteen.
- Historically, females are more likely to gain University Entrance or higher qualifications than males. Since 1993 the gender difference has grown and in 2006 females were 31 % more likely than males to gain University Entrance or higher qualifications.
- The percentage of those who gain Scholarship is similar for girls and boys. 58% of the Scholarships gained by boys are in Mathematics and Science.

Student disengagement is often cited by teachers as one of the main barriers to learning and achievement for boys in general. The 2007 Ministry of Education statistics (Ministry of Education, 2009a) show that males are more likely to be stood down or suspended (the figures are similar in both cases -approximately 1 female for every 2.5 males). The statistics for exclusions and expulsions (both, again, similar - approximately 1 female for every 3 males) are even more concerning when one considers their implications for the continuing education of the boys concerned. The Ministry of Education suggests that these figures show the extent to which boys' disengagement from school is a serious problem in New Zealand. As this is a very narrow indicator of student disengagement and only relates to those that are causing serious problems within schools, these statistics are likely to present just the tip of the iceberg in terms of numbers of students disengaged from their learning.

1.3 This research study's contribution

A report prepared for the Ministry of Education entitled *Consultation on 'Staying at School'* (2006) suggests there are many systems within schools that impact on students, and their subsequent engagement. School-wide factors mentioned include timetabling, teacher availability, resources and class sizes.

There are several studies that investigate the link between school-wide factors and student engagement in their academic studies. Fewer focus on boys alone, and even less, if any, seek to hear what the boys, themselves, have to say. It is the aim of this research to listen to the voices of Year Twelve boys in boys' schools, in order to establish which school-wide factors they believe have the greatest impact on their engagement and in what way. The boys' responses will give educational leaders in boys' schools a better understanding of the current situation and allow them to consider how their schools could enhance the academic engagement of their Year Twelve boys. At a time when the education of our boys is increasingly coming under scrutiny the findings of this study will contribute to existing research and provide valuable insights.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This research "Enhancing Year Twelve students' academic engagement in boys' schools: Students provide their perspective" offers insight into how school-wide factors, as revealed through the personal stories and reflections of Year Twelve boys, enhance or hinder student engagement at this level. For the purposes of this research, school-wide factors include such areas as curriculum and assessment structures, school organisation, and resourcing.

A number of fields of research are relevant to an investigation of this nature including, but not restricted to, studies of boys' education, student motivation and engagement, and school improvement. For a first-time researcher it has been a fascinating and rewarding task to study the abundant available literature. The range and depth of research projects undertaken in these areas is overwhelming, and beyond the scope of this research. Of necessity I have been selective. I have limited my literature search as follows:

a) Firstly, I selected research that investigates the situation for boys in schools, not only in New Zealand but worldwide, and attempts to address the gender issues highlighted within.

b) Secondly, I selected studies that not only focus on the individual, but also highlight factors at the school and national level that are shown to impact on student engagement.

c) Thirdly, I investigated theories of motivation and engagement that seem particularly relevant to Year Twelve (16 or 17 year old) males in New Zealand boys' schools.

d) Lastly, from my own experience in teaching in boys' schools, I perused reports, research projects, and the like, on topics I believed would be relevant to this research. An example of this is the growing literature on NCEA.

2.2 What is engagement?

Defining engagement has proven to be more difficult than imagined. As part of her research investigating the manner in which the academic world and New Zealand teachers view the term, Harris (2008) points out that "there cannot be any 'assumed' shared knowledge about student engagement among academics or teachers" (p. 75). The teachers in her study often seemed confused as to exactly what they meant when speaking of engaging their students. Some speak in terms of student behaviour, some of enjoyment, and others of the need for students to be actively participating in their own learning. Many believe a combination of these factors constitutes student engagement. There is a feeling among some that learning will automatically take place if a student is behaving and enjoying school.

The literature on student engagement is equally diverse. Often, in fact, the term is not defined and the reader is left to filter the material through their personal understanding of this concept. For example, in their book entitled *Engaging every learner,* Blankstein, Cole and Houston (2007) fail, at any point, to clarify exactly what they mean by engagement, despite its obvious centrality to the purpose of the text. Dictionary definitions do little to help: The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the meaning of engage as "participate or become involved in" (p. 402). Many researchers view engagement as being a one dimensional construct focusing on observable classroom behaviour such as time on task, attentiveness and participation in learning activities (Finn, 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003). Other researchers like Hudley and Daoud (2008) claim engagement is two dimensional, incorporating both behaviour and affect.

Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) conceptualise engagement as a meta-construct that comprises three interlinking and often overlapping components: behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. They suggest that behavioural engagement includes positive conduct, involvement in learning and academic tasks, and participation in school-related activities; emotional engagement "refers to students' affective reactions in the classroom" (p. 63); and

cognitive engagement "stresses investment in learning" (p. 63). They suggest that when students are cognitively engaged in their learning they act in a strategic and self-regulating manner. Self-regulation is an area of study coming under increasing scrutiny in recent times and will be dealt with later in this review.

An additional complication in the literature is the confusion between the terms engagement and motivation. Some researchers, such as Boekaerts (2002), fail to acknowledge the concept of engagement at all, and focus only on motivational constructs. Others imply that being motivated means being engaged. Pintrich and Schunk's (2002) definition of motivation as "a process whereby goal-centred activity is instigated and sustained" (p. 5) does this – to be motivated is to be engaged. In her work, Alderman (2008) fails to define engagement clearly. She does, however, differentiate cognitive engagement from the more general, and often used term; engagement. The terms motivation and engagement are often used in tandem, once again implying that if a student is motivated they are engaged. At other times the concepts are viewed almost synonymously with alternating use of the two labels.

The situation is confusing and does require some clarification. Many researchers acknowledge there is more than one facet to engagement, so the idea of a meta-construct as outlined by Fredricks et al. (2004) offers some clarity. Engagement, therefore, cannot be viewed as a dichotomy in which a student is either engaged or not engaged, nor as a continuum with engaged at one end and disengaged at the other.

The ideal, in Fredricks et al.'s terms, is to have students who are engaged behaviourally, emotionally and cognitively. However, all educators are aware that students appear to engage academically in a number of ways. There are students who behave appropriately, do the work that is set for them in class and seem to be engaged, but are in fact doing little more than going through the motions; that is, they are behaviourally engaged but not emotionally or cognitively engaged. I once taught a student who appeared to be disengaged; his behaviour was often mildly inappropriate, he appeared disinterested and made little effort in class to complete set

tasks. He would, however, invest considerable amounts of his own time and effort to produce essays that were insightful and showed he had been listening in class. These were handed in outside of class time and, at his request, feedback was also given out of class time. Subsequently, he gained very good grades in the final examination, whilst managing to stay "cool" with his mates. In class this student was engaged cognitively but not behaviourally nor, to all appearances, emotionally.

Most educators would ideally want all students to be fully engaged in accordance with Fredricks et al.'s (2004) multi-faceted view of engagement. Working towards this ideal is a challenge, but it is one that must be accepted if our young people, and particularly our boys, are to leave school well-equipped to take on the demands of an increasingly complex world.

As the vast literature on motivation and engagement has the two inextricably linked, it is imperative that we have a conceptual framework to work with. Most studies use specific observable or self-reported behaviours as measures of engagement; with each element having its own set of associated behaviours. Engagement viewed in this manner appears to be the outcome of an internal process. Motivation, therefore, becomes the process, usually unobservable, that instigates the behaviours we observe when we consider whether a student is engaged or otherwise. This view of motivation and engagement provides a useful and workable framework to support this study's investigation into the theories of motivation relevant to Year Twelve boys.

2.3 Relevant theories of motivation

Many researchers (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Stipek, 2002; Wigfield & Wagner, 2005) have outlined a number of motivational theories that offer some insights into adolescents' academic motivation and engagement. Those that have the greatest relevance to this research are associated with beliefs in ability, self-efficacy, goal orientation, expectancy-value theories, and intrinsic motivation. In this section these theories will be discussed and, where applicable, specific reference to differences

relating to gender will be included. Underpinning these theories is a social-cognitive perspective; one that insists that motivational theory must address "beliefs and cognitive and emotional variables, and environmental factors" (Alderman, 2008, p. 6).

2.3.1 Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement goal theory has grown out of the early literatures on drive theory and goal theory. The former supports the idea that humans have basic drives which they must constantly strive to fulfil. Initially, these drives were seen in terms of basic survival drives; needs that require and demand action, like the need for food, water and shelter (Woodworth, 1918). In the 1950s and 1960s, drive theory research was used to inform achievement motivation, which, Atkinson (1964) proposed was a learned drive. According to Covington (2000) "this theory held that achievement is the result of an emotional conflict between striving for success and avoiding failure" (p. 73). The proportion of each will influence an individual's behaviour in an achievement situation. An individual whose strongest drive is to succeed will approach a learning event quite differently to one whose focus is to avoid failure.

Goal theorists on the other hand argue that individuals are motivated by the goals they set themselves, and that the degree of motivation they experience will depend upon the goal being sought. Achievement goal theory grew from here; the 1980s and 1990s gave rise to a number of researchers (Ames, 1992; Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Maehr, 1989; Urdan, Pajares, & Lapin, 1997) investigating the role of achievement goals in academic settings. Maehr (1989) defines achievement goals as "the purpose of task engagement and the specific type of goal is posited to create a framework for how individuals interpret and experience achievement settings" (p. 301). He suggests that the achievement goal orientation of a student will influence the manner in which they engage in academic situations.

Two types of achievement goal orientations are recognised; learning (sometimes called mastery or task) and performance (sometimes referred to as ego or self-

enhancing). Dweck and Leggett (1988) suggest that students in an achievement setting will adopt one or the other. Those who adopt a learning goal orientation display an adaptive response pattern and focus on mastering material or skills. In other words they focus on learning and improving their competence. Students with a performance goal orientation display a maladaptive response pattern; they will be more interested in being able to perform the skill or demonstrate their knowledge in a specific situation to show ability, or to prove their competence, or alternatively, to avoid looking incompetent. Pintrich (2000a, 2000b) notes that the two orientations are not mutually exclusive. A person can be motivated to both learn and perform. A person exhibiting both orientations can, according to Pintrich (2000b), be equally well served. Classrooms "engender some competition and social comparison, invariably, given their general structure, and if students are focused on 'approaching' the competition and comparison, there do not have to be detrimental effects if they also are oriented to mastery of their schoolwork situation" (p. 553). The problem occurs when the concern for performance is stronger than the concern for learning, often resulting in the use of maladaptive strategies. Pintrich (2000a) also suggests that a person's goal orientation can change over time and across domains. He notes, however, that there is some stability in goal orientation: some people may be more focused on learning (mastery orientation) and others may be more normative and competitive (performance orientation).

From the mid 1990s some researchers (Elliot, 1999: Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996: Midgley, Kaplan & Middleton, 2001) began to speculate that viewing achievement goal orientation as a dual structure didn't explain why some students who had a performance orientation were achieving well in our schools and others weren't. Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) hypothesise that a performance goal orientation has two different strands: performance-approach and performance-avoidance. "A performance-approach goal focuses the attention of the student on the attainment of normative competence, and a performance-avoidance goal focuses on the avoidance of normative competence" (Elliot, 2005, p 59-60).

Of the two, performance-avoidance is of most concern in an academic situation. For students with this orientation, fear of failure is the foremost motive, as failure, they believe, will expose their incompetence. Typically, this type of student will feel they are not capable of doing what is required, process academic work superficially, seldom seek help, generally fail to persist at a task, and often experience increasing anxiety and feelings of helplessness. This can lead to the use of such maladaptive strategies as self-handicapping (Elliot, 1999; Urdan, 2004).

A performance-approach orientation is more complex. There exists a dual motive: a need for achievement and a fear of failure. Such a student will exhibit positive learning behaviours, for example, they will seek challenges, make a concerted effort and demonstrate persistence (Elliot, 1999). Research studies, such as that conducted by Midgley, Kaplan and Middleton (2001), highlight an interesting phenomenon: a performance approach goal consistently enhances performance. Whilst this sounds positive, many of the aforementioned studies found that the increase in performance comes at a cost. In the short term these include the prevalence of some less useful behaviours such as threat appraisals (McGregor & Elliot, 2002), surface processing of material (Elliot, 1999) and avoidance of help-seeking (Karabenick, 2003). It appears that whilst initial behaviours towards an evaluative event may be positive, as the event nears, concern grows and the fear of failure can become the over-riding motive, making it more difficult for the student to achieve. In the long term a performance-approach orientation can decrease intrinsic motivation and there are some concerns regarding its affect on general well being (Elliot & Moller, 2003).

In more recent times it has been argued that a '2 x 2' achievement goal framework better suits the full range of goal orientations (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). In this conceptualisation the mastery goal orientation is also divided in two and viewed as mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance. It is generally agreed that a mastery-approach goal is the most useful of the goal orientations. Students who have this orientation will be intrinsically motivated, seek challenges, be self-regulating, use deep processing strategies, and enjoy the learning process. They will use adaptive strategies following failure and use this to inform future learning

(McGregor & Elliot, 2002; Pekrun, Elliot & Maier, 2006). As with the performance-avoidance goal, a mastery-avoidance goal has as its underlying motive a fear of failure. There are a number of common features: students engage willingly in learning situations, they often have parents who worry excessively about their performance, they often avoid seeking help, and intrinsic motivation is adversely affected (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Karabenick, 2003). A study (Van Yperen, 2006) identifying the goal orientations of first year students at a Netherland university, includes some interesting statistics relating to the prevalence of students with a mastery-avoidance goal orientation. The researcher reports being surprised to find that close to a third of the participants held this orientation.

Central to achievement goal theory is the argument that a student's goal orientation will affect the manner in which he/she engages in academic situations. According to Van Yperen (2006) "a very high percentage (approximately 85%) of people hold a dominant achievement goal…. [and subsequently] have clear, distinct profiles" (p. 1443). In addition, Middleton and Midgley (1997) report that in a majority of studies, boys tend to support performance goals to a greater degree than do girls, whereas girls are more likely than boys to endorse mastery goals. Martin (2004) also states that "girls are more inclined than boys to adopt a learning or mastery focus" (p. 142). In an earlier study, Martin (2003a) reports that fear of failure is an important factor in boys' motivation: " in the learning domain, boys have been found to be unwilling to attempt new learning when they are uncertain of success, and to be less likely to re-attempt something at which they had previously been unsuccessful" (p. 52).

In contrast, Meece and Painter (2008) suggest that there is no clear correlation between gender and goal orientation and that any differences are "moderated by ability, race and classroom context" (p. 346). Taking into account both these views, this is an area of intense interest for those concerned with enhancing student academic engagement in boys' schools.

Whilst the literature on achievement goal theory is useful, on its own it does have some limitations. The discussion of the four different orientations is pertinent and offers valuable insights, but little effort is made to explain how, why or when a student might adopt a particular orientation. Neither does the research address whether students' goal orientations can be of varying intensities and how this might change the behaviour patterns for each profile. Some insight can be gained into the former issue by studying other motivational constructs. It is to these that I will now turn.

2.3.2 Self-theories

Intelligence

Self-theories of motivation investigate how a person's beliefs "about themselves can create different psychological worlds, leading them to think, feel and act differently in identical situations" (Dweck, 2000, p. xi), and their subsequent impact on a student's academic motivation and engagement. Self-theories vary in terms of the focus and importance placed on aspects relating to self, such as intelligence, efficacy, and worth. Integral to self-theories is the degree to which beliefs about such aspects of self are viewed by the individual to be fixed or malleable.

Many theorists (Alderman, 2008; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck & Master, 2008; Stipek, 2002) believe that the way in which a person views intelligence will impact on their academic motivation and their subsequent engagement in the classroom. According to Dweck and Leggett (1988) intelligence can be viewed as either fixed or incremental. When viewed as a fixed entity, a person is perceived to have a set amount of intelligence that cannot be altered. A person can strive to be the best they can, but there is a limit that is set biologically. On the other hand, an incremental view of intelligence espouses that it is malleable – it can be further developed through effort. Importantly, Blackwell et al. (2007) clarify this by stating that those adopting an incremental view do not believe "everyone has exactly the same potential in every domain, or will learn everything with equal ease" (p. 247).

Whilst adults, according to Stipek (2002), adopt both conceptions of intelligence, often alternating depending on the domain they are working in at any given time, adolescents are often less flexible. During adolescence there is a tendency to perceive intelligence as either fixed or incremental (Blackwell et al., 2007). A student's perception of intelligence will clearly impact on their motivation and engagement. Alderman (2008) states that "the theory of intelligence; entity or incremental, held by a student influences whether a performance or learning goal is adopted" (p. 90). Blackwell et al. (2007) posit that prior to high school a fixed view of intelligence has little impact on achievement, however, during high school the increasingly assessment-driven environment with its emphasis on normative evaluations creates a context that these students "are less equipped to surmount" (p. 258).

An incremental view is consistent with a learning goal orientation. Dweck and Master (2008) state that "an incremental theory puts the spotlight on the process of learning" (p. 50). Students with this orientation are more likely to take on academic challenges because they understand that by focusing on learning they can further develop their intelligence. If, as part of that challenge, they experience failure, it is unlikely to be debilitating. They are more likely to use adaptive responses such as increased effort and deep-thinking problem solving strategies to enable them to work towards mastering the challenge. Students with an incremental view of intelligence tend to see difficult challenges as an opportunity, something to be sought rather than avoided.

An entity view, however, is more consistent with a performance orientation. Students with this conception of intelligence generally have a strong belief about their ability, or lack of it. According to Dweck and Master (2008) these students will, "put a premium on looking smart" (p. 50). Students who see their potential as high will often view mastery as a means to an end, their focus is usually normative, and they often seek positive comments regarding their performance and ability. For those who see their potential as low, this often translates into avoiding looking 'stupid' and results in a number of different behaviours such as avoidance, self-sabotage, low

persistence and helplessness, which are often associated with lowered motivation and increased disengagement from academic studies. For both groups, tasks that are relatively easy and ensure success are often chosen. Thus, in the public arena, in the case of the former group, high intelligence is confirmed, and in the latter, at least lack of intelligence is not exposed.

Dweck (2000) maintains that belief in an incremental view of intelligence is critical if students are to be fully engaged and achieve in educational settings. Conversely, Dweck (2000) claims a belief in a fixed view of intelligence is more likely to result in maladaptive responses to academic challenges, resulting in lowered motivation and engagement, and poorer achievement.

Efficacy

When a student is faced with a specific task, some theorists suggest they will consider their chances of success before getting underway. Their estimation of the likelihood of success will take into account such considerations as their previous experiences, their belief in their ability to perform the task, and whether their current situation is going to enable them to succeed. Bandura (1997) refers to the outcome of such considerations as self-efficacy, that is "beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Self-efficacy is task specific and is not a generalised belief in one's ability. A student can be self-efficacious in one subject and not another, and in one task within a subject and not another. Alderman (2008) states that theorists working in this area consider personal self-efficacy beliefs to be "the fundamental element of agency …They regulate choice, behaviour, effort and persistence" (p. 69). Those that have a positive self-efficacy related to a specific task are more likely to approach it enthusiastically than those who have a low self-efficacy.

From this perspective, it follows that a student who has positive self-efficacy and believes they are able to complete a task successfully is more likely to exhibit behaviours that demonstrate their engagement. For example, they are more likely to expend considerable effort and persist at a task for longer. A number of studies

confirm the contention that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to demonstrate enhanced task engagement (Pajares, 2008), to set higher goals and make a greater effort (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992), and to use a variety of meta-cognitive strategies to solve problems (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

Bandura (1997) identified four factors that influence the formation of an individual's academic self-efficacy beliefs. These are, in order of decreasing importance, prior task accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological state. Prior task accomplishments refer to the experiences one has had on similar tasks in the past. Past successes will tend to have a positive influence, whilst past failures will tend to have the reverse effect. Bandura (1997), however, points out that this is not the only dynamic: the manner in which the person interprets these experiences is also important. Vicarious experiences also influence self-efficacy. Observing a task being completed successfully, or otherwise, influences student feelings of efficacy. How the demonstrator completes the task is important: demonstrators who use a variety of meta-cognitive strategies and rework aspects of the task in order to complete it successfully are shown to have the greatest positive effect on the observer's self-efficacy (Pajares, 2008). Verbal persuasion refers to the verbal messages students get from their peers, teachers, parents and others. These can have both a positive and negative influence on self-efficacy. Pajares (2008) labels this influence as verbal messages and social persuasions. This allows for the inclusion of the non-verbal messages students get from those around them, and the messages signalled by the wider community and society they are located in. A student's physiological state will also impact on their self-efficacy. Physiological factors include positive influences such as optimism and sense of well-being, and negative influences such as anxiety, stress and depression.

As with other motivational constructs, age and gender influence a person's self-efficacy. Gender differences in self-efficacy have been shown to emerge during early adolescence (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Wigfield, Eccles and Pintrich (as cited in Meece & Painter, 2008, p. 347) suggest this is because it is at this time that students become more aware of gender stereotypes and increasingly concerned with adhering

to these. Meece and Painter (2008) note that many studies show that boys' self-efficacy is noticeably higher in subjects that are generally seen as being better suited to males, for example, Mathematics and Science. Conversely, their self-efficacy was often lower in subjects stereotyped as being feminine, such as English.

Viewing motivation in a manner that incorporates notions of self-efficacy has many implications for those involved in boys' education. From this perspective, an important aspect of improving boys' engagement in their academic studies will be to ensure boys feel more efficacious towards their academic studies. This will involve giving them more positive experiences in the classroom, providing them with opportunities to see the work of others (often their peers) and in practical situations letting them see others as they work at similar tasks. Giving constructive feedback is also essential, not only about the things they are doing well, but also suggestions as to how they could do some things better.

2.3.3 Attributional theories

Whilst some theorists position an individual's view of self at the centre of their theories, others look to bring different factors to the fore. Attributional theorists focus on how individuals respond following an event and how the nature of their response impacts on future events. Weiner (1979, 1985, 1986, 1992) postulates that motivation stems from the beliefs a student has about the causes of their success or failure at school. In turn, these beliefs or attributions will influence the expectations the student will have about their future success and, subsequently, their behaviour in the classroom. Weiner lists four attributions that are predominant: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Clifford (1986) adds a fifth to the list: learning strategies.

Weiner (1979, 1992) emphasises that motivation is further influenced by the way in which a student views the attributions they make. These can be seen in three different dimensions, each a continuum: internal/external, stable/unstable, or controllable/uncontrollable. It is the individual's perception of the attribute in conjunction with these dimensions that has the greatest impact on student

motivation. For example, a student may attribute their failure in an examination to lack of ability; they may also view lack of ability as an internal and stable attribution which is beyond their control. It therefore follows that they will see their chance of passing a similar examination in the future as low. Weiner believes this will have the effect of lowering motivational levels. Whereas, if a student attributes failure in an examination to effort which is perceived as an internal, unstable and controllable factor, their expectations for future success could well be very different. Weiner argues that, as a consequence of their attributions, the first student is less likely than the latter to fully engage in similar classroom tasks in the future.

Covington (1984) investigated how student attributions change in relation to age. At a time when their performance in relation to others is becoming more important, it is shown that adolescents increasingly distinguish between ability and effort, and are more likely to attribute success or failure to ability. According to Covington, many adolescents also negatively correlate effort and ability; that is the more effort needed, the lower the ability. These factors, according to Covington, impact significantly on student motivation.

A research study conducted by Meece and Painter (2008) found that boys are more likely to attribute success in an academic task to ability or effort, both internal attributions, "resulting in generally higher self efficacies and higher expectations for the future, particularly in subjects which are stereotyped as masculine" (p. 349). On the other hand, if boys are unsuccessful at an academic task they are more likely to attribute their failure to external factors.

When a student attributes success, or lack of it, primarily to ability, this will in turn have an effect on their self-efficacy, their outcome expectancy (Bandura, 1997). If lack of success is attributed to lack of ability, a student is likely to believe they will have little chance of succeeding on a similar task in the future. Motivation levels will be affected. Zimmerman (2000) found that a positive correlation exists between self-efficacy and expended effort. That is, if a student believes there is a good chance of

their succeeding at an academic task their effort will be high. If, however, the student believes their chance of success is low, little effort will be expended.

Terminology within motivational literature is often confusing, with constructs which are very similar in nature often being given different labels. Intelligence (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck & Master, 2008), ability (Weiner, 1979, 1985, 1986, 1992) and competence (Elliot & Dweck, 2005) are similar in conceptualisation and often used interchangeably within motivational literature. The following paragraphs outline some of the research which highlights the impact age and gender have on perceptions of ability (referred to as competence or intelligence in some research studies).

Several motivational research studies have demonstrated the decline in students' perceptions of ability with age. Young children are reported to have very positive perceptions of their academic ability (Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002). As students move on to high school, their self-perceptions of ability decline and continue declining as they progress through. Stipek (2002) suggests that the normative environment in the later years of high school (which includes national examinations, applying for places in tertiary institutions and competing for tertiary scholarships) is such that students will inevitably compare themselves to others and use this information as the basis for their self-perceptions of competence. Interestingly, whilst most researchers agree that gender is a factor in an individual's self-perception of ability, Cole et al. (2001) maintain there is little evidence that gender predicts global perceptions of ability to any significant extent, if at all. Rather it tends to shape domain-specific perceptions of ability.

Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) conducted a10 year longitudinal study which followed students from Grade One through to Grade Twelve in a large urban area in the Midwestern America. They found that students' self-competence beliefs declined with age and that students differentiate competence between subjects. Alderman (2008) also points out that children as young as eight are able to differentiate competence by domain. In addition, she states that adolescents'

competency beliefs are not only domain specific but can also be differentiated across subject areas.

The aforementioned study (Jacobs et al., 2002) which included analysing students self-reported competency beliefs in three separate domains showed some interesting gender patterns, many of which had been reported in previous studies. In addition, it also found that the rate of change varies by both gender and domain. Boys had higher perceptions of their competence in Mathematics at first grade, but their competence beliefs decreased at a faster rate than did those of girls. As a result of differential rates of decline, boys and girls had similar beliefs about their Mathematic abilities by high school (Alderman, as cited in Elliot & Dweck, 2005, p. 517).

Perhaps because societal attitudes towards gender roles were still relatively entrenched many of the earlier research studies didn't show the convergence of gendered competency beliefs in Mathematics (Eccles, 1994). Jacobs et al. (2002) found that the situation in the language arts domain to be very different. At elementary (primary) school level they found very little difference in competence beliefs between the genders, however, as the students entered high school there was a marked difference. This lessened, but nevertheless remained significant, towards the end of high school. Of the three domains, sports was the only one in which the difference remained consistent over time, with boys having more positive competence beliefs than girls throughout all levels of schooling.

This American study highlights how school subjects are often stereotyped as being more suited to one gender. In Western societies boys are traditionally stereotyped as being better at Science and Mathematics, whilst the Arts subjects are seen to be the domain of girls. This is reflected in boys' and girls' perceptions of their ability, as mentioned above. As the traditional roles for males and females are being increasingly challenged, so too are accepted subject stereotypes being questioned. It seems the changes highlighted by Jacobs et al. (2002) are a reflection of this. Despite these changes, Martin (2003a) found that high school boys are often more conservative in this area. His study of Australian boys showed that their fear of

failure is strongly linked to gender construction with boys often being very careful not to do anything that can be "labelled 'sissy' or seen as feminine in any way" (p. 59). This can include selecting and being good at a subject generally thought to be the domain of girls.

As outlined above, a student may see themselves has being very capable in one area and much less so in another. The literature demonstrates that student beliefs about their competence will impact on their motivation and engagement. The literature also suggests that by Year Twelve students have relatively stable perceptions of their ability, and have usually decided where their strengths and weaknesses lie. Their motivation and engagement can be expected to alter depending on the subject they are in, whether they perceive the subject to be gender stereotyped, and their beliefs about their competence in it.

The concepts related to self-perceptions of competence are similar to those of self-efficacy and are often confused. As already mentioned, Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the belief "in one's capabilities to organise and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Friedel, Cortina, Turner and Midgley (2007) point out, however, that self-efficacy differs from competency beliefs in that an individual may know they have the competence to attain a specific goal, but they may also believe that it is not possible to achieve that goal at the current time. For instance, a Year Twelve student may believe they are capable of passing the Level Two English Research Achievement Standard, but are also aware that they do not have sufficient time due to other commitments (perhaps sporting or part-time work) so believe that they cannot actually achieve the standard at the time it is being assessed. The student has a positive self-perception of competence with regard to the particular achievement standard, but low self-efficacy. This demonstrates that competence and self-efficacy are distinct concepts which are not always positively correlated.

Gender differences in self-efficacy follow similar patterns to that of competency beliefs. Boys have higher self-efficacy in subjects like Mathematics, Science and

Computer Studies, but a lower self-efficacy in subjects such as English (Pajares, 1996). Gender differences in self-efficacy are also linked to age (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). These are generally attributed to increased concerns relating to conforming to gender-role stereotypes, concerns that typically coincide with the onset of adolescence (Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996). Studies, including Schunk (1986), have shown that self-efficacy beliefs impact on performance by mediating such behaviours as persistence, effort and perseverance. Schunk and Zimmerman (2008) state that students' self-efficacy beliefs "influence their academic motivation through their use of self-regulatory processes" (p. 121).

2.3.4 Expectancy-Value Theory

Expectancy-value theories take the perspective that "individuals' expectancies for success and the value they have for succeeding are important determinants of their motivation to perform achievement tasks, and their choices of which tasks to pursue" (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002, p. 91). They suggest there are two key questions which individuals in achievement situations ask: 'How well do I expect to do in this task?' and 'How much do I value the task?' The answer to the former they label the expectation of success, with the latter being referred to as subjective task value. For the purposes of this literature review, the focus will be on the modern expectancy-value model proposed by Eccles and Wigfield (2002), as shown in Figure 1 (see over).

The manner in which a student's expectation of success is formulated is multi-faceted and complex (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Influences include such factors as: the nature and perception of the task in relation to the individual's self-beliefs, the context the individual is located in, including such factors as culture, gender and family attitudes and expectations, and the affective responses and reactions to previous achievement situations. The focus is very much on personal beliefs, responses and interpretations, and the inter-relatedness of these as they impact on the individual's belief about their ability to complete a task successfully.

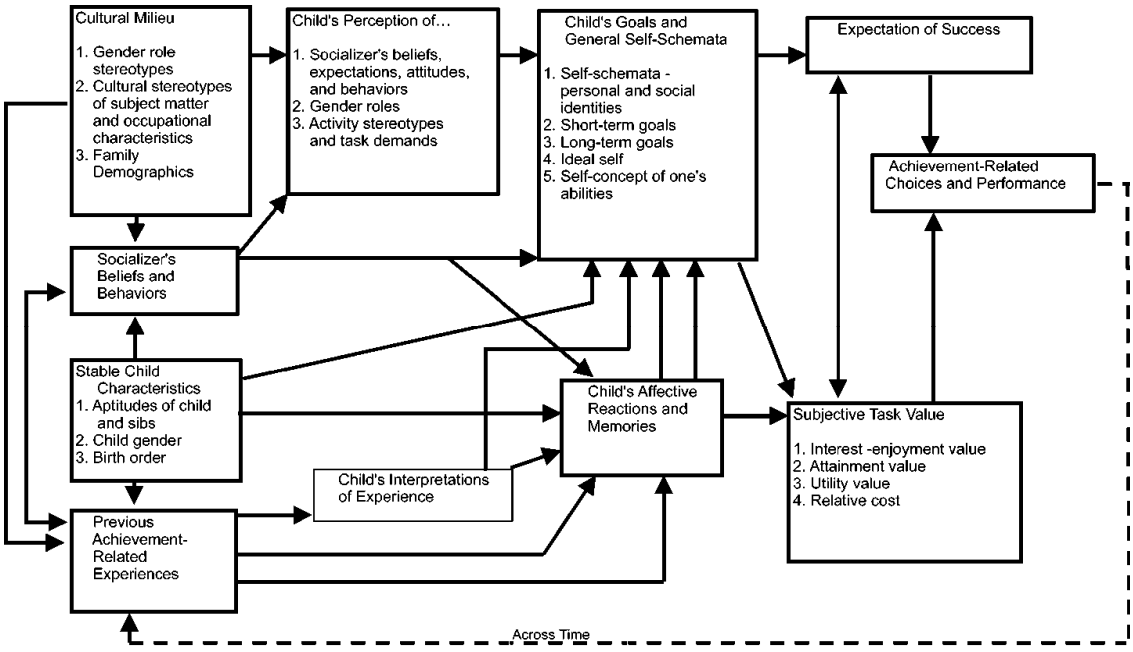


Figure 1. Eccles and Wigfield's expectancy-value model of achievement motivation.
(From Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*, 109-132.

Eccles (1983) outlines four major components of subjective task value: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost. Attainment value refers to the importance placed on doing well at a particular task. Intrinsic value [labelled as interest-enjoyment value by Eccles and Wigfield (2002)] is the enjoyment gained from doing the task. Utility value is the usefulness the task has to the individual, and cost [labelled relative cost by Eccles and Wigfield (2002)] refers to what it is that the individual has to do in order to achieve the task and what they might have to give up to succeed at it. It also refers to the cost in terms of the effects on self-perceptions, such as that of competency, and on personal well-being, such as fear of failure and performance anxiety. How the individual views each of these will also be influenced by past and present contexts, their perceptions and responses, and their future aspirations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

The context students find themselves in is an important aspect of expectancy-value theory. Cultural expectations and stereotypes related to gender will, therefore, be significant. Western society has traditionally stereotyped some subjects (for example, Mathematics and Science) as being more fitting for males and others, English for

instance, for females. It can be expected that boys may perceive some subjects as more appropriate for them than others. Expectancy-value theorists posit that not only will these subjects be perceived as having more value, positive outcomes in these subject-areas will be deemed more valuable. Eccles (2005) states "there is substantial evidence of gender differences in the valuing of various educational … outcomes" (p. 118). This provides us with yet another perspective as to why boys persist longer, perform better, and engage more fully in some subject areas than in others.

Experience derived from working in the classroom suggests that one of the most salient aspects relating to Year Twelve boys' academic engagement is that which expectancy-value theorists (Eccles, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) label cost. In the current environment, students have considerable demands placed on their time; many have part-time jobs, play competitive sport, are involved in bands, to name but a few of the activities which eat into students' out of school hours. The cost of completing a task that requires significant chunks of out of school time may be considered too great, even though the student has a high expectation of success, values and enjoys the subject, and see it as useful. A decision may be made on this basis to disengage from it. If one or more of the other components of subjective task value (attainment, intrinsic or utility value) also support withdrawing from the task, the decision is even easier. Many educators believe the nature of NCEA allows students to make this type of decision and still meet their long-term goals. NCEA is a school-wide factor that may impact upon engagement and will be discussed in some depth later in the literature review.

2.4 Types of motivation

Student motivation is often viewed as having two components: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is referred to as "motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake" (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008, p. 236). Extrinsic motivation on the other hand involves participating in an activity as a means to an end. Some researchers view the two as a dichotomy; a person is either intrinsically motivated or

extrinsically motivated (Schunk et al., 2008), with the former having the greatest impact on academic achievement. This seems an overly simplistic view and does not provide a useful framework with which to understand student engagement. A more useful way of conceptualising the two types of motivation is as a continuum with highly intrinsically motivated at one end and highly extrinsically motivated at the other (Alderman, 2008). The continuum measures how much a student is compelled from within to complete a task and the extent to which they are driven in order to gain a reward. Those that view motivation as a continuum theorise that the two types of motivation are compatible and can co-exist (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005).

Self-determination theorists (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000) also view motivation in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, however, they highlight the autonomy of the learner as the critical component. They also believe that intrinsic motivation is the most desirable type of motivation as it produces better learning outcomes and richer, more enjoyable learning experiences. This is not to say that a student who is extrinsically motivated is necessarily poorly served; rather it depends on the degree of autonomy experienced by the learner. Ryan and Deci (2000) outline four types of extrinsic motivation which focus on the degree to which a person regulates their own learning depending on the degree of autonomy they experience: externally regulated, introjected, identified and integrated. Firstly, the learner is said to be externally regulated when they are predominantly controlled by outside influences such as rewards and punishments. Secondly, introjected extrinsic motivation refers to the situation in which the approval of self and others is important to a learner, so they are externally controlled to some extent. Thirdly, the type of extrinsic motivation associated with a learner who both values others' approval and is internally controlled, in that there is some valuing and enjoyment of tasks and self-endorsement of goals, is labelled identified extrinsic motivation. Finally, integrated extrinsic motivation relates to learners who have integrated and internalised goals, values and roles, and are referred to as self-determined learners. The control is internal and the learner experiences congruence. It is important to note that these are not stages to pass through, but are degrees of external control.

In addition, Ryan and Deci (2000) identify a third category, aside from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which they label amotivation. This refers to a situation where a person lacks any desire or plan to act in one way or another. They clarify the concept further: "when amotivated, a person's behaviour lacks intentionality and a sense of personal causation" (p. 61). Gagne and Deci (2005) emphasise that motivation should be viewed as a continuum with intrinsic motivation at one end and amotivation at the other. In between these extremes lie will be the four degrees of extrinsic motivation.

Ryan and Deci (2000) further argue that viewing motivation in this manner is useful as not all students can be intrinsically motivated to complete all tasks. Despite this, the majority of students can still have enjoyable and rich learning experiences in the classroom. There are times when students must learn a skill or understand some concept which they fail to find intrinsically motivating. Often it is learned because the student perceives the relevance and necessity, and can see how it fits in with personal goals. In this instance, the student is said to be extrinsically motivated, even though they are driven internally and are self-determining. The student will likely be engaged behaviourally, emotionally and cognitively. The key, according to those advocating the self-determination perspective, is the degree of autonomy students have. An element of choice is important; students who are given a real choice have a greater chance of being intrinsically motivated. It is also argued that if choice has been given and a student subsequently encounters a piece of work that does not intrinsically motivate them, there is a better chance that they will adopt a form of extrinsic motivation that is self-determining. This will provide sufficient motivation to encourage them to fully engage, and for effective learning to take place.

2.5 To what extent does motivational theory help those at the chalkface?

Motivational theory has much to offer researchers and practitioners who work towards a better understanding of what motivates students in school settings.

Unfortunately, the theories are diverse and no one theory seems to offer a complete picture of the situation. For the purpose of this review, I have chosen theories that appear to provide some insight into the reasons why Year Twelve boys may, or may not, engage in their academic studies. Observing motivation from these multiple perspectives, however, causes some difficulties, and means our overall view can seem "fragmented and diffuse" (Pintrich, 2003, p. 667).

For the educator working in a school, the gap between theory and practice often seems overwhelming. No one theory seems to address the needs of students and teachers, or adequately take into account the complex context they find themselves in. In order to ensure that school leaders and teachers have relevant and easily accessible models underpinned by current theory, the next step seems to be for research studies to investigate which aspects of theory have the greatest relevance to specific groups. The findings of such studies could then be used to develop informed, workable pathways that assist schools as they strive to enhance student motivation and engagement.

A number of researchers (Martin, 2003a, 2007; Martin, 2008; Meece & Painter, 2008; Zimmerman, 2001, 2002; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005) have taken this step and developed models which utilise current theories that are particularly relevant to the group involved in this study. These models offer clarity and provide useful frameworks for those at the chalkface. It is this research that the literature review will now address.

2.6 Self-regulation

According to Zimmerman (2001), self–regulation refers to the degree to which "students are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process" (p. 5). It is important to note that while self-regulation is not a theory of motivation, students who are self-regulated learners are by

definition motivated, and by implication engaged in their learning, in the manner outlined by Fredricks et al. (2004).

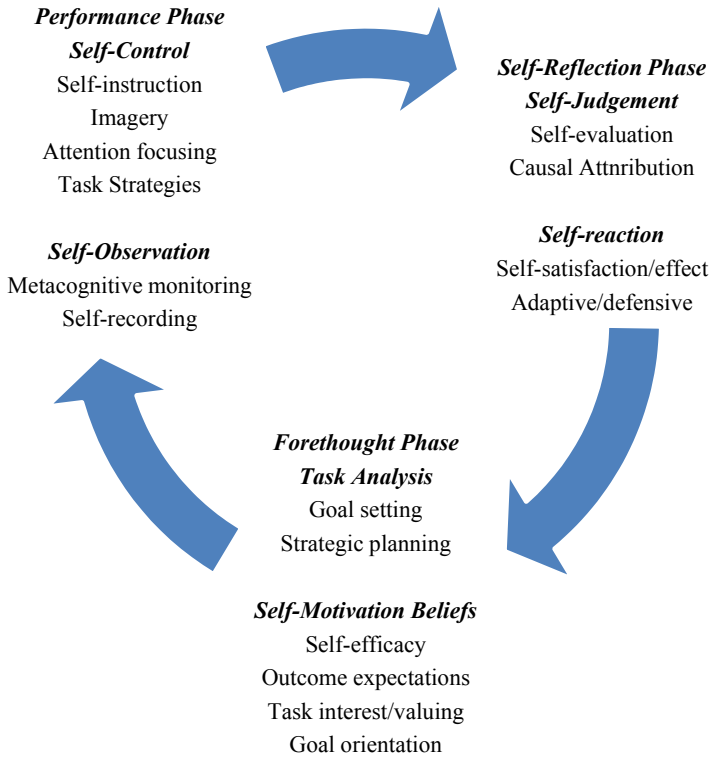


Figure 2. Phases and subprocesses of self-regulation. From Zimmerman and Campillo, 2003, p. 239, as cited in Elliot, A.J. & Dweck, C.S. (2005) *Handbook of competence and motivation* New York: Guilford Press. p. 515.

Self-regulation is a cyclical process (See Figure 2) which incorporates three phases of action as shown in Figure 2. Each of the phases incorporates a number of processes from a variety of motivational theories, many of which have been highlighted already in this literature review: Self-efficacy Theory, Expectancy Value Theory, Intrinsic Motivation, Achievement Goal Theory and Attributional Theory. Also included are a number of behaviours consistent with a learner who is fully engaged in their learning, such as self-recording, self-reflection and goal setting. Self-regulation is more than simply getting on with the task at hand; it involves a complex process that is initiated and sustained by the learners themselves. Meece and Painter (2008) point out that to develop self-regulated learners "educators must

emphasise students' role in their own learning and shift some of the responsibility for learning from themselves to the learner" (p. 355).

In addition, self-regulated learners must possess a number of important qualities. These include a vision of the future, volitional control strategies, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, and the ability to self-instruct, self-monitor, self-evaluate, manage time, and organise themselves effectively (Alderman, 2008). A vision of the future allows learners to set challenging, yet attainable short and long term goals. Volitional control strategies refer to the strategies the learner initiates to ensure they are able to stay focused and keep moving towards their goal in spite of the many distractions that present themselves. Cognitive strategies refer to those strategies that help the student with their learning (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). The meta-cognitive aspects of self-regulated learning involve knowing how learning strategies work, how to use them and how to evaluate them. There are three dimensions to meta-cognitive strategies: person (relating to self), task (nature of, difficulty, effort/time required etc.), and strategies (understanding and selection for specific task). Throughout task completion, students work independently, ensuring they understand material, going over elements they are unsure of, and evaluating their performance. They self-monitor their time management and organisational strategies.

Self-regulation is seen by many researchers as a key to student achievement. Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2005) suggest that "there is extensive empirical evidence that learners' use of self-regulatory processes is highly predictive of their academic success" (p. 523). Alderman (2008) claims that students who are self-regulated learners are better served in an academic environment; not only will they be fully engaged in their learning, they will be more resilient and more likely to utilise adaptive behaviours and strategies when they encounter failure.

The research findings from studies focusing on gender differences in self-regulated learning have generally been in accord: "with a few exceptions, the data indicate greater use of SRL [Self-regulated learning] strategies by girls than boys" (Meece & Painter, 2008, p. 343). Duckworth and Seligman (2006) found that "girls tend to be

more self-disciplined than boys…and girls tend to be more self-controlled than boys" (p. 206). They suggest that boys are more likely to respond to tasks and questions spontaneously without conscious thought, less able to control their emotions and therefore are more likely to give in to their frustrations. They postulate that these differences mean that many boys struggle to exert the control over their behaviour necessary to self-regulate their learning, particularly over an extended period.

Students who are not self-regulated learners will struggle to engage fully in the classroom, a situation which has significant consequences for their achievement. This does not mean, however, that all is lost. Alderman (2008) outlines a number of studies which have shown that students can be helped to become more effective self-regulated learners and, therefore, more fully engaged in academic studies. Schunk and Zimmerman (as cited in Zimmerman, 2002) also believe "that self-regulatory processes are teachable and can lead to increases in students' motivation and achievement" (p. 69). Research suggests, therefore, that many Year Twelve boys in our schools are not self-regulated learners and that this will have implication for their levels of engagement.

2.7 The Motivation and Engagement Wheel

Australian researcher, Andrew Martin (2003a, 2003b, 2004), has investigated motivation for the past decade with a particular concern for boys' motivation. His findings are significant for educational researchers and practitioners in New Zealand because of the geographic and cultural similarities that exist between the two countries. At the same time, many of his findings echo those of international studies conducted further afield. Martin (2003a) defines motivation as "students' energy and drive to learn, work effectively and achieve to their potential at school, and the behaviours that follow from this energy and drive" (p. 44). If one assumes that by 'behaviours' Martin is referring to Fredricks et al.'s (2004) meta-construct of engagement incorporating behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions, it seems that the definition of engagement adopted for this literature review aligns closely

with Martin's definition of motivation. Indeed, later work by Martin (2007) confirms this.

For the use of school practitioners and community groups wanting to address student motivation, Martin (2003a) developed an integrative framework, known as "The Student Motivation Wheel" (p. 45). This has been developed, refined and relabelled (Martin, 2007). Now called "The Motivation and Engagement Wheel" (p. 414) the framework is reproduced in Figure 3 (See below) with the kind permission of its author. This version more clearly addresses all three aspects of engagement: behavioural, emotional and cognitive. It was outlined at the beginning of the literature review that for the purposes of this study, motivation would be viewed as the process that underpins engagement. This version of Martin's motivation (and engagement) wheel also suggests this; the cognitions (motivational concepts) being the processes that underpin the behaviours (engagement).

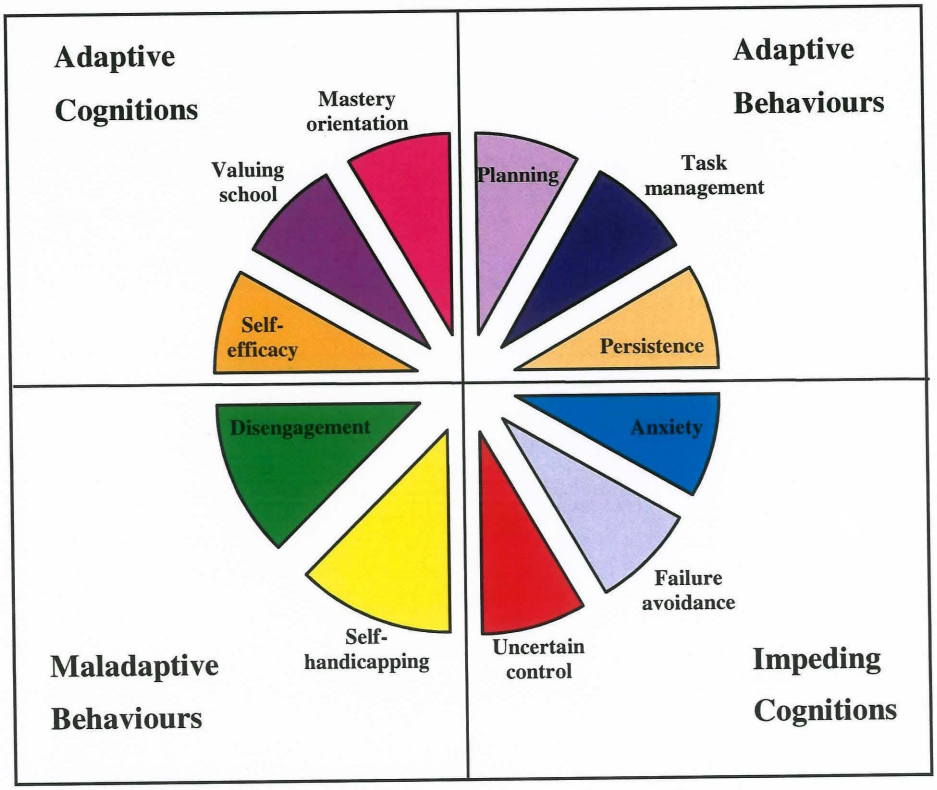


Figure 3. The Motivation and Engagement Wheel, A. J. Martin as published in: Martin, A.J. (2007). Examining a multidimensional model of student motivation and engagement using a construct validation approach. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 77*, 413-440. REPRODUCED with author's permission

The Motivation and Engagement Wheel utilises a multidimensional approach and is organised into two order levels. Martin (2007) argues that when motivational theories are studied a number of common elements can be discerned: adaptive cognitions, adaptive behaviours, impeding cognitions and maladaptive behaviours. These derive from the influential works of key motivational researchers throughout the last few decades and provide a conceptual scaffold. Martin (2008) believes that the lower order constructs are the key areas that need to be addressed when focusing on student motivation and engagement. While the higher orders are conceptual in nature, the lower orders are operational. These operational areas are comprised of eleven constructs (the segments of the wheel) which are strategically placed within the four higher order categories.

Martin (2008) asserts that "theory and research can guide the development of constructs that reflect the diversity of students' academic engagement and motivation" (p. 242). The Motivation and Engagement Wheel, according to Martin (2008), highlights and integrates a number of seminal theoretical tenets within the eleven constructs and melds these into a cohesive and functional framework. The theoretical motivational perspectives that Martin (2008) has selected and integrated, and the constructs they underpin are as follows: the self-efficacy construct reflects Self-efficacy theory; the mastery orientation construct reflects Self-determination theory as it relates to intrinsic motivation, motivational orientation and Goal orientation theory; the valuing construct reflects the idea of subjective task value in Expectancy-value theory; the persistence, planning, and task management constructs reflect the key attributes of self-regulated learning; the uncertain control construct reflects Attributional theory; and the failure avoidance, anxiety, self-handicapping and disengagement constructs reflect Self-worth theory. Each of these theories and models has been discussed earlier in this literature review.

This framework has proved to be functional in a number of studies (Martin, 2007, 2008), as both a framework for the development of The Motivation and Engagement Scale-High School (Martin, 2009), a measurement tool used to assess students in the

eleven areas included in the lower order, and as a focus for interventions designed to improve student motivation and engagement. As Martin (2007) claims:

> the Motivation and Engagement Wheel enables educators to (1) address a finite and manageable set of constructs that derive from seminal theory; (2) quantify students on each of these constructs; and (3) contextualize this quantification in terms of the degree to which the target constructs are adaptive or maladaptive from a motivation and engagement perspective (p. 431).

It is important to note, Martin (2008) stresses, that the Motivation and Engagement Wheel is useful when addressing the motivational needs of all students, however, because of the current concern for boys in our schools, his focus has been directed towards boys' motivation and engagement.

Martin's (2007, 2008) studies using the Wheel are interesting. He found that

> in terms of adaptive dimensions, girls are significantly higher than boys in their valuing of school, mastery orientation, planning, study management and persistence. In terms of impeding and maladaptive dimensions, girls are significantly higher than boys in anxiety while boys are significantly higher in self-handicapping and disengagement (Martin, 2007, p. 429).

For both genders, but particularly for boys, the adaptive cognitions and behaviours are the aspects we need to be striving to improve, whilst for boys self-handicapping and disengagement need to be reduced if we are to improve their motivation and engagement.

2.8 School-wide factors

Within current literature it has been suggested that some school-wide factors and systemic structures significantly influence student engagement. The existence and shape of these may come about as a result of local decision-making within the school

and its community, or they may arise as national requirements are met. It is to a selection of these that this literature review will now turn.

The Ministry of Education report *Consultation on 'Staying at School* (2006) sets out suggestions for schools regarding student retention. This study involves a series of interviews with students, mostly boys who left school prior to turning 16 years of age, and secondary school principals. It endeavours to establish the reasons for the students' early exit and investigates what can be done by schools to address the issue. Whilst this group is from a younger cohort than the one this study is investigating, there seems to be some material that might be useful. The report identifies a number of strategies that schools have found helpful in addressing student disengagement. Those that seem to have particular relevance to this study include: increasing the flexibility of the curriculum so that it is more relevant to students, getting students involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, offering extra assistance with literacy and numeracy, helping students with goal setting, and providing hands-on work experience as a regular part of the school week.

In 2008 the Education Review Office (ERO) released a report entitled *Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* that summarised the findings from ten case studies of New Zealand secondary schools, five of them boys' schools. Each of these schools had recently had a positive ERO Report and had "developed, to some extent, particular approaches or strategies related to boys' education" (Education Review Office, 2008, p. 8). The study's aim was to identify features within schools that were seen as crucial to improving boys' engagement and lifting achievement. Analysis of the case studies identified a range of factors across the following six areas: leadership, school culture, relationships, engaging boys, relevant teaching and learning, and literacy and numeracy support for boys. A number of the identified strengths would seem to have relevance to this study. These include: setting up mentoring programmes and programmes to develop self-image and self-management, ensuring students have access to a rich variety of curriculum and vocational programmes supported by timetabling and class organisation, linking

programmes to industry and other relevant organisations, helping boys to set long-term goals, and establishing cross-curricular literacy and numeracy programmes.

A world-wide study of student engagement was conducted by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000. The participants in this study were 15 year olds, and whilst this is a year or two younger than students in Year Twelve in New Zealand schools, the findings have some relevance to this research study. For the purposes of this report student engagement was referred to as "students' attitudes towards schooling and their participation in school activities" (Willms, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), & Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2003, p. 8). The report identified two indicators of engagement: participation and sense of belonging. New Zealand did not score well in the participation measurement with 27% of students studied recording low participation levels; one of the lowest in the OECD. The participation score was based on student absenteeism (full day), skipping classes and arriving late to school. For the second indicator; sense of belonging, as indicated by students' feelings about school, New Zealand scored within the OECD average range. The study went on to investigate possible links between student engagement and literacy. It found that there was no relationship between sense of belonging and participation, or between sense of belonging and literacy. Perhaps not unexpectedly, however, it found a stronger relationship between participation and literacy.

The report had some suggestions for educators. It felt that school processes play a significant role in improving student engagement, stating that "students are more engaged in schools where there is a strong disciplinary climate, positive student-teacher relations, and high expectations for success" (Willms et al., 2003, p. 57).

The difficulty of finding studies relevant to this research is twofold. Firstly, finding research in which participants are the same age as Year Twelve students in New Zealand is not easy and secondly, many studies use definitions of engagement other than the one adopted for this research. While the studies mentioned earlier in this

section are indicative of this to varying degrees, they still offer some insight into the issues related to student engagement at Year Twelve.

A collection of Australian studies (Martin 2003a, 2003b; Martin & Dowson, 2009) has also addressed how schools can improve student engagement, with a focus on improving boys' engagement. Martin (2003a) posits that one of the most important roles of school leaders is to ensure the quality of their school's teachers. To ensure teacher quality and effectiveness teachers must have access to quality professional development programmes relating to teaching pedagogy. An effective professional development programme needs to be well-researched and planned, and include a carefully implemented school-wide component (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). In a second study Martin (2003b) suggests a number of school-wide areas of interest for those wanting to improve boys' engagement: establishing mentoring programmes, helping boys set goals and targets, providing student-centred programmes and literacy support, addressing issues such as class size, providing effective professional development for teachers relating to such matters as pedagogy and catering for diversity, and giving boys opportunities for choice. Martin and Dowson (2009) mention many of the above factors, but also highlight the need to consider how class size and composition affect engagement, and the role that targeted student programmes and interventions might have in raising levels of engagement.

Whilst there are a number of factors that are identified as having particular relevance to issues surrounding boys' engagement in New Zealand, one that is repeatedly highlighted is the recent adoption of a new secondary assessment regime, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). The final section of this review examines some of the literature relating to this aspect of the topic.

In 2002, Level One of a new standards-based secondary school qualification, known as NCEA, was introduced at Year Eleven. Over the next two years, Levels Two and Three came on stream, for Years Twelve and Thirteen respectively. Level Four was adopted in 2004 to replace existing bursary examinations. Whilst most students at

each of the year groups are assessed at the levels indicated there is provision for students to follow a multi-level programme.

In recent times there have been a number of studies that have investigated how effective NCEA is as our national qualification and its effects on student engagement (Mahoney, 2005; Meyer, McClure, Walkey, McKenzie, & Weir, 2006; Starkey, 2006). The results have been varied. The literature on the positive impact of NCEA has predominantly been located in such matters as student choice, student control, and the opportunities it gives for students to self-regulate their learning. The over-riding theme of the literature, however, is that NCEA enables students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they possess, rather than focus on what it is they struggle to do.

Alison (2005) conducted a series of focus groups in which secondary teachers gave their views on NCEA. They saw a number of benefits associated with the assessment regime. They felt there was greater flexibility; they were able to offer new programmes, there were more options within existing programmes, and students could more easily be offered multi-level courses. Consequently, they believed there was greater student choice, with students being able to select courses that better suited their needs. Another report (Starkey, 2006) comments on the opportunities NCEA gives students to plan their workloads with internal assessments being offered throughout the year. Hipkins (2007) comments that NCEA allows students to act strategically and the subsequent skipping of assessments is " a valid way of managing overassessment" (p. 41).

NCEA is often criticised from a number of perspectives for its negative impact on student engagement. In a briefing paper to Members of Parliament, Mahoney (2005) notes the views of teachers that "student behaviour demonstrates a greater concern with credit accumulation than with learning" (p. 12). Similarly, Meyer et al. (2006) state that "there is evidence that a 80-credit requirement encourages a minimalist approach by students" (p. 67). Another issue identified in many studies (Hipkins, 2007; Mahoney, 2005; Meyer et al., 2006) is the concern that there is little

motivation for many students to aim for the Merit and Excellence grades. Hipkins (2007) points out that this concern has been addressed and, indeed, changes were actioned in 2008 that enabled high achieving students' certificates to be endorsed with Merit or Excellence, by subject and/or by level, to acknowledge those who consistently gain the higher grades.

An issue which arose in many studies is that of skipping standards. Whilst Hipkins (2007) labels this action as strategic and views it as a predominantly positive attribute, Meyer et al. (2006) express concern. They believe that allowing students to skip standards they don't like, or that they find challenging, or they expect to fail for any number of reasons, is a design feature of NCEA that is "a disincentive to maximising student motivation and achievement" (Meyer et al., 2006, p. 68). Reported results from a NZCER (New Zealand Council for Educational Research) survey (Hipkins & Vaughan, 2005) show that 33% of Year Twelve skip at least one standard. The two most common reasons given for this are managing workload and already having sufficient credits. Hipkins and Vaughan (2005) suggest that Year Twelve students often feel more confident about the assessment structure and are more prepared, than their Year Eleven counterparts, to act strategically. The skipping of standards, for whatever reason, will have significant repercussions for student engagement in the classroom; a student who decides not to complete a standard is unlikely to engage fully in the teaching and learning process.

Interestingly, Hipkins and Vaughan (2005) refer to the work of Fredricks et al. (2004) and discuss the idea of engagement having three facets. They report that during their research they saw many instances of students engaging behaviourally and emotionally, but less "evidence of students' cognitive engagement of the sort that would help them build a rich learning career" (p. 129). Schallert, Reed and Turner (as cited in Hipkins & Vaughan, 2005, p. 129) suggest that when students are "driven by the need to check off each task, each subgoal on the way to long-term accomplishments" they lose the thrill of learning for its own sake. In terms of motivational theory, the behaviours exhibited suggest a performance orientation rather than a mastery orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Pintrich, 2000a, 2000b;

Urdan et al., 1997) and this, as has already been discussed, can have a considerable impact on student engagement.

The feminisation of assessment structures, in particular NCEA, is an oft-mentioned criticism. There is an absence of literature relating specifically to NCEA, however, several practitioners have expressed their views in recent times including some who are prominent in boys' education in New Zealand. Paul Baker, the Rector of Waitaki Boys' High School believes that whilst the introduction of NCEA did not initiate the gap in gender performance, it has entrenched and widened it. According to Baker (2006) "success in assessment now requires understanding and meticulously meeting complex written instructions" (p. 12), a characteristic that is particularly suitable for girls. Ian Baldwin, Rector of Southland Boys' High School (as cited in Forbes, 2009) echoes this sentiment, claiming that "the vast differences in male and female learning mean girls are more suited to NCEA assessment" (The Southland Times, May 18, 2009). John Morris, Headmaster of Auckland Grammar School, states that the "increase in on-course assessment has been well proven to favour the way that girls work and further militate against boys achieving to their potential" (2004, July, p. 1). Such statements demonstrate that many educators believe the demands of NCEA assessment tasks and their incompatibility with the skills and abilities of many boys, have had, and continue to have, a detrimental effect on boys' engagement and achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 The nature of research

People have always sought to better understand the world around them. Their existing beliefs about the world, their perspective of what constitutes knowledge, and their understanding of human behaviour have influenced the manner in which they have endeavoured to make meaning. For some (Kerlinger, 1970; Skinner, 1966) knowledge is absolute and viewed as 'being'. It exists, is incontestable, and is there, just waiting to be discovered. There is one reality; other perspectives are flawed and somehow reveal a deficiency in the perceiver. Reality, like knowledge, just is! Lather (1992) described those with this worldview as having a "lust for absolutes, for certainty in [their] ways of knowing" (p. 8). They believe human behaviour is something that can be studied, that causes can be identified and behaviour modification programmes put in place to change any undesirable conduct. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) explain that from this perspective human behaviour is "passive, essentially determined and controlled" (p. 18).

Such a worldview is seen as being indicative of the positivist paradigm. Kuhn (1970) described a paradigm as "what the members of a scientific community share" (p. 176). He also postulated that the members of a community who hold true to a particular paradigm have "acquired firm answers to questions like the following: What are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses?" (p. 4). Their shared ontology and epistemology will lead them to view the notion of research in a similar way.

In a society where positivist ideas of knowledge are prevalent, the notion of research is clear. Its role is to discover knowledge. Because there is a presumption of "a stable, unchanging reality" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006, p. 771) the hegemonic approach to research is the empirical or scientific model. This requires the researcher to follow a clear process that involves formulating hypotheses,

verifying these through testing and observation, and forming conclusions. There will be an emphasis on measurability and predictability. Researcher objectivity and neutrality are paramount. It is expected that conclusions drawn will be in the form of "time and context free generalisations" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14). This type of research will produce discrete, precise, numerical data that is often relatively quick and economical to gather from varying sample sizes. It is data that is able to be analysed statistically to generate information independent of the researcher, from which conclusions can be drawn. The analysis of quantitative research data allows the researcher to make generalisations or identify cause and effect relationships.

From the 1960s onwards, there has been a shift amongst the research community against accepting such beliefs and attitudes as the dominant worldview, and a paradigm shift has been observed (Donmeyer, 2006). Many social scientists (Campbell, 1974; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Cronbach, as cited in Keeves, 1988) began to question the positivist approach to research and its premise that society, like knowledge, is inherently ordered. A post-positivist approach argues that this clearly isn't the case. It rejects the view of knowledge as absolute and denies the existence of one reality, instead claiming that both are constructed by the individual. Clearly, this is a very different ontological and epistemological view; one where there is no single reality, but multiple ones that reflect the individual's perception of the world around them and a conception of knowledge as constructed rather than simply 'being'. The existence of a real world is not denied, but the contention that there is one interpretation of it is robustly refuted. Post-positivists also reject the "belief that human behaviour is governed by general, universal laws and characterised by regularities" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). In place of this is a view of the unique, agentic individual, possessing free will, creativity and the ability to influence the environment in which they live (Cohen et al., 2007). Researchers who adopt this perspective seek to understand the individual's interpretation of their world and their response to it. They share a belief that the social world is complex and should be studied as it is. They acknowledge that any study will necessarily be subjective, with the collected data being composed of rich descriptions depicting the multiple interpretations of its participants.

The ontological and epistemological foundations of a post-structural worldview offer yet another perspective. Reality is not an entity that can become known or constructed by the individual, but is relative. Reality is ultimately unknowable and there is no final moment of knowing; one person's reality can be as valid as the next persons'. In a community, however, it is the social group that accepts a version of reality or knowledge as the accepted one; it is not a matter of accepting all versions. Chaos would reign if this were the case.

With regard to educational research, Capper (1998) suggests that a post-structural perspective "rather than working towards an end point, should call into question the end point itself" (p. 363). She contends that change is better managed in a manner that encourages dissensus and discordance, as post-structuralists believe there is no one way to address a problem and no one solution. It is essential that the various players talk and passionately debate issues. Research, from a post-structural paradigm, must acknowledge this and, as Capper (1998) states, "consider ways of viewing a situation rather than providing guides for action" (p. 366). Research must be focused on critiquing the 'world', using qualitative methods which will focus on individual narratives and group dynamics. Knowledge gained from the process must be agreed upon by the group before being accepted as such and it is always open to revision.

3.2 The research study

The success, or otherwise, of a research study depends on thorough preparation and planning throughout. Cohen et al. (2007) suggest there are four broad sequential stages that need to be considered when planning research: orienting decisions, research design and method, data analysis, and presenting and reporting the results. This section is structured using the four stages listed above and addresses the research considerations suggested by Cohen (2006).

3.2.1 Orienting decisions

Prior to research being undertaken the researcher must clarify a number of factors and make decisions which subsequently form the parameters of the research project.

Research question

The first and one of the most pervasive actions for any researcher to take is the formulation of their research's focusing question. This influences all subsequent decisions from providing direction for the literature review to guiding data analysis and the final writing up. According to Bryman (2004) the question needs to be clear, researchable, connected with established theory and research, have the potential to contribute to existing knowledge, and be neither too broad nor too narrow (p. 33). Despite it being formulated early in the process, Flick (2008) contends that it is essential that the research question is malleable enough to "be refined and reformulated, sometimes refocused in the course of the project" (p. 22).

As with most research studies undertaken by teacher-researchers, the idea for this study came about through my work. For many years I have taught and held leadership roles in boys' schools in New Zealand whilst continuing to read widely about the situation for boys in our schools. This has led to my belief that boys' schools have a vital role to play in addressing the concerns related to boys' engagement and achievement. Despite this, Year Twelve seems to be a difficult year for many boys in single-sex schools. Much has been written about the impact of pedagogy on student engagement, however, there is much less written about the role that school-wide factors play in enhancing or hindering boys' engagement, particularly at this level. This led to the formulation of the research question for this study;

How can the academic engagement of Year Twelve students be enhanced within boys' schools?

Research paradigm

> …direct engagement in the social world focuses the sociological eye on the interaction between structure and action – on how people are embedded in larger social and cultural contexts and how, in turn, they actively participate in shaping the worlds they inhabit (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002, p. 203).

The social and cultural context of this research is boys' schools in New Zealand, the focus is on a specific group, Year Twelve boys, and the purpose is to give voice to the boys' perceptions of the manner in which the organisational structures they find themselves embedded in shape both their behaviour and in turn the world they inhabit.

Accordingly, this research is located in the naturalist interpretive paradigm. Cohen et al. (2007) state that those adopting a naturalist approach "reject the idea that human behaviour is governed by a set of universal laws" (p. 19). They postulate that an individual's behaviour can only be understood if the researcher takes the time and energy to appreciate the situation as it exists for the individual. It is the individual who defines, interprets and responds to the social reality they are located in (Cohen et al., 2007; Lather, 1992). As a result, this type of research is value laden. Cohen et al. (2007) stress that researchers working within a naturalist interpretive paradigm are post-positivist. They demonstrate concern for the individual and understand that human experience is highly personal and subjective. As their focus is on better understanding the reality as it exists for the individual, it follows that theory will emerge from the research, rather than informing the study from its inception (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This resonates with educators, many of whom readily agree that today's schools are not places that are inherently ordered. As Cohen et al. (2007) put it they are "messy, full of contradictions, richness, [and] complexity" (p. 167). The physical reality of a school obviously exists; there are the buildings and grounds inhabited by a variety of people, carrying out a variety of activities, but within the school community there are

a number of ways of "meaning-making" (Potter, 2006, p. 18) amongst stakeholders. This study seeks to hear the voices of the most significant stakeholders, the students themselves. What is the reality for Year Twelve boys in terms of their engagement in academic studies? What do they perceive the school-wide factors that help and/or hinder them to be? It is their stories, their interpretations of reality, that provide valuable insights and contribute to a better understanding of a current, much debated issue.

Sampling

This research forms a major part of the academic requirements towards a Masters of Educational Leadership degree and must be completed within a one year period. Time constraints have therefore influenced many of the decisions relating to sample size and location, and the timing of data collection episodes.

For the purposes of this study, the sample is boys who are currently in Year Twelve and who are attending a boys' school within New Zealand. Practicality dictated that for the researcher's ease of access schools were located in North Island urban areas where accommodation was easily obtained. Because of the small scope of this research study, it was essential that the number of schools involved was manageable. In addition, it was important that students who wanted to participate had every chance of being involved: another reason for restricting the number of schools which participated. Initially, the principals of three schools meeting the above criteria were contacted by way of letter and invited to participate in the study. When one of these declined to be involved another school was approached.

Defining the criteria further by considering aspects such as decile and student demographics was considered and seen to have some merit. This would have added a further dimension to the study, but would have made it unmanageable for one person within the allocated time period and was therefore not adopted.

The numbers of participants in each school was carefully considered in terms of the time available to both the researcher and the schools. It was decided that five participants from three schools, a total of fifteen participants in all, would allow for student voice to be heard without being too onerous on any individual school or the researcher. Perhaps using a sample of ten students from each school would offer a more diverse perspective, but the cost, in terms of time and extra workload, to both could not be justified for this small research study.

My experience teaching in secondary schools suggested that the timing of the research data collection was important. Any data collected in the first term would be influenced by feelings of anticipation and excitement often associated with the sense of making a new beginning. By late in Term One reality will have set in for many students as they work to meet the academic requirements of Year Twelve. It is at this time that students often become less engaged. Consequently, I decided that any time from Term Two onwards would elicit the most useful data. Term Two, itself, is probably the ideal time for data collection to occur, due to the increasing assessment commitments faced by both the students and the school in Terms Three and Four.

3.2.2 Research design and method

The research design "is a plan for collecting and analysing evidence that will make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she has posed" (Ragin, as cited in Flick, 2004, p. 147). It binds the theoretical framework, goals (general and specific), and the 'nuts and bolts' of conducting research into a scaffold that informs the project through to its conclusion (Cohen et al., 2007; Flick, 2004). Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that the idea of "fitness of purpose" (p. 78) will inform all decisions made by the researcher and lead to a research design that is uniquely suited to the aims of the project.

Research method – Interviews

Interviews are a widely used data collection method for those doing qualitative research. They provide rich data by allowing the researcher to hear the interviewee's "interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 349). As it is the voices of Year Twelve boys that this research seeks to highlight it was decided to use interviews as the data collection method.

A mixed-methods approach was considered, with a second data collection method being adopted in conjunction with semi-structured interviews. Focus groups, for example, would have enabled the inclusion of more students, allowed for discussion between the participants, and provided an opportunity for students to debate, discuss and perhaps clarify their experiences and insights. However, I considered that costs could outweigh benefits. The biggest concern was the potential harm to participants. A tendency for some boys to be more assertive in discussion groups than others could potentially inhibit other boys from contributing at all. Additionally, some might also be reluctant to give voice to ideas that aren't necessarily in line with the majority being voiced in the focus group, or indeed within the school and its wider community. In my opinion interviews would allow boys to respond more honestly, without fear of negative comments from their peers. The conjoint use of surveys was also considered and rejected, this time due to the time and effort required on the part of participants to write responses with the complexity needed to give sufficient insight. I felt that many boys would struggle, or be reluctant to articulate their ideas in writing, but would be more amenable to articulating them verbally.

Interviews are often classified in terms of their structure, ranging from highly structured to unstructured, although some researchers argue that the latter cannot truly exist as the researcher is forced to make several choices prior to any interview taking place, thereby giving the interview, structure, albeit loose (Jones, 1985; Mason, 2002). The degree of structure best suited to a research study will depend on a number of factors such as purpose, age of sample and context. In this research study a semi-structured interview format is used.

Interview type - Semi-structured

The nature of semi-structured interviews suits the research sample, Year Twelve boys, for a number of reasons. Semi-structured interviews tend to be more informal than their more structured counterparts, the language and style more conversational in nature, and the power balance on a more equal footing (Bishop, 1997; Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). However, Kvale (2006; 2007) points out that in the interview situation there is a power asymmetry; the interviewer is the person who controls the situation (aspects such as topic, questions, timing) and the interview is a "one-way dialogue" (Kvale, 2007, p. 15). In addition, the interviewer often has control of the location, further exaggerating the power asymmetry (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Both assertions have some relevance to this particular study in terms of my choice of topic and the nature of the knowledge I hoped to elicit. The location of the interview; most likely in a school's only interview room that is commonly used for disciplinary meetings and usually situated near senior management offices, could have the potential to unsettle participants and increase any feelings of powerlessness. The location also has major implications with regard to participant anonymity, a consideration which will be addressed later in this section.

Kvale (2007) describes the semi-structured interview as a "construction site for knowledge" (p. 21). Using this format allows the interviewee considerable influence concerning the direction of the interview and this reinforces the constructed nature of knowledge. Whilst structure exists in the form of a pre-determined outline known as an interview guide (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007; Kvale, 2007), the manner in which the interview unfolds is flexible and fluid enough to take into account the boys' responses, and follow up on both anticipated and unexpected revelations. These attributes that make the use of semi-structured interviews particularly suited to this project.

The preparation of the interview guide is the key to successful interviews and demands careful consideration (Kvale, 1996). This provides the scaffold for the interview; informing, not dictating, the interview itself. In turn, the interview guide is

informed by the way in which the interviewer frames and understands the topic being researched. In this instance the design of the guide is formulated to enable Year Twelve boys to share their experiences, perceptions, understandings and interpretations (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004) in relation to their academic engagement.

Hermanns (2004) describes the interview as an "interpersonal drama" (p. 209) with the interviewer in the role of stage director, charged with the task of shaping the final product. The interviewer must skilfully direct the interview as it progresses, through the use of verbal probes (Matteson & Lincoln, 2009). The effective use of concurrent probes, that is probes that take place at the time of the interview, can enhance the interchange or dialogue between the interviewer and the participant (Willis, 1999). They can be used to elicit additional information and seek clarification in order to gain greater insight into the topic being discussed.

Interviewing school-age participants

The youthful age of the participants brings an extra dimension to the interview design. Cohen et al. (2007) highlight a number of guidelines when interviewing children. Whilst the participants in this study are either 16 or 17 years old and would not consider themselves children, they are still at school and many of Cohen et al.'s (2007) guidelines are relevant. These include understanding that the power dynamic is weighted in the adult's favour and the need to make the interview as non-threatening as possible. Kvale (2007) also highlights the power imbalance and the need to consider this in all interviews with teenagers. Making the interview as informal as possible, using language appropriate to the age and level of the participants, taking care to avoid jargon, and allowing time for interviewees to think and organise ideas can alleviate power imbalance to some extent..

Kvale (2007) suggests many of the same guidelines and advises researchers to remember that adults and children, including teenagers, inhabit different social worlds. Researchers must avoid giving the idea that there is one right answer to questions and refrain from asking long complex questions. In addition, Gerson and

Horowitz (2002) stress the importance of the interviewer, at all times, demonstrating "a willingness to put moral judgements aside" (p. 210). The latter considerations are particularly significant when dealing with children, and must always be at the forefront of the researcher's mind when conducting interviews; this study involving high school students is no exception.

Researcher-participant relationship

In the context of a semi-structured interview the researcher-participant relationship is particularly important. In the first few minutes, the researcher needs to set the interviewee at ease in a manner that encourages mutual trust and respect in order that the interviewee feels able to respond openly and honestly throughout the interview (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007; Kvale, 1996, 2006).

As mentioned in the previous section, many researchers have highlighted a power asymmetry between the partners in the interview situation. This idea is important in the context of this study at a number of levels; the research involves young adults being interviewed by an adult, a researcher (who is known by the interviewees to be a teacher) interviewing students, and the interviews taking place in a school interview room. It is vitally important that the researcher is cognisant of this and considers strategies to redress the imbalance to some degree. These strategies include using first names for both interviewer and interviewee during the interview, using language which is accessible to the students, providing teenage-friendly refreshments, and stressing the value of the boys' input.

Cohen et al. (2007) point out that "the onus is on the interviewer to establish and maintain a good rapport with the interviewee" (p. 362). As such the interviewer must be also appear knowledgeable and professional in an understated manner, so as to reassure the interviewee that they have some expertise in the area under discussion. It is important that the boys feel that they can talk about their experiences with someone who has some understanding of the context, even if not from their perspective. It is also essential that the researcher's opinions and any preconceptions

do not influence the encounter by way of verbal and non-verbal reactions or comments. Any response from the researcher must be encouraging and non-judgemental.

Reflexivity and representation

"Researchers are in the world and of the world" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 171). They, like others, experience and interpret their world, developing their ontological and epistemological perspectives. And like others, they frame their interaction with their world through the lens of these perspectives.

Bloor and Wood (2006) describe the interview situation as "a species of conversation, … [in which] the interviewer is not a neutral information-gatherer, but rather is an active co-participant with the interviewee in the social construction of the research data" (p. 146). In a semi-structured interview the researcher is not, and does not desire to be, an objective, neutral observer, but rather an integral and active participant in the interview itself. It is the researchers' skill in constructing the interview (Hermanns, 2004; Kvale, 2007; Matteson & Lincoln, 2009; Willis, 1999) which will determine the richness of the collected data. It is therefore inescapable that the researcher brings their life experiences and their accumulative reactions: behavioural, affective and cognitive, to the interview arena. A reflexive researcher has "a heightened awareness of the self in the process of knowledge creation, a clarification of how one's beliefs have been socially constructed and how these values are impacting on interaction, data collection and data analysis and the research setting" (Grbich, 2007, p. 10).

It is a given that researchers must repeatedly reflect on their own research practice and at all times be aware of how they, as a co-participant, are party to the social construction of the research process. This is particularly true for those working in a field they have been, or are currently part of. Teacher-researchers working in the education field are an example of this, even more so if the research involves school children.

Matteson and Lincoln (2009) point out that there are accepted conventions associated with the roles of teachers and their pupils; the teacher is in the role of carer, and the student is cared for. The teacher's role of caring is largely reactive and responsive; they are used to listening to students and supporting and helping them. Matteson and Lincoln (2009) suggest that "an educational researcher, when establishing a rapport with a school-aged participant, may unintentionally take on the role of a teacher" (p. 660). The concept of reflexivity is especially relevant to this research project as I am a teacher currently working in a secondary school and the participants are students. It would be all too easy for me to assume the more familiar role of teacher during the interviews. This risk was minimised in three ways; firstly, I have no current association with any of the participating schools so there is no pre-existing teacher/student relationship; secondly, I was a "guest" in this location and had none of the jurisdiction associated with being a teacher in the school; and, thirdly, at all times, I understood the parameters of my role in my interaction with participants, and was mindful of potential compromises to this.

The researcher seeks to hear the stories unfolding and provides a vehicle for their being heard. Paradoxically, the researcher is the interpreter of those voices and delivers them through a medium very much constructed by him or herself. Matteson and Lincoln (2009) highlight "the potential to let the researcher's voice drown out those of the participants" (p. 660). The self-reflexive researcher, in a study such as this, must always be cognisant of their responsibility to represent the voices of their participants as faithfully as possible. To assist with this, the participants in this study were provided with a copy of their transcripts for perusal and comment prior to releasing them for my use. They were also free to add or delete material as they wished.

Many researchers (Cohen et al., 2007; Flick, 2008; Kvale, 1996; Kvale, 2007) stress the need for the researcher to be knowledgeable in the field in which they are researching. This highlights a further predicament for the self-reflexive researcher wanting to accurately represent their participants. As a teacher of Year Twelve boys, with my own thoughts about what helps and hinders academic engagement, I needed

to be on my guard. Question design and the selection of probes meant that the very nature of the chosen data collection method increased the risk of my researcher voice gaining dominance. This is partially addressed by the inclusion of themes that have emerged from both the pilot interview and the interviews themselves.

Following the interview, the researcher makes crucial decisions relating to the manner in which transcriptions are produced to ensure the integrity of the participants' voices. The researcher must decide whether to include such things as laughter, pauses, intonation, emphasis, repetition of words or phrases, and space fillers. Searle (2004) exhorts researchers to remember that "transcripts are representations of true speech" (p. 377), and do not truly show what takes place in an interview. Atkinson (1992) reminds researchers that "some degree of arbitrary imposition is necessary, and these decisions will have implications for just how those social actors are constructed in the text" (p. 394). It can not be stressed enough that all decisions made by researchers must be done so with the intention of faithfully representing the voices of their participants.

Research ethics

"Ethical issues permeate interview research" (Kvale, 2007, p. 8) and, indeed, all research. The researcher must constantly balance the desire to gain new knowledge with the well-being and integrity of the participant. In a semi-structured interview the needs of the interviewee are paramount, particularly in this research study where the participants are young adults, in a developmental period in which many are feeling vulnerable and unsure of what the near future holds. There are some ethical considerations that apply to all research studies and others that pertain specifically to semi-structured interviews. The former are addressed initially, with concerns regarding the latter following immediately after.

Researchers demonstrate respect for participants by adhering to an agreed code of ethics. Informed consent is a pivotal requirement in such codes. Researchers show respect towards participants by valuing and acknowledging a person's right to

autonomy. The idea of autonomy allows that each person has the right to make their own decisions about matters that affect them. It is argued that an individual should have the right to decide whether or not to participate in a research project. According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004) "respect for the autonomy of individuals, is achieved mainly by the mechanism of informed consent" (p. 270).

Informed consent is the process by which the would-be participant, having been fully informed about the nature of the project, formally acknowledges their agreement to take part in research. Cohen et al. (2007) provide a checklist for the researcher's reference which includes giving a fair explanation of the procedures to be followed and their purposes, describing the attendant discomforts and risks which may reasonably be expected (as well as potential benefits), offering to answer any inquiries concerning the procedures, and highlighting that the person is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the study at any time without prejudice to the participant.

There are four elements vital to a person being able to provide informed consent. These have been labelled as competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension (Diener & Crandall, 1978). In this instance the researcher must consider how to best gain informed consent from the students who wish to participate. Hurley and Underwood (2002) comment that "children who participate in developmental research routinely hear explanations of the purpose of the investigation, voluntary participation, their right to withdraw, and confidentiality" (p. 132). They investigated how much students understood in a project in which full information was given before students gave their assent to participate. This relates to the element of comprehension. Hurley and Underwood (2002) showed that, despite the best efforts of the researcher, students often remained unaware of their rights and did not fully understand abstract concepts such as confidentiality. Issues around informed consent were considered carefully during this study's planning stages. Meetings with the boys prior to the interviews taking place and verbal checks made at the beginning of the interview addressed items on my researcher checklist and ensured that the four elements were met. At all times, the use of jargon in

explanations was avoided and conscious effort was made to ensure that the language and mode of delivery was accessible to all students. Following this course of action helped ensure that the boys willingly and knowingly gave their informed consent to be part of the research study.

Another essential consideration is how the researcher will ensure participant privacy. "The individual's right to privacy is a fundamental human right" (McBride, 1994, p. 3). In 1993 the New Zealand Privacy Act ensured participant privacy a place in research codes of behaviour, not only because it is good practice, but because it is a legal requirement.

Requirements for anonymity must be addressed prior to research being undertaken and acted upon during the research process. Anonymity refers to the individual's right to remain anonymous and for their participation in the project not to be revealed in any way, either by their physical presence or by the information they supply. It is vital that any information supplied cannot be used in a manner that risks revealing participants' identity. In this study schools are not identified by name or by specific geographical details, and participant anonymity is protected by the use of pseudonyms. There is, however, no way of guaranteeing student's full anonymity with regard to their participation in the study, due to two factors. Firstly, the interviews were undertaken in the school interview room. Schools are public places and the boys were observed coming and going, a situation that could not be reasonably avoided. Secondly, it can not be guaranteed that the boys, themselves, did not disclose their involvement. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that they probably did. In a letter to the boys' parent/guardian, the possibility of harm following such disclosure was identified and discussed.

Confidentiality is another mechanism to ensure participant privacy and relates to the need for the researcher to ensure that information cannot be connected with a specific participant by the use of their own name, quirky speech or the like.. Confidentiality can be achieved by referring to a participant by a pseudonym at all

times and by the researcher ensuring that allocated pseudonyms are not shared with others. The boys in this study chose their own pseudonyms.

The concept of beneficence; "what benefits the research will bring and to whom" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 60), is one all researchers must address. It is envisaged that this study will be of interest to educational leaders in boys' schools as they work to raise Year Twelve boys' achievement in line with that of their female counterparts. It is hoped that the findings will allow the voices of the boys involved to be heard, and for these to help inform leaders as they consider how best to address the issue in their schools. The boys will also potentially benefit from participating in the study. Prior to their involvement many, if not most, will never have been offered a chance to talk freely and openly about such issues, in a safe setting with an adult who is vitally interested in their thoughts and ideas. It is hoped that this experience will have be enabled them to consider and clarify their own situation, isolating those factors that help or hinder their own engagement. This can have considerable benefits as they have the opportunity to verbalise their goals, evaluate their progress, and refocus prior to the assessments in Term Three and Four.

Equally importantly, the researcher must be aware of the potential for harm in any research study and take all steps to minimise this risk. In an interview situation, there is an increased likelihood that interviewees will share personal details, some of which may later be regretted. Such disclosures could both heighten and reduce psychological and emotional distress. The potential for harm is addressed in this study in four ways. Firstly, within the schools the appropriate people were informed about the study; the principal, the school counsellor and the Year Twelve Dean, so that they were aware of the nature of the study and, in the latter case, the boys who were involved. Secondly, parent/guardian consent was obtained prior to the involvement of any boy and a phone conversation held with each participant's parent/guardian. Thirdly, the participants were given the opportunity to review a copy of their transcript and either correct inaccuracies or revise statements prior to signing the data over to the researcher. The final draft was amended as requested by the interviewee. Finally, as a consequence of changing interview times, the

interviews were conducted in such a way as to ensure that as little time as possible was spent out of class. This ensured that any possible negative effects directly related to the interruption to the boys' studies were kept to a minimum.

Kvale (2007) points out "the personal closeness of the interview relation puts strong demands on the ethical sensitivity of the interviewer" (p. 29). The researcher must be on the lookout for any signs of discomfort on the part of the interviewee and respond as necessary. As Cohen et al. (2007) go to considerable lengths to emphasise, "at all times the welfare of the subjects should be kept in mind" (p. 59). I endeavoured to abide by this sentiment at all times.

Access to the field

When the principals of the three North Island state boys' schools included in this study were approached they readily agreed to participate and welcomed the opportunity for their students to be involved in the interviews. A school liaison person was appointed, in all cases one of the deans for the Year Twelve cohort, and arrangements were made for me to speak at a Year Twelve assembly.

At this assembly the research study was outlined and boys were invited to take part. Those expressing an interest, a pleasing number in all schools, were given a letter introducing the researcher and the study to their parent/guardian and a consent form to be completed by both the parent/guardian and the student. From a legal perspective this was not strictly necessary as the boys participating in the study were all 16 or 17 years of age and could have made the decision to participate without their parent/guardian's consent. However, as the boys were of school-age and because of the risk, albeit very small, of harm, it was felt that parents/guardians needed to be aware of their son's involvement and give their consent for them to be involved. The boys were asked to return the completed consent forms to the liaison person within one week of the invitation being extended.

It was anticipated that there may have been more respondents than places, with the final selection being made at random and the prospective participants being contacted by mail informing them of their inclusion or otherwise. Unfortunately, this was not the case and all the participating schools struggled to find five students for the study. In discussions with the school, it appeared that whilst the boys were interested and wanted to participate, they were unprepared or unable, due to sports or work commitments or bus timetables, to take part in interviews after school. The situation was similar when lunchtime interviews were discussed. After much debate, it was decided by all parties to hold the interviews during school time with some provisos in place. Only those students who had expressed an initial interest were approached and, if they still showed a desire to be part of the study, they were only included once they and their parent/guardian signed the consent form and verbally consented to the change of time when contacted directly by the researcher.

Interviews were held in an interview room at the respective schools within two to four weeks of the initial contact. Because of the need for the researcher to travel and stay overnight at some locations, they were timetabled on the same day or over two consecutive days.

Issues of quality

Issues of quality relating to qualitative research have long been a point of discussion (Bryman, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Morgan (as cited in Schwandt et al., 2007) pointed out that any attempt to judge the quality of a piece of research is inevitably based on the assumptions embedded in the paradigm in which the research is located. Therefore, it follows that whilst those working within a positivist paradigm can follow a set of clearly defined guidelines to assess quality, it cannot be as clear-cut for those working in naturalistic paradigms.

According to Schwandt et al. (2007) "when the naturalistic axioms … were proposed, there followed a demand for developing rigorous criteria uniquely suited to the naturalistic approach" (p. 18). There have been a number of responses to this

issue. Some researchers, according to Bryman (2004), have simply applied quantitative measures of validity and reliability to qualitative research. On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest two new criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research: trustworthiness and authenticity.

Trustworthiness is closely linked to the quantitative measures of validity and reliability and is made up of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. According to Bryman (2004) the credibility of data relates to its feasibility. A paradigm that has as one of its tenets the belief that there are multiple interpretations of reality requires the researcher to ensure "the research is carried out according to the canons of good practice" (Bryman, 2004, p. 275) and that findings are submitted "to the members of the social world [and] studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood the social world" (p. 275). Geertz (as cited in Bryman, 2004) suggested that it is the job of the qualitative researcher to provide rich, descriptive data. Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that such data will allow others to decide if the findings are transferable to other situations. Guba and Lincoln believe that for research to meet the third criteria of dependability, researchers must be prepared to have their work scrutinised by others. To facilitate this, they suggest that researchers keep clear, accurate records, copies of transcripts and other relevant documents. Bryman (2004) points out, however, that "auditing has not become a popular approach to enhancing the dependability of qualitative research" (p. 275). Whether being used for validation or not, it seems eminently sensible that the records pertaining to any research be kept to the highest standards. Confirmability is the fourth and last component of trustworthiness. Whilst many (Cohen et al., 2007; Kvale, 2007) would agree that researcher objectivity is not a critical, realistic or even a desirable component of qualitative research, there is nevertheless an expectation that the researcher will not unduly allow personal viewpoints to influence outcomes. This is the aspect of quality that confirmability refers to.

Authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) relates specifically to qualitative research and assesses whether a piece of research fairly represents the group it focuses on and is ontologically authentic. Lincoln and Guba (2007) maintain that for research to be ontologically authentic it must "raise consciousness, or to unite divided consciousness … so that a person or persons (not to exclude the evaluator) can achieve a more sophisticated and enriched construction" (p. 22). Other aspects of authenticity include educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity. These include considering such matters as how the research has increased understanding of how and why individual and group constructions are developed, what action the heightened awareness stimulates and whether the individual and/or the group is empowered (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

Other researchers such as Hammersley (1992, 2005) locate their argument in the middle ground. Hammersley (1992, 2005) argues that researchers' criticism ought to focus on assessing specific knowledge claims in terms of their contribution to a body of research knowledge. He also states that, as regards validity, "these claims should be judged solely in terms of whether they seem likely to be true given the evidence available" (Hammersley, 2005, p. 183).

Whilst the scope of this research is limited, with the sample coming from a small number of boys' schools in New Zealand, I hope that the documenting of student perspectives will provide an insight into one of the ongoing concerns of New Zealand educators. My decision to use semi-structured interviews as the sole data collection method has been carefully considered. The concerns, mentioned earlier, are acknowledged, but, in the words of Hammersley (2000) the "aim has been to capture the 'logic' of their [the boys'] views rather than seeing them through the blinkers of official educational assumptions" (p. 395).

3.2.3 Data analysis

A further step in the research design process is the decision concerning the manner in which data is to be analysed. For the purposes of this research, the technique used is

content analysis which is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). Content analysis "takes texts and analyses, reduces and interrogates them into summary form through the use of both pre-existing categories and emergent themes" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 476). There are a number of advantages in using content analysis. According to Grbich (2007) it allows large amounts of data to be simplified into a manageable and useable format, and provides a method for extracting both quantitative and qualitative data from word-based documents. When used with thematic codes, it can provide a more complete picture and produces information that enables greater interpretation and theorising. It seems eminently suitable for the purposes of this research study.

As previously stated, I have considerable experience teaching Year Twelve students in boys' schools. In combination with my reading and study of the issues related to this project, I have identified a number of school-wide factors that I believe impact on student engagement and used these as a starting point. These include student choice, sense of belonging, NCEA, timetabling, curriculum structure, and gender stereotyping of subjects. Prior to the data collection phase I conducted a pilot interview with a Year Twelve boy who attended a school that was not part of this study. Following the analysis of this interview two new themes were added: having a goal for the future and class size. At this point an initial working list of themes was compiled. Perhaps not surprisingly, the pilot interview demonstrated quite clearly that prompts were necessary in order to provide some direction for the interview participants. The working list of themes was used for this purpose. It was provided for the boys to refer to if they wished, however, it was made clear that they were free to talk about any of the areas on the list, ignore it altogether, or speak about matters that were not on the list. Providing this assistance seemed to help the boys feel more comfortable and gave them a platform for their responses.

Interviews were transcribed by me and the data categorised and coded. Coding involves "attaching one or more keywords to a text segment in order to permit later identification of a statement" (Kvale, 2007, p. 103). Initial codes were derived from

the working list of themes, with new codes being added as new themes emerged from the interviews.

Data coding included the attachment of a '+' or '-' to identify whether the interviewee felt the factor helped or hindered engagement respectively. The inclusion of a code to show the intensity of the boys' feelings one way or another was also considered. In the end, however, it was decided not to do this for two main reasons. Firstly, many boys tended to be quite matter of fact in the way in which they expressed themselves and so it is not always easy to perceive the intensity of their feelings. Secondly, as the interviews were recorded using only an audio device, it was even more difficult to pick up the intensity of feeling at the point of transcription; the time when, because of practical considerations, decisions regarding the coding of intensity needed be recorded. Kvale (2007) points out that if interviews are to be coded in this way, the interviewer must use "careful probing during the interview to ascertain how the statements may be categorised" (p. 104). Furthermore, as themes emerge during the course of the interview, it is imperative that rich, descriptive data be collected so that interviewee statements can be accurately coded at a later time.

3.2.4 Presenting and reporting the results

The manner in which a research paper is presented is influenced by the audience the researcher is addressing and the way in which the researcher has positioned her/himself (Grbich, 2007); in this case in the naturalist interpretive paradigm. As this research project makes up the thesis component of a Masters degree, the audience will incorporate two main groups: those involved in the assessment of the thesis and those with a particular interest in boys' education. Both influence the shape this presentation takes in terms of style and content, with the former having a marked influence on the final presentation in terms of layout and appearance.

The location of this study within a naturalist interpretive paradigm impacts on the way in which findings are presented. As Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2008) point

out, research projects located here are often associated with the gathering of "qualitative data [which] can be collated and aggregated to provide numerical responses, but the real strength is in the way that quoting from respondents is able to offer insight and humanity into the analysis"(p. 147). Following the coding and analysis of the interview transcriptions I undertook a little numerical analysis, and these findings are presented in the form of graphs. It is, however, the voices of the boys that this study seeks to communicate and it is these that must be heard above all else.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

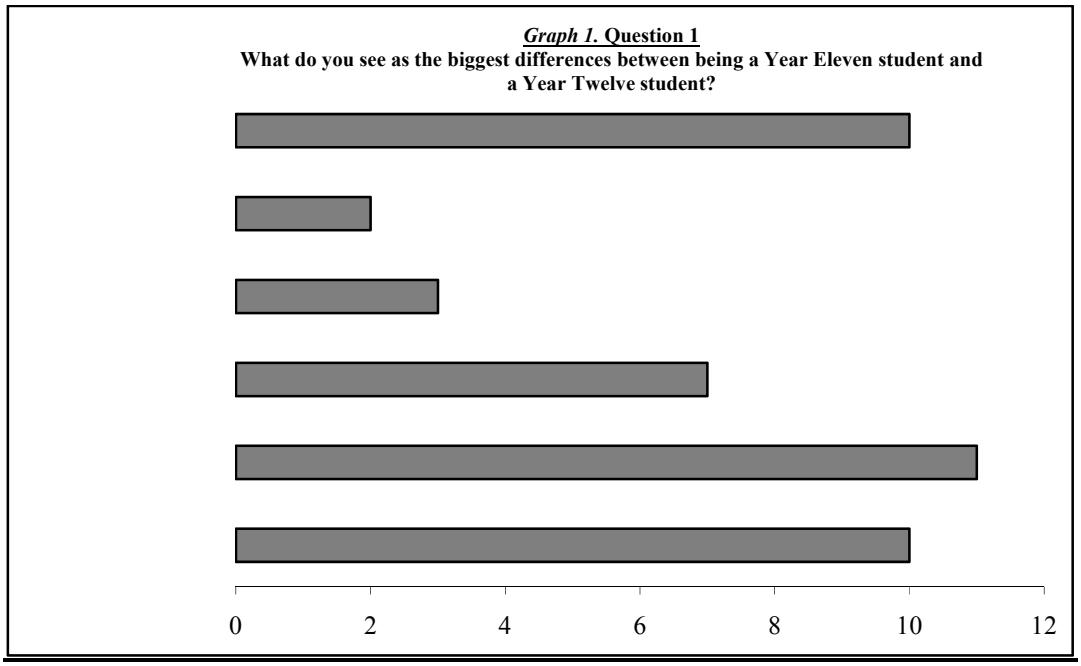
4.1 Introduction

During Term Two, I interviewed fifteen boys from three different boys' schools and a range of backgrounds and abilities. Their responses to the questions I asked were varied and interesting, indicating that many of them were thinking critically about their schooling. Often they were able to offer valuable insights. Many were able to clearly articulate their thoughts, demonstrating the connections they were making between the context they found themselves in and their engagement in their academic studies.

This section of the research report presents a summary of the findings from these interviews. A predominantly atomistic approach (Burton et al., 2008) will be adopted, in that findings will be presented question by question with some discussion. As the focus of this study is on the boys' perceptions, it is their voices that necessarily dominate this section. To this end, the boys have often been quoted verbatim. An analysis and discussion of the key themes emerging from the findings will follow in the Chapter Five.

4.2 Question one

What do you see as the biggest differences between being a Year Eleven student and a Year Twelve student?



The responses of the boys had a striking similarity; many were finding both the work more challenging than in previous years and the workload a lot heavier. Most spoke of the difference in the level of difficulty as being significant:

> *Rather than small steps that gradually get harder, it just plunges. (Blue)*
>
> *Definitely it's harder. Every subject is a step up. Quite a jump. (Jim)*
>
> *I found it easy last year but this year is a lot harder. (Adam)*
>
> *You do a small jump to Year Eleven and then do a big jump into Year Twelve. For some courses, like Chemistry, there is just too much of a gap. (Alias)*

There was also a consensus regarding the increased workload:

> *You have to do a lot more work to get through. (Adam)*

This year is more intense, more studying and that. (Deverstater)

These comments were echoed by the majority of the boys, who were, in many cases, struggling to meet the demands of the workload. When asked if he did more at home this year than he had in previous years one boy responded;

I should do but sometimes it doesn't happen. (Bryan)

Some spoke of the difficulty they faced in completing homework:

I know if I do it at home I'm not going to do it, I'll get distracted. (Jack)

Of interest is that while most boys spoke of an increased workload, most did little or no homework at home and reported completing what homework they were given during class time. Lashlie (2005) talked to a number of boys as part of her work on the *Good Man Project*, including Year Twelve boys, and reported a similar finding; that the boys believe there is a significant increase in workload.

Lashlie (2005) also spoke of the greater choice students have concerning when and if they do set work. The boys interviewed in this study also spoke about the expectation that they would demonstrate independent learning strategies as Year Twelve students, both in class and in terms of homework completion. It was reported that teachers often left the decision to work or not up to the student themselves. As one student said;

> *It's all up to you. It's your decision to do homework in Year Twelve. Whereas in Year Ten and Eleven the teachers say you have to do it and they ask for it the next morning. In Year Twelve you either choose to do it or you don't. It's your decision. (Mat)*

Some felt this related to the fact that for them, by virtue of their age, school was no longer compulsory and there was an element of choice about being a student, and subsequently, about the way they responded to their academic studies.

> *At Year Twelve they (the teachers) know that it's your choice to be there or not, and it's your choice whether to do the work or not. (Bob)*

One boy recognised that this was not always an easy situation for some of his peers and that there was a tendency for some to disengage from their studies.

> *They give you a bit more responsibility for yourself which is better for some people. (Bryan)*

He reported that this worked for him and as a result he was more engaged in his studies.

Many also stated that there were few teacher-imposed consequences for not completing work and some boys concluded that the consequences were more of a personal nature:

> *Well, if you're not doing anything then you're not going to learn properly, so that's it I guess. (Adam)*

> *If you don't do your homework, it's like you're not concentrating in class. You've actually missed something. (Jim)*

The boys who accepted it was their personal responsibility reported being more engaged in their academic studies than many of their peers.

The attitude of teachers towards students was another difference that was often mentioned by the boys, although in a number of different ways. Most felt that teachers treated them with more respect and perceived them (the boys) to be more mature.

> *Teachers tend to treat you more as adults than children. You get more respect from them*. (Blue)

> *They treat you with more respect, as if you are your own person, as if you're more mature now. (Mat)*

A number of boys commented that the teachers were friendlier towards them and often engaged in conversation with them; something they obviously enjoyed. The boys acknowledged that there was great variety in classroom management styles. There were comments relating to the strictness of some teachers; some felt teachers expected more in terms of behaviour and were stricter, whilst others thought the

teachers were often more relaxed. Some also commented that discipline was sometimes an issue:

> *Some teachers expect you to be well behaved and don't deal with discipline as well. (Alias)*
>
> *Some of the teachers are a lot stricter. (Mr Bean)*
>
> *There's a bit more freedom. There's not as much discipline as such. Like you can do a bit more than what you could do in the years before. (Adam)*

Additionally, there were some contradictory comments relating to how helpful teachers were in assisting students with their work. Some felt they were more inclined to help, while others felt the opposite was the norm in Year Twelve:

> *The teachers aren't helping you as much. (Bruce)*
>
> *Teachers help you more and they talk a lot more. (James)*

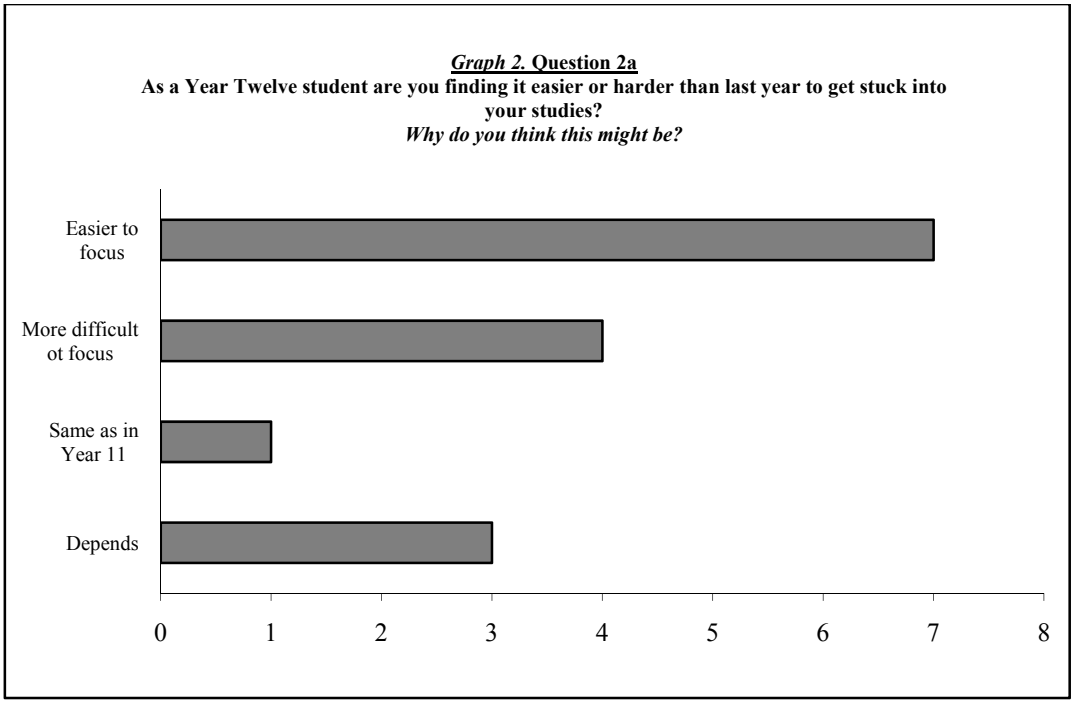
Three of the students commented that they were feeling under pressure. The reasons for this included issues of workload, the need to perform to get entry into subjects that would allow them to follow a chosen career pathway, and the realisation that the end of their schooling was in sight and they needed to prepare for the future. I'm sure these are common concerns for many of the boys in Year Twelve. Two students commented on being acutely aware of the fact that it was no longer compulsory for them to be at school and cited this as one of the main differences from Year Eleven for them.

4.3 Question two

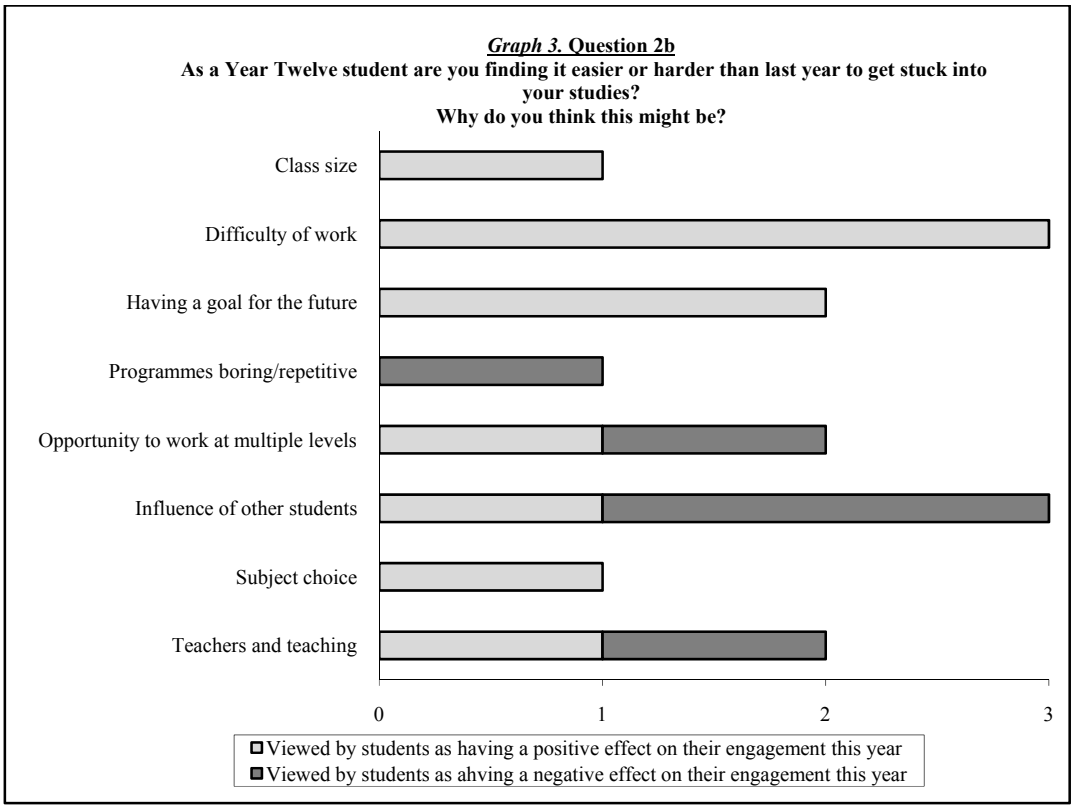
As a Year Twelve student are you finding it easier or harder than last year to get stuck into your studies? Why do you think this might be?

The responses to this question were concerning. Whilst the biggest group was those who felt it was easier to engage in Year Twelve, this still represented less than half

the sample. The remainder, with the exception of the boy who was finding little difference in his ability to focus, were having some difficulty getting "stuck in" to their studies as Year Twelve students in comparison to the previous year. This is a significant group and the data supports anecdotal evidence from teachers that Year Twelve seems to be a time when students struggle to fully engage with their academic studies.



When the students were asked for their reasons, their responses varied. The aspects of school that students felt made it easier to get involved in their academic studies were: smaller class sizes, the need to work harder because of the difficulty of the work, having a goal for the future, being able to tailor courses to their abilities, some of the less-focused students having left, being able to choose subjects they enjoy, and their teachers.



In the words of the boys themselves:

> *Classes are a bit smaller but it's better because the teachers can focus on the students better, the ones that need more help. (James)*
>
> *Before I got really bored with the subjects because I wasn't learning anything but now I'm learning stuff and I find it much easier. (Paul)*
>
> *You need to start getting more into your studies for what you've got to do later in life. (Bob)*
>
> *Last year I didn't do Geo [Geography] because I was part of the accelerate programme, so this year I've picked it up again at Level Two. (Bruce)*
>
> *Some of the people that were more distracting last year have left school. (James)*
>
> *This year because I'm doing subjects that I like and am interested in, I like going to class. (Mat)*

It's down to my teachers, they push you quite a bit and they're always there to help and I find with the teachers I have this year I'm enjoying school a lot more. (Joseph)

The boys also gave a variety of reasons why they were struggling to get "stuck in' to their studies, and interestingly some of these were the same as the ones given by other students as having a positive effect. The aspects referred to as having a negative impact were the repetitive nature of many of the programmes, being part of an accelerated programme, the influence of other students, and the teaching style of some of the teachers.

It just seems like now I'm doing what I did in the fourth form. I still want to give it a good go, I still want to pass, but there's just not that oomph. (Jack)

Because I did Geography in the fourth form and last year I did all the subjects for Level One and I sort of feel like I'm a seventh former and it's the year before I go to Uni. It just feels like I don't want to work. (Alias)

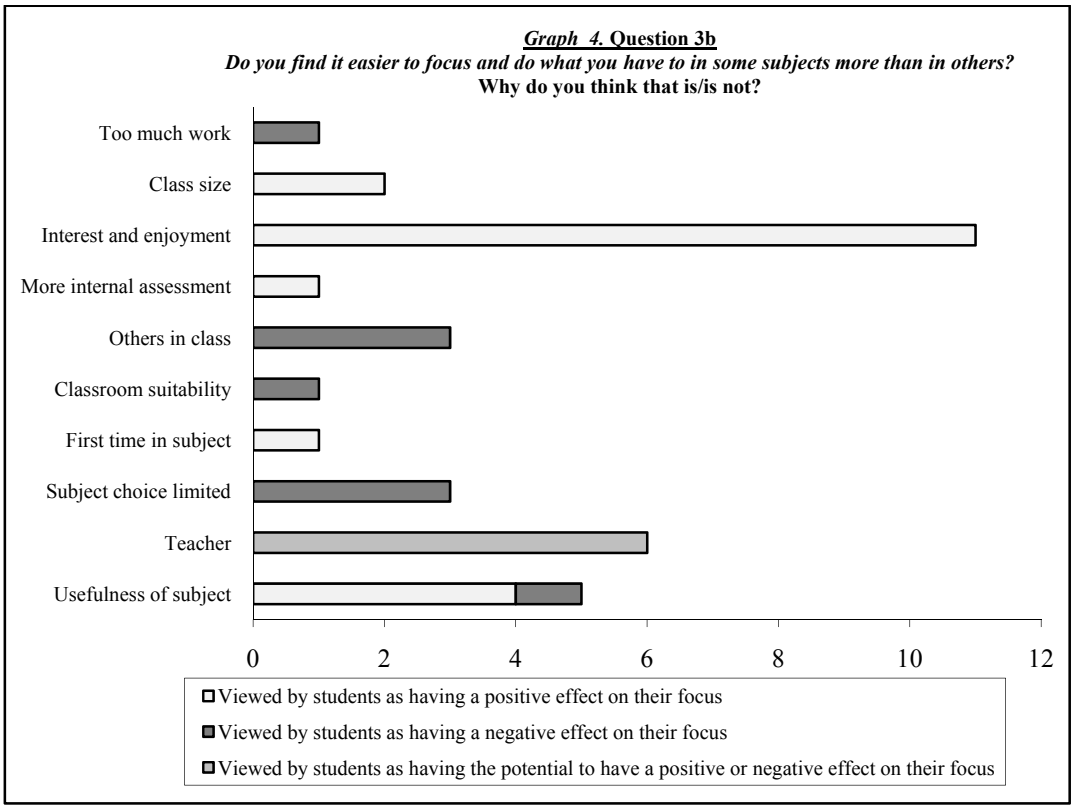
In some of my classes it's easier, in some it's harder because you've got all the boys talking. They don't be quiet. When you try and ask the teachers for help and that, there are other students they have to deal with because they are talking and making a noise. (Mr Bean)

One or two of the teachers are aiming to teach the students who know a lot about the work so if you are behind on a subject they won't go back and pick up on the basics. They will stay at the higher and harder stuff. (Blue)

4.4 Question three

Do you find it easier to focus and do what you have to in some subjects more than in others? Why do you think that is/is not?

Without exception, the boys' response to the first part of this question was that they did find it easier to engage in some subjects than in others.



The reasons the boys gave for this varied, although the response given by most boys, perhaps not surprisingly, was that they find it easier to engage in subjects that they find interesting and enjoyable; in motivational theory terms, those that they find intrinsically motivating.

> *I really like English and History and I find it a lot easier to focus and get the work done there because I'm really enjoying it and I want to do it. (Jim)*

> *I do [work harder] in Technology and Automotive because I like them. (Mr Bean)*

> *You've got to take an interest in it to be able to succeed and learn better. (Blue)*

> *I guess some of the classes that are most difficult to focus in are the ones I'm not that interested in. (Bryan)*

The second most commonly mentioned factor was the teacher. The boys who mentioned this believed that the teacher could have either a positive or negative influence on their engagement. There was some disagreement, however, as to what they wanted in a teacher:

> *Some teachers just write notes on the board and say copy this and then do the exercises, which I don't think is good teaching. (Alias)*
>
> *It's more the teacher and that. In XXXX he puts the notes up on the board and we copy them down in silence. After that we discuss what was in them. I like it that way. (Mohamed)*
>
> *Some teachers are really strict and others are sort of loose with the rules and that. [Interviewer: Which do you prefer?] Ones that are looser. Not too strict. (James)*
>
> *Some of the teachers are a lot stricter. They just come down on you a bit harder. I think that is good in class. (Mr Bean)*

Whether or not the subject was perceived as useful to their future education or career plans had a bearing on the engagement of a third of the boys.

> *It [a subject that is perceived as useful] does make you try to learn more. Even if you don't like it you will push yourself more if you know you need it for a career or a job. (Blue)*
>
> *I like getting good results in classes that I feel are the important to me. [Interviewer: Why are they more important to you?] Um..Career selection. (Joseph)*
>
> *Probably I would have done it. [talking about a subject he didn't particularly enjoy – English] It's a good base, a good base for learning. I think I probably would have chosen it anyway. (Joseph)*

One boy, however, talked about how he had chosen two subjects because of his intended career path and how, since that time, had changed direction in terms of his future. As a result, he was struggling to stay focused in one of the subjects as he had

no particular interest in it – one of the dangers of choosing subjects for their utility value alone.

Three of the boys talked about being given a limited choice in terms of the subjects they were taking. Sometimes a subject was compulsory, while at other times the timetable structure meant they had to choose between a limited number of subjects, often ones they had no genuine interest in. In one case the boy had little desire to take most of the subjects on offer.

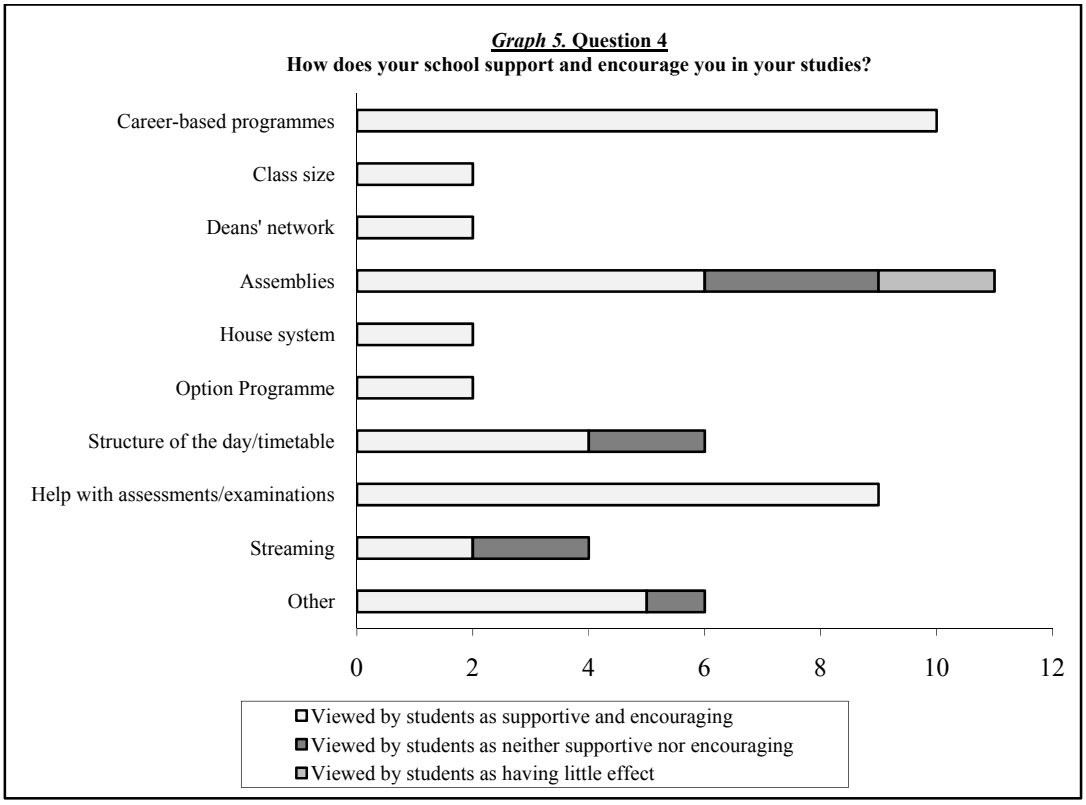
> *English is not really my thing but it's compulsory, I still try and do everything but… (Adam)*
>
> *Some of them [subjects] I just do because I didn't know what else to do. (James)*
>
> *Those were my only other three options. Science was the easiest. (Bob)*

Perhaps predictably, as the boys did not find the subjects intrinsically motivating, each reported struggling to focus in these classes.

There were a number of other reasons why some students were more focused in some subjects. It was reported by two boys that they were finding some of their classes easier to focus in because of the smaller numbers of students in each class. Another boy mentioned the internal/external weighting as an important factor, reportedly preferring subjects in which there were more internal assessments. One of the boys, a capable student who was determined to succeed, commented that taking a subject for the first time had intensified his focus in that class. One of the factors the boys mentioned that had a negative impact on their focus was the amount of effort needed to succeed in some classes; one boy had decided there was just too much to be done and had disengaged. Another was being taught Chemistry in a standard classroom making it difficult for the teacher to complete practical work with the boys, a factor that had resulted in him becoming less involved. Yet another student was in a class that was being taught by two teachers and he found the resulting differences in teaching styles difficult to cope with.

4.5 Question four

How does your school support and encourage you in your studies?



The boys were generally positive about the steps their schools were taking to help them with their studies. The predominance of positive responses was in part due to the nature of the question; although some did take the opportunity to comment on factors they thought were less than helpful and these responses have been included here.

Of the many support systems that boys' schools put in place to support their students in their academic pursuits, the factor that was mentioned most often was the provision of a variety of career-based opportunities. Over two thirds of the students reported that their experiences in this area had had a positive effect on their

engagement in their academic studies. The career-based experiences the boys talked about included opportunities to meet with careers advisors, discussions with teachers and deans, involvement in the Gateway programme, visits by armed forces and university roadshows, work experience, and careers expos.

> *I wanted to do physiotherapy but I wasn't sure what subjects I needed to do… I realised, through Mr XXXX's influence that I needed Physics and Chemistry and that's how I picked them up at Year Twelve. (Alias)*
>
> *We had someone come in and talk about careers and for a lot of us that got our minds really thinking about what we want to do. That really helped with the next year with choosing options. If that sort of thing happened each year it would be good. (Jack)*
>
> *Gateway is really helping. They helped me find an apprenticeship and they were talking to me about scholarships in hospitality as well, so I've filled out a couple. The school really helps out. (Deverstater)*
>
> *Work experience, like I'm at XXXX Photographic at the moment which is awesome. They've allowed me to go out of class once a week on a Friday. I learn a hell of a lot: selling cameras, editing pictures, printing pictures, and I also get credits for that. (Mat)*
>
> *I've been to the Otago [University]talk… so that was really good and it helped me make up my mind about what I wanted to do. It sounds so good. (Joseph)*

The area that was spoken about most often was assemblies. Eighty percent of the boys mentioned that their school used assemblies as a vehicle for supporting and encouraging them in their studies. It was, however, the area in which there was least agreement about the associated benefits.

> *We have an academic assembly on Fridays and things like if you gain Excellence in a test you go up on stage and you get a certificate by the Principal and a letter of congratulations. That encourages you to push yourself to get one of the certificates. (Joseph)*

I'm trying to get as many certificates as I can, to go up on stage and be recognised by everyone. (Alias)

They give us advice and tell us it is very important to study but I guess it's just another thing that teachers say. (Jack)

I've never really taken it [assembly] seriously, and didn't like it, maybe resented it and now I just ignore it. (Jim)

Assemblies are boring. It's just talk and there's too much of it. I switch off to that. [Interviewer: Do others do that?] Most people. Most teenage boys. (Mat)

It is interesting to note that the boys who made comments similar to the first two excerpts had been part of an accelerated programme and had had their Level One NCEA certificates endorsed in the previous year. Such comments were spread over the three schools involved in the study. Equally spread were the less positive comments.

There was a general perception that the school tried to support engagement in academic studies by signalling expectations in assemblies. It seemed that the manner in which these were articulated was significant if the boys were to feel encouraged by it. When encouragement was interpreted by the boys to mean achieving their potential, it was received more positively by most.

Like the school, they don't push you to get an Excellence, they push you to get your highest. For some people their highest is Achieved, some are Merit, some are Excellence. So it's sort of equal for everyone. (Bruce)

They do push you to aim for your best possible pass... It does help because you get the job you want in the future, or you get a better job than you would have. (Deverstater)

Others perceived the message to be 'aim for an Excellence grade' and this was received far less positively than the individual excellence message.

At assemblies the principal and teachers will be saying aim for Excellence, strive for it. Where in reality some people know that they can't achieve

Excellence and they get the idea that there is no point in trying if they can't. (Blue)

When asked what sort of message he believed should be given in assemblies he replied,

Aim to pass would be the best one. It would speak to more people. It would be a more positive way. There wouldn't be a negative effect. The only thing you can think beyond that is no I want to aim for Merit or Excellence. (Blue)

For others the message does not seem relevant. They attend school to achieve results that will allow them to move on. If Excellence is not needed it is not worth working toward. When one boy was asked why he felt the message articulated in assemblies had a negative impact on him he responded:

A lot of us don't want to get Excellence. We want to do what we can and pass school. My mates and me, we're not aiming for Excellence. We're not aiming to go to university or anything. We're just aiming to get our Level Two and go to Polytech or get in the workforce. (Bob)

A majority of the boys felt that the school assisted them with their preparation for assessments and examinations in a number of ways: providing advice on effective study techniques, offering tutorials, and setting practice examinations both at mid-year and at the end of the year.

Study timetables you can download off moodle, which is the school server and things like that. They really help you put into perspective what you should be studying and when and how long you should be studying it. Those are really good to help you out. (Joseph)

When it comes to exam time there's always study preparation, like tips or whatever that come through the notices everyday that tell you good ways to study and stuff like that. You're always getting new ideas about how to study. (Adam)

The mid-years and the mock exam just before the real exam help a lot. Each one is like a learning step and you get to improve after each one. Your third

go is your final go. That's good. If we didn't have that it would hinder us. (Jim)

The structure of the school day and/or the timetable according to some boys was another way their school was seen to be supportive or otherwise. A five-period school day with four periods, each of one hour, before lunch was viewed as preferable (two periods, interval, two periods, lunch, one period, hometime).

It's changed to one period after lunch, it's a lot better. We went back to it [the two period, one period, lunch, two period structure] for about three days last week because of junior exams and everyone was commenting how they liked the new timetable a lot better, just because people couldn't really be bothered in the last class by the end of the day. (Bryan)

After lunch when you're tired and that, you come back and you've only got the one period. It makes you focus more on that one period. (Mohamed)

Some of the boys reported finding a six-day timetable structure difficult to manage. One boy put the problem for himself and others quite clearly;

We've got a six day timetable now. For boys who aren't that organised it's a bit of a pain. Because come Sunday night most boys don't remember what they had on Friday. Most boys don't even know what they ate for tea the previous night so that's quite hard. Every day you've got a different subject at a different time. (Bruce)

One of the schools has an option programme which was mentioned by many of the boys from that school. The students spend three periods a week over two half-year blocks doing option courses of their choice. Boys spoke of being able to do such things as sports, philosophy, careers, Mathematics tutorials and audio-engineering. In some cases boys could also gain credits. To accommodate this within a five-day timetable structure three of the days had six periods rather than the five on the remaining two days. Boys reported that they generally chose their options on the basis of their interests and found the break in their academic studies not only refreshing but often useful. One boy, however, mentioned that in the second half–

year he was going to use more expedient criteria to make his choice, and take the Mathematics tutorial option to help him improve his chances in the external examination.

> *I'm taking fairly serious subjects, quite hard ones like Maths, Physics, English and Geography, things like that, that require a lot of hard work, so I think that the three-period option, I do Outdoor Ed, really helps me relax just for one period and play sport and be outdoors. That's something that I always really want to do and I don't want to give that up in school time. I want a period that I can let loose and have fun. (Joseph)*

The boys felt that by giving them this option the school was supporting them in their academic studies, either directly through the likes of the Mathematics tutorials or the careers programme, or by allowing them to do something simply for the enjoyment of it as a break from their more serious pursuits.

The manner in which some subject areas structured their courses was also commented on, mostly in positive terms. Two aspects of this were mentioned; the accelerated programmes that were provided to allow some of the more academically able students to study a year ahead of themselves in both the junior and the senior school, and the tiered structure that some larger subject areas often use to meet the needs and interests of their students. Other aspects of school were also mentioned in response to this question. Smaller class sizes, the pastoral care network and the house system were each commented on by two boys. In addition, goal setting sessions, an intranet site for pupil/teacher interaction, and publishing of top academic performers in the school newsletter were mentioned in a positive light. An aspect that was seen by one student as not encouraging students in their studies was the consequences the school had in place for non-achievement. A consequence in his school for students who don't achieve Level Two in Year Twelve is not being able to wear the senior uniform worn by all Year Thirteens in the past. He felt that the most common response of his peers to this was annoyance and a sense of being treated unfairly.

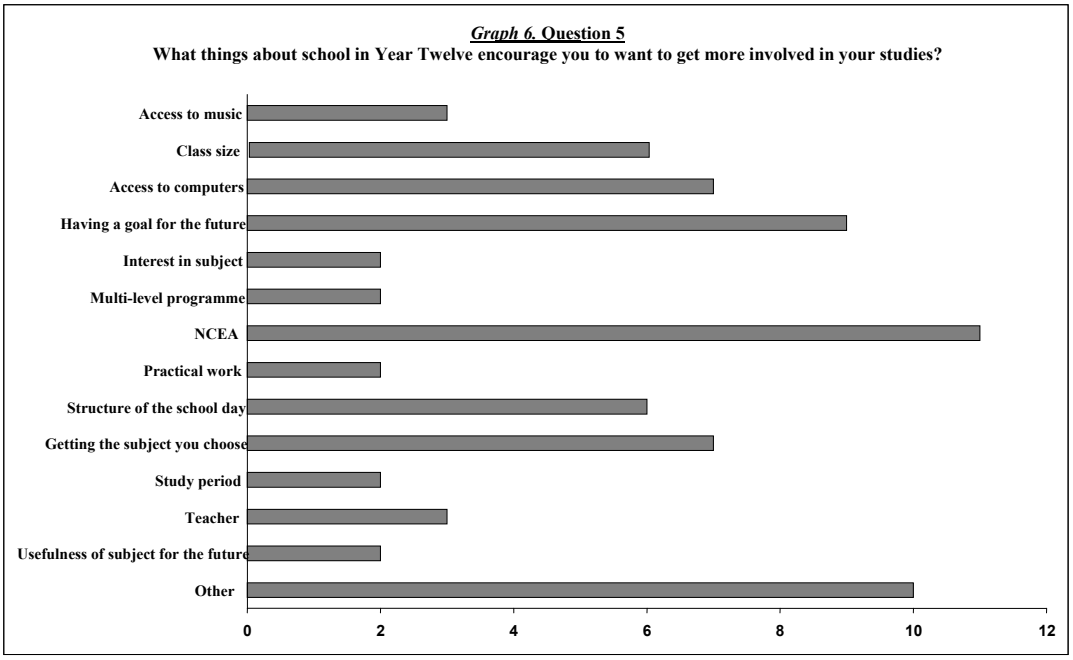
The dean network was mentioned by one boy as being a vitally important system in terms of student academic support. His comments are worthy of note.

My Dean she's put herself out on a limb, she's really stuck it out there for me. She's put this class together for me… Yeah, they could have just said, "you're not interested in school, leave". But they didn't. They helped me out and found some stuff I really want to do. (Mat)

It is the way in which the school responded to his learning needs that impressed this young man so much. The key components seem to have been the relationship between the dean and the student, and the school's preparedness to be flexible when putting together programmes for individual students.

4.6 Question five

What things about school in Year Twelve encourage you to want to get more involved in your studies?



The responses to this question were many and varied. Included as individual bars in the graph below are all those responses that were given by two or more students. The

responses given by only one student have been included in the "other" bar. There were four areas that were mentioned more frequently: having a goal for the future, access to computers, getting the subjects of your choice, and class size.

The most frequent response related to NCEA. The boys commented that generally they found it an assessment system that enhances their engagement. There were many reasons for this which are detailed fully at the end of this section under a separate heading.

A response given by nine of the boys was that having a goal for the future was one of the most salient factors in their engagement in their studies.

> *To do my Level Three Hospitality I only need NCEA Level One, but this year I'm focusing on getting Level Two anyway, so I have a higher qualification just in case I need it. It's like a backup. It does make a difference cause if you have a goal to pass Level Two you'll go for it. (Bob)*
>
> *My goal is going to Africa and working with world aid. But I don't want to be an aid person I want to do it from a higher position. My goal isn't to work in the ranks but to be in a position where I can do something. And I think Politics and Law is the way to do it and it fits with my interest in English and History. (Jim)*
>
> *It [having a goal for the future] makes a huge difference to me. Having that goal of what I want to do means I have subjects I want to do. I really enjoy the subjects and I believe it provides quite a bit of motivation to do my schoolwork well. (Joseph)*
>
> *You've got a goal, you can aim for finishing school and going there. (Mr Bean)*

These comments coupled with the ones made in response to Question 4 indicate how important it is from the boys' perspectives to have a goal, and for the school to provide quality career-based programmes that help them to set these. This is one of the themes that will be discussed further in the next section.

Another feature the boys felt was important in fostering their engagement was easy access to computers. Many enjoyed the opportunities they were given to work on computers in specialist subjects and felt that having access to them in all subject areas would be advantageous.

> *In the third and fourth form I was in the laptop class, I really felt focused and typing was a lot better for me than writing. I really don't like my handwriting. (Jack)*
>
> *A lot of guys would rather do it on computer. (Bob)*
>
> *If I could take a laptop into English I would go every period. But I'm not allowed. (Mat)*

Equally important was getting into the subjects chosen by the boys themselves. Many spoke of how much more they enjoyed a subject if they had chosen it. One boy summed it up:

> *If you pick what you want to do and what you need then you will enjoy it and you'll be putting that much more effort in. (Bob)*

Some of the boys believed that the desire to get into a specific class was an additional motivator for them.

> *So if you've got the better grades and more Excellences you get priority for getting the subjects you choose and that is another incentive to work at Level One and I guess at Level Two for next year. (Bruce)*

Another boy saw a real advantage in being in specialised subjects because the students who were in those classes had chosen to be there, unlike other subjects, such as English, which were compulsory.

Once again the boys felt that class size was an important factor. Many commented that the smaller size of some of the Year Twelve classes really helped them engage in their learning. The following comments were echoed by each of those making this response:

In most subjects there are twenty students in a class, something like that. It's easier to learn because it's more one on one sort of learning rather than the group even though there are still quite a few people. It seems like the teachers are talking to you more rather than the class. I learn heaps better like that. (Adam)

A small class is more relaxed. In a big class it is more structured, it's just sit down shut up and do your work, whereas in a small class you can talk to your friends and the teacher and stuff. The teachers go over the stuff a lot more. (Bruce)

Once again, students commented that discipline is less of an issue for teachers when numbers are smaller and therefore more time can be spent helping individual students.

The structure of the school day was an area that many of the boys felt had an impact on their engagement in the class. All the students, who spoke about this, preferred a five period day. They felt it was easier to focus on fewer subjects in one day.

I prefer the Mondays and Fridays because there is only five periods a day and every kid always looks forward to going home, so with five periods a day it seems shorter. But you're also getting the most out of your learning on your core subjects because they're longer. (Joseph)

Three of the boys were in a school which had recently changed from a two-one-two format to a two-two-one format. They spoke of enjoying the new structure. Interestingly, most of the boys who spoke about the structure of the school day were happy with the fifty five minute to one hour periods. They felt that if periods were any shorter they would get very little work time. One boy outlined the situation and spoke of having only about forty to forty five minutes of work time in each period by the time students changed classes, settled down and then packed up at the end. He felt this was an ideal amount of time to concentrate and focus on learning.

Three boys commented that they found it easier to focus when they were allowed to listen to music when working at individual tasks. One boy in particular had thought carefully about this and had his arguments sorted.

> *Music is soothing. They've done a bit of research on it and it actually releases chemicals in the brain – neurotransmitters like serotonin which is the neurotransmitter, one of them, which is the happy chemical which makes you happy. I just think you're focused; you don't have any distractions of anyone else talking or anything. You just blot it out with the music in your ears and you do your work. (Mat)*

Each of the schools visited had a policy that music devices were not to be used in the classroom, but some teachers were nevertheless lenient in this respect. These boys were appreciative of this.

There were a number of other areas that were mentioned by two or three participants: the teachers, the student's interest in the subject, being able to undertake a multi-level programme of study, the amount of practical work involved in a course, and the usefulness of the subject in the boys' eyes. Two boys commented on the usefulness of having study periods, one who was in a school in which Year Twelve students had study periods each week and another who thought it might be useful at times.

> *Boys hate homework so work real hard during the school day when they have to, to get homework done, so that when they get home they don't have to do anything…. Like around exams I will do a couple of hours study but you don't have homework that way. So when you have study you can just go home and do that. It's much better that way.(Bruce)*

> *When I've got a lot of work or exams coming up I would use them but I can see that during the year I wouldn't be studying at all. (Jim)*

The areas included in the 'other' section were each mentioned by one student as being school-wide factors that enhance student engagement. These were: being involved in co-curricular activities, having areas of interest outside of the classroom and the school, having an option programme, the length of the periods, having a

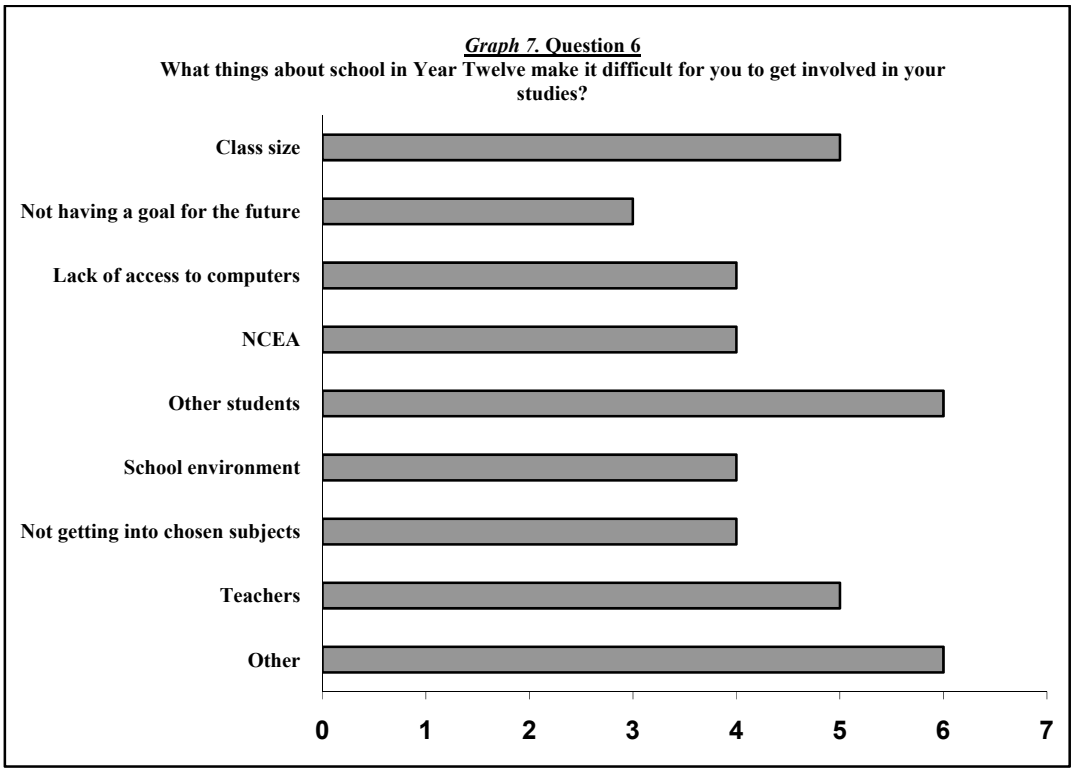
sense of belonging to the school, being given study tips and advice, streaming across the cohort, and being a boarder. One boy felt that competition was an essential aspect in his engagement;

> *You've always got your peers, it's that competition. Like what have you got? What have they got? Stuff like that. So you are always striving to be better than someone. (Bruce)*

4.7 Question six

What things about school in Year Twelve make it difficult for you to get involved in your studies?

The responses to this question were much more varied than for many of the other questions. There were nevertheless a number of clear themes and some interesting one-off responses that offer insights into the types of factors that boys believe hinder their academic engagement.



The most prevalent response was associated with the behaviour of some students during lessons.

> *The ones who just go to school to muck around... seat warmers. They just create problems for the teacher and stuff… They [the teachers] don't get the chance to do their job properly. (Bruce)*
>
> *Kids who don't want to be here but there's nothing else to do. They're quite distracting in class. (Mat)*
>
> *There are a lot of guys here that just shouldn't be here. They should have been kicked out a long time ago. (Bob)*
>
> *It [how well I work] just depends on the people I'm around I reckon… There's people mucking around and it makes me muck around. (Deverstater)*

As can be seen from these comments, the boys were concerned not only with the impact disruptive students had directly on their engagement, but on the teacher's ability to teach effectively and address the learning needs of the class as a whole.

When talking about how large classes hindered their engagement the boys often mentioned the behaviour of other students, although this was not the only factor. One boy summed up the situation clearly;

> *Some of them [classes] can be too big. Usually when heaps of them [students] start talking the teacher has to stop the lesson to tell them not to. Sometimes it won't stop and the teacher has to ask them more than once and we're losing class time… It's easier to manage small classes well, easier to do examples and easier to get the work across and easier for the teacher to keep track of who's done what work and who hasn't. (Blue)*

One boy talked about the impact of being in a practical class where the numbers were high. He spoke of the situation where boys who strike problems early in the period often couldn't proceed with their work until the next day. This was because the teacher was busy most of the period helping others who had run into difficulties before him, perhaps even on the previous day.

Interestingly, for many of the participants, particularly those who weren't in the top academic classes, their largest class was their English class.

> *English is nearly up to forty people in there. It's huge! Too many. Way too many. If you are late you miss out on a chair… The teacher is always telling people off. If the teacher had a smaller class you'd have more time with the teacher, one on one because she wouldn't have so many people to go around. (Mat)*

This is a surprising phenomenon when boys' literacy is an area often singled out as being of major concern. This is an area that will be commented on in greater depth in the discussion section.

Once again 'the teachers' was a common response, with a third of the boys commenting that teachers often had a negative impact on their academic engagement.

> *I had a teacher that lectured at the start of the period and I switched off. (Paul)*

> *Some people who don't relate and who learn differently, people that lose track and aren't top students, teachers can sometimes almost ignore that they're losing track, losing focus, and not try to get that focus back. (Bryan)*

Some students commented that lack of access to computers was a real hindrance to their success and inhibited their engagement. They often struggled to write fluently, didn't find the act of writing particularly satisfying, and were unhappy with the end result. They believed being able to access computers easily in all subject areas would help them engage in their studies. One boy commented on his teachers' use of computers in the classroom. He found that increasingly teachers were using PowerPoint presentations in their lessons and reportedly struggled to learn from this medium.

> *In some classes there's almost a reliance on PowerPoint presentations and things like that which for some people are hard to associate with. With PowerPoints for me it's one of the things that I tend to lose focus with. It's*

interesting cause I like working on the computer but not learning from the computer as such. I like doing my work on the computer, typing up and doing presentations like posters and things like that, but actually learning from PowerPoints or some sort of programme, I find it hard to do compared to reading it on paper. (Bryan)

Whilst most of the boys found that NCEA encouraged them to become more engaged, four boys believed that it was a hindrance for them. Their responses were varied and, as with the abovementioned NCEA responses, will be discussed under a separate heading at the end of this section.

There are a number of reasons why boys do not get into the subjects of their choice. These include such things as timetable constraints, not meeting subject pre-requisites, insufficient staff to cover popular subject areas, and students not returning subject choice forms by the allocated time. The responses of four of the boys showed clearly the impact this can have on academic engagement. Two boys spoke of not being able to take the subjects they had initially chosen. Due to the constraints of the timetable they had ended up in at least one subject area they hadn't chosen, and reported feelings of disinterest and lack of engagement. One boy talked of his disappointment when he didn't get to do a subject he was particularly interested in.

I had timetable clashes. I got most of my subjects but I didn't get Classics. I wanted to do Classics but it was on the same time as Accounting and couldn't swap that because there was another clash. So I was a little bit bummed because I would have liked to know about my heritage. That would have been really good for me. (Jack)

By the time I spoke with him he had already changed from the subject he had agreed to take initially, and was in yet another subject. He felt things were alright but had only limited interest in the class he was currently in. Not unexpectedly, he described himself as being far from fully engaged. Yet another boy spoke of the effect on his friends when they didn't get the subjects of their choice and were placed in a subject area they had no particular interest in.

They don't like it, they don't want to learn, they don't care about that subject as much as they would if they got what they had chosen. (Blue)

Yet another boy spoke of his disappointment at not being accepted into a subject area because of previous poor results.

In Fourth Form I mucked around. It was a bad year for me really. Then I got into the lowest Level One Maths class and passed that no sweat but I'm not allowed to make the jump from the lowest Level One to Level Two. They reckon there is too big a gap and you just can't do it. (Bob)

When asked if he thought he could have succeeded at Level Two Mathematics if he had been given the opportunity he replied;

Probably, I don't know if I would have passed everything but at least I would have given it a good go. (Bob)

The school environment (physical and cultural) the boys found themselves in was commented on by four boys. Three boys felt that boys' schools could be fairly intimidating at times and this affected academic engagement;

There's that whole intimidation thing at a boys' school. Who's tougher, who's going to fight with you? You go to class feeling really stink. (Jack)

Things around the playground; fights and stuff about being white or being brown impacts on what happens when you go into the classroom. All the gang stuff, I just don't like. It's not good. (Mat)

The third boy who commented on this aspect of life in a boys' school felt it was just the way it was and students had to learn to live with it.

The school environment can be pretty harsh sometimes. Going to a boys' school you've got to expect that. Things can get pretty nasty sometimes but it's just a normal boys' school and tensions are going to get high. (Joseph)

Others talked about the physical environment, one boy about the state of the toilets and how not wanting to use them made it difficult to engage fully in class at times. Another commented on the amount of litter and the spitting that was prevalent in his school. He found being in such an environment unpleasant and distracting.

Another area of concern mentioned by three students was not having a goal for the future. These students commented that the lack of a goal for the future was an obstacle to their academic engagement.

> *I think it [not having a goal] does have an impact on how I study. I might not have the motivation so I might just give up. (Paul)*
>
> *A Year Twelve student who doesn't know what the hell they're going to do in the future would be quite lost. (Mat)*
>
> *If you don't [have a goal for the future] you just go off on a tangent, you'd have no direction or anything. (Bruce)*

There were a number of one-off responses including: a lack of streaming in senior school, subjects that seem to have little relevance, and the effects of the current economic climate.

> *In classes you get the lower achievers that just go to school, muck around, eat their lunch, go home and wag when they want. So in Years Nine and Ten they're not in your class but they get put in your senior classes because they're not streamed and they create trouble. The teacher's too busy trying to keep them in line. (Bruce)*
>
> *Lots of the English work we do I don't really see why it should be compulsory. I know you need to learn how to read and write and how to interpret stuff but learning how to write a film review and read a Shakespeare play and stuff like that, I don't see why you need to know that. (Mohamed)*
>
> *But to be completely honest you can just stay at school and not have to worry about a full-time job. If I was to leave school now I could be on my arse with nothing. I have a part-time job now but I can't live on it. (Jack)*

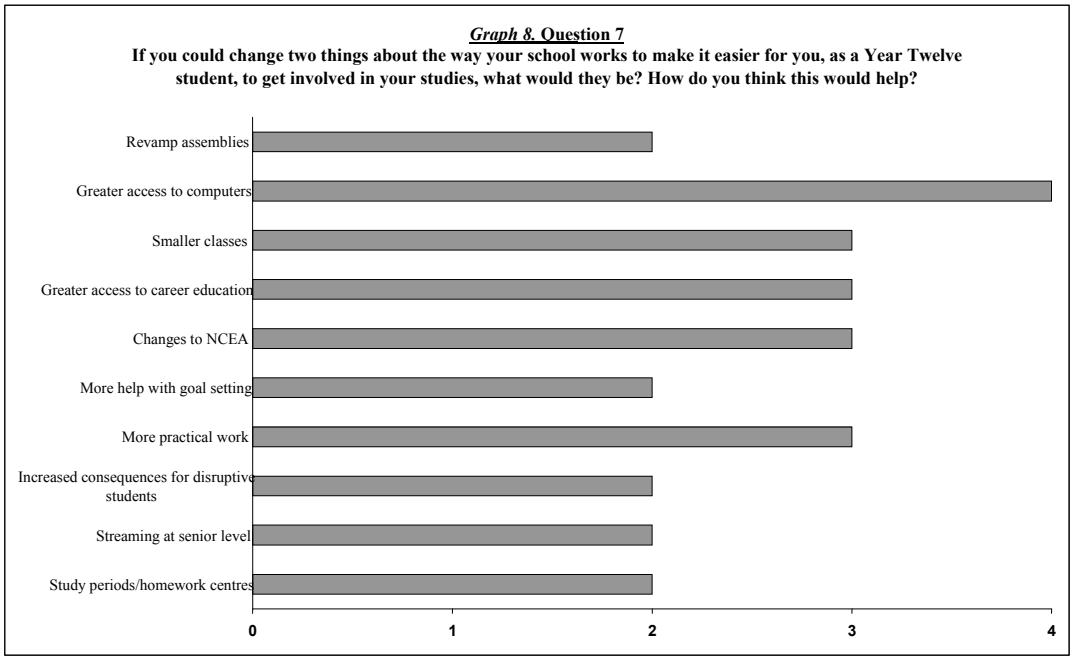
One response that was very interesting was from a boy who, upon looking at the list of themes, made it quite clear that feeling a sense of belonging to the school was not a matter to be even considered.

The sense of belonging to the school, that's just a joke. The longer you are here the more bored you get for lots of Year Twelves… It's the same old teachers, the same old rules; you just get sick of it. You just come to school five days a week, learning and learning and learning… Nowadays it depends on you. In every school they've got their different groups, their different people. In some groups you've got the goodie goods, they love being at school cause they're too afraid to get out in the workforce maybe, there are the smart guys who stay in school because they're good at it. There's others of us who just stay at school to get what we need and leave. (Bob)

Certainly, a thought-provoking perspective!

4.8 Question seven

If you could change two things about the way your school works to make it easier for you, as a Year Twelve student, to get involved in your studies, what would they be? How do you think this would help?



Like previous questions this question elicited a variety of responses. Recorded in the graph are the responses made by more than one student. There is a sameness in many of the responses to this question, however, there are also some interesting and thoughtful one-off suggestions made by students.

The response given by the largest number of boys related to the need for Year Twelve students to have greater access to career education.

> *I know that he (the Guidance Counsellor) does come to Level Two students eventually through the year, but he's got to act before they turn sixteen, because a lot of guys will get out of school as soon as they can. (Jim)*
>
> *I needed someone to show me the careers where I could go with what I have. I haven't met with someone in Year Eleven and so far in Year Twelve to talk about careers. (Paul)*
>
> *I think everyone should do it [work experience]. I think it's good to find out what you're interested in. A Year Twelve student who doesn't know what the hell they're going to do in the future would be quite lost. (Mat)*

These boys clearly felt that having the opportunity to meet with a Guidance Counsellor prior to Year Twelve would have tangible spin-offs in terms of their academic engagement. One boy mentioned that a change he would like to see was for more students to have access to programmes such as Gateway.

> *They have Gateway, that's good. I know it's really small and hard to get into. I know it would be hard to have lots of people in Gateway but perhaps have a second smaller Gateway-type programme where people could go out for a couple of days and have that experience. (Jim)*

There were a number of changes that were mentioned on three separate occasions. Having smaller classes was one such area, with many of the comments echoing those mentioned previously. One boy commented that he thought there should be…

> *...restrictions about how many people can be in one class at a time… maybe like fifteen people would be a good lot. (James)*

Some boys wanted to see improved access to computers. The boys' comments relating to this are well documented earlier in this chapter. Their suggestions for improvement included better access for all classes, for individuals at lunchtimes and, for one boy, better access at the hostel.

Two areas that are quite closely linked are the comments the boys made about changes to NCEA and their desire to have a greater practical component in many of their courses. With regard to changes to NCEA, one of the boys commented that he would ensure there was more time for internal assessment tasks. Two of the boys would increase the numbers of internal standards. One of the reasons given relates to the immediacy of the internal assessment episodes; the assessment task follows directly after the learning, rather than being removed in time from the learning as external assessments are. The second reason was concerned with the more practical nature of the learning and the associated assessment tasks for many of the internal standards. This links closely with the suggested changes relating to practical work.

> *I reckon more practical classes, for like the sciences. In Bio, this year, we've only had two or three practical lessons and boys tend to learn more when they're actually doing it. (Adam)*
>
> *More practical work within subjects like, say, in Maths and English. (Deverstater)*

Two of the boys mentioned, that they would ensure Year Twelve boys had at least one study period each week. As already mentioned many boys reported preferring to do their work at school. Having a study period would allow them to do this and mean they would not need to do homework. One of the schools had previously allocated a study period to Year Twelve students; the boys from this school felt it was to their detriment that this study period had been removed from the timetable. This led one of the boys to select the reinstatement of study periods as one of his changes.

He suggested this change for two reasons;

People used to do their homework in study and then they could go home. It was much better whereas people just don't do their homework now... like around exams I will do a couple of hours study but you don't have homework that way. So when you have study you can just go home and do that. It's much better. (Bruce)

Related to this was the suggestion of a homework centre with access to computers so that boys could complete any unfinished homework prior to leaving school.

Two of the suggested changes were predominantly concerned with dealing with disruptive students and lessening their impact on the academic engagement of others. The first suggestion addressed the consequences boys faced for disruptive behaviour. The two boys who suggested this were quite clear in this matter; one summed it up succinctly.

There are a lot of guys here that just shouldn't be here. They should have been kicked out a long time ago. I reckon they should be made to do the work or get a blue card and go. (Mr Bean)

Another change mentioned was to stream all senior classes where numbers would allow it. One reason for this comes from the boys' belief that the students who struggle with course content are the ones who are the most disruptive in class. They believe that streaming would allow more able students to work unimpeded. The second reason highlights the different learning needs of students and is clearly outlined in the following response:

I think that streaming classes would be a good idea because some students need to spend longer on Achieved level type concepts than the brighter ones. It can get a bit frustrating if you are waiting to move onto Excellence type work. (Mohamed)

Some of the boys felt that assemblies would provide more encouragement for students if they were revamped and conducted in a manner that would have more appeal to Year Twelve boys.

We got a lot of people like rugby players and a racing car driver. They have a lot of these wonder people who perhaps got lucky. He was brought up with car racing. We can't just drop out of school and become a racing car driver. So maybe have those kind of talks but also your average person, like a builder. (Jim)

Really good motivational speakers. A really good speaker who's fun and will engage us. Someone who will appeal to boys and who is a good speaker. (Mat)

Another suggestion made by two students was that there needs to be more emphasis on goal-setting. The boys felt it was important for Year Twelve students to be assisted in developing and utilising effective goal-setting strategies.

One of my friends, his goal is to have academic colours and try and get thirty Excellence credits this year. He's going to have to work quite hard in the externals to get that, but if you have a goal you're going to work towards it. No matter how hard it is at least he's going to try quite hard to get that goal. So having a goal helps you quite a lot. (Alias)

I think they should help you with the goal setting. Someone should go through it, like the deans with each year group. (Mr Bean)

One of the boys talked about the goal setting sessions that were part of his schools' programmes. He reported being asked to decide which subjects were going to provide his best chance of getting credits and which weren't. For him things hadn't quite worked out as planned and the subject he had predicted would give the best yield hadn't; he had gained more from two other subjects. He still felt, however, that the goal setting had helped him focus more on his academic studies and was a necessary component of the Year Twelve programme.

There were a number of suggestions made by only one person which were particularly interesting. One boy felt that there needed to be more advice given on how to study.

Learning how to study. I reckon they need to show us more about how to study. There's a thing in the school diary, but it's not very useful. I think the dean should tell you how to study or even just in the classes. (Mr Bean)

Another boy was concerned about the well-being of many of his peers and wanted to see more done to help those less well off than himself.

I know some schools are doing things like giving uniforms out if you're very poor or the parents don't care and there's no way of getting a school uniform. Some kids don't have a warm jersey in their uniform. At intermediate they had a cooking class for kids whose parents didn't cook for them. They were taught how to cook basic cheap items… But I don't know what you would do at secondary school. (Jim)

A third comment came from a boy who felt that there was too much emphasis on cultural practices that, he felt, weren't relevant to him. He wanted to change the compulsory nature of these.

Like the haka. They brought out doing the haka and it was compulsory and I did not want to do that. So then they brought out the singing competition and I didn't want to do that either because I don't like singing. (Mat)

When asked how he felt this impacted on his engagement in the classroom, he replied:

People don't turn up. They don't go to class. "We've got haka today, we've got singing today" so they just don't turn up and take the day off. (Mat)

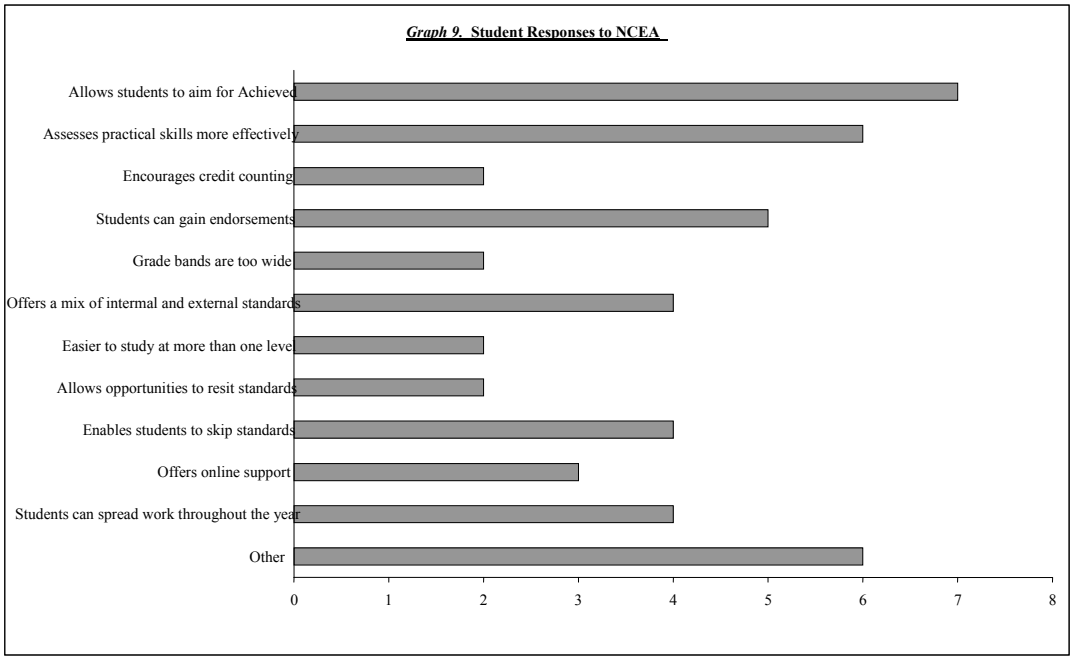
4.9 Question eight

Is there anything else you would like to add?

There were no responses to this question in any of the interviews.

4.10 NCEA

NCEA was mentioned by all of the boys at one time or another in their interviews and is clearly seen by them as having a marked impact on their engagement. Because of the frequency of the responses coupled with the on–going debate surrounding NCEA, as discussed in the Literature Review section, it was decided that NCEA related findings would be addressed under a separate heading. This will enable a clearer understanding of the current situation from the boys' perspectives.



The responses of the boys often concerned their understanding that NCEA enabled them to make decisions around managing their time and the effort they expended on any one standard. Many reported having decided either to skip standards, internal and external, or to do only enough to gain an Achieved grade and get the credits on offer.

> *I can't creative write for donkeys, so I just flagged it… It wasn't worth my time really. I'll get the credits somewhere else. (Mat)*
>
> *If it's in Multi-media [this student's passion] I want to get the best of the best, but if it's in English I just want to get it done and scrape past. (Mat)*

If I … if there's a lot to learn about and I know I won't be able to learn it, I don't bother. (Bob)

In the end-of-year exams, like in the English one, some of them [standards] I just don't do. I spend the extra time doing the other ones better. (Mohamed)

Some of the subjects like Chemistry and English I just try to get Achieved because I'm not that good at them. But for things like Math and Music which are real interests for me I try for Excellences. (Paul)

In order to make these decisions, the boys admitted to credit counting. Many of the boys were aware of the possible consequences of such strategies and had either experienced them personally or had seen others come to grief. One boy had some sage advice to give.

Some boys work out that they've got this many credits and they say I've already got twelve credits with internals so they work out that they just need two credits to pass. So they just do one paper and walk out but they fail. They're back doing it again. Whereas you have to stay in an exam for so long and use that time to do all of the papers. You're better off getting as many chances as you can so you can pass. (Bruce)

Another boy felt that NCEA was flawed in that it was relatively easy to get Achieved and this encouraged boys to do as little as possible

It's quite stupid how it's quite easy to get Achieved and then for some students that's all they're going for. I see it in all my classes. You get all these notes and you only need a tiny bit to get Achieved, and they just remember that stuff instead of trying for a Merit. (Adam)

Despite most admitting to managing their time in this manner many of the boys were still looking to achieve the higher grades.

If I go in there and find the test is really hard I'd be quite satisfied with an Achieved, but if it's a subject I've studied really hard for I'm really looking for Merit or Excellence. I want to push myself for the best that I can. So

Achieved isn't really good enough when I put a lot of time and effort into it. (Joseph)

The boys interviewed in this study were among the first to have their certificates endorsed either by subject or by level if they gained a pre-determined number of higher grades. Those who had received endorsements last year were highly motivated to match or better last year's achievements.

It makes you want to achieve higher. It makes you want to get more than Achieved. It obviously looks better and makes you feel a lot more confident about your work. I got my certificate about two weeks ago and I was quite happy and my parents were proud of me. (Joseph)

It made me work for it. It made me work a lot harder because I knew that's what I wanted. I wanted to be able to get that. (Adam)

Yeah I'm going to try and get it [endorsed with Excellence] this year. You know you've got to get this many credits, it gets you really working. (Bryan)

Many of the boys spoken to appreciated the fact that they could be assessed on their practical ability.

It means the practical things can be tested and not just the theory. (Paul)

In XXXX [an option for those involved in sport at the elite level] you can get credits related to your own sports. You can do coaching… It does make a difference. It shows what other skills the student has to offer outside the classroom. (Blue)

That is one of the good things with NCEA; you can do your cooking and get marked on it, (Deverstater)

Nearly a third of the boys commented on the mix of internal and external standards. They welcomed the opportunity to spread their assessment throughout the year.

It helps me feel more safe that I will pass, especially the internals. (Alias)

The up side is that you're working towards something throughout the year. Like if there was no internals I could see myself, especially last year, cruising

until the end and then having to cram. Whereas with the internals, it keeps you working towards something throughout the year… We don't take it seriously unless there are credits involved and it's going towards our marks. So I suppose it makes you take the whole year a bit more seriously, not just the end of year. (Bryan)

One commented that he particularly enjoyed the assessment being closer to the learning. Another boy felt that whilst the mix was good in some subjects it was a little unbalanced in others.

I think they should do twelve internals and twelve externals in every subject… Some of them there are only four internal credits and you have to do eighteen at the end of the year. (Mohamed)

Some other positives mentioned by the boys included: the opportunity to resit standards, the opportunity to do multi-level study, and the support available on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) website.

If you don't pass that, you can look at it and see where you went wrong and figure out how to do it again without doing the mistakes and do a resit and get there. (Bob)

There are three levels of it, and you can actually get Level Three credits in Level One. It helps you out in later years. (Mat)

With NCEA there are always people there to help you. Like you can ring NZQA and if you have any questions you can get them to ring you, or you could use their website. (Mr Bean)

You get the criteria and you know what you have to do for Excellence. With the competitive nature of quite a few of the people in my classes in the accelerate programme it's quite good when you get Excellence. (Bryan)

There were also some further criticisms concerning NCEA. These included the perception that NCEA is difficult to understand, the width of the grade bands is too

great, the process used to decide a grade in some subjects is flawed, and it's too easy and lacks credibility.

> *It does get a little bit confusing at times. With the double levels you don't exactly know what you're doing. Also you can do some classes that just start at Level Three and you don't have it at Level One or Level Two. Then it's - well is there any point in me doing this class because I need Level One credits. I don't want to stuff up you know. (Jack)*
>
> *The whole Achieved, Merit and Excellence thing. Someone can just get Achieved and someone else gets almost a Merit, but it still gets an Achieved and there can be quite a big difference between the two papers, and they're still getting exactly the same thing. (Adam)*
>
> *When another person gets Excellence and there's nothing separating you, but really one person's might be a bit better than the other's. I suppose that's not really a good thing for NCEA. (Bryan)*
>
> *Some of the stuff is crap. Like there was a Science exam, you could get all of the Excellence questions right and fail, because some Excellence questions don't count back. There was one question that you could get Excellence, Merit or Achieved, If you got Excellence they don't count back for Achieved. So if you got Excellence it didn't give you enough Achieveds to pass. Stuff like that is really stupid. (Bruce)*
>
> *It's very easy compared to like IGCSE. I did IGCSE as well as NCEA and the difference between the grades was huge. The IGCSE one was a lot harder, a hell of a lot harder. (Mat)*

The boys' comments concerning NCEA offer valuable insight into the way they perceive it and the strategies they utilise to manage it. Similarly, their responses to interview questions indicate that many of them are thinking carefully about their experiences at school. Their thoughts are often insightful and offer a fresh perspective on much of what occurs routinely in many, if not most, boys' schools in New Zealand. A discussion of key themes to emerge from the findings will follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to listen to Year Twelve boys and to find out what it is they believe enhances their academic engagement in boys' schools. Their responses provide a wealth of data that offers a uniquely adolescent male glimpse of their engagement with their studies and the effects upon this engagement of the school context they find themselves in. An analysis of the findings shows that the majority of the boys' responses fall into a number of categories or themes: subject choice, the availability and accessibility of career-based programmes, the size of classes, access to computers, the setting of expectations, the structure of the school day and timetable, the effects of disruptive students, and NCEA. Each of these themes is discussed in this section along with other relevant aspects of academic engagement as commented on by the boys.

5.2 Engagement: Global or domain specific?

One area of debate over recent years is whether motivation is global or domain specific. Within schools, comments relating to student motivation such as "Jimmy just isn't motivated" and report comments mentioning a student's lack of motivation abound. These give the impression that motivation is a global state. The findings of this study indicate quite clearly that motivation and subsequent engagement is not global but domain specific. All of the participants reported being engaged in some subjects to a greater degree than in others. This supports the findings of many researchers (2008; Eccles, 1994; Jacobs et al., 2002; Pajares & Schunk, 2002) that motivation and engagement are domain specific.

Within the research community, the reasons why motivation is domain specific continue to be vigorously debated. In this study, by far the most frequently

mentioned factor affecting the boys' engagement was their interest and enjoyment of a subject. Being intrinsically motivated seems to be the most salient factor for many Year Twelve boys. A number of researchers (Alderman, 2008; Lepper et al., 2005; Martin, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2008; Schunk et al., 2008) agree that intrinsic motivation is an important factor that has a major impact on student engagement. Martin's (2003b) findings also highlight how important it is for boys that their lessons are interesting and enjoyable. He argues that the presence of both characteristics is significant in relation to student engagement and motivation.

5.3 Subject choice

The importance of intrinsic motivation in the engagement of boys has some clear implications for those in leadership positions in boys' schools with regard to student programmes of work. Many of the boys in this study reported being in at least one subject that they did not want to be in: some because the subject was compulsory, some because they did not meet the pre-requisites of the subject they really wanted to be in, and still others who had been unsuccessful at getting into the subject of their choice due to timetable constraints. Regardless of the reasons for their subject placement, most of the boys reported being disengaged due to limited intrinsic motivation; they were neither interested nor found the area of study enjoyable, in at least one subject area in their academic programme. These results closely resemble the findings of a recently released Ministry of Education report *On the Edge of adulthood: Young people's school and out-of-school experiences at 16.* The authors, Wylie, Hipkins and Hodgen (2009), suggest that just over 50 percent of the participants at Year Twelve report not being able to take at least one subject they wanted to. Their participants also report being placed in subjects they have little interest in due to timetable constraints.

There are a number of factors other than intrinsic value that influence a student's choice of subjects. Competency, and attainment and utility value beliefs have a strong impact on activity choices, engagement, and performance, especially in the

adolescent years. (Eccles, 1994; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998). Sometimes the boys i interviewed chose a subject predominantly because of its utility value (Eccles, 1994; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Those boys who reported choosing a subject because of its perceived usefulness for the future, and who also enjoyed being in it, spoke of their continuing engagement in the subject. Of those whose only criteria for their choice was a subject's utility value, some commented that they were struggling to stay engaged. This was particularly true for one boy whose career path had changed since his initial subject choices were made. The subject, one he did not particularly enjoy, no longer had utility value and he was becoming increasingly disengaged.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there was some evidence that the boys were most engaged in the subjects in which they felt most competent and were experiencing success. A number of research studies (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman et al., 1992) also report similar findings. At times, however, the opposite scenario can be motivating. One boy was used to achieving to a high standard in all his classes and, prior to the interview, had been struggling in a class he was taking for the first time; for him this was hugely motivating. He was consistently motivated to achieve top grades and needed to pass the new subject for his future career plans. He believed that success in the subject was possible and would be determined by his actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). He exhibited all the characteristics of a student with a mastery-approach orientation (McGregor & Elliot, 2002; Pekrun et al., 2006) and was fully engaged. At the interview, he reported having made considerable progress, to the point where he was achieving the success he desired.

Students who had freely chosen a subject often reported making greater use of self-regulated learning strategies than those who had been placed in subjects where there was limited or no choice. The attributes and strategies included in the forethought phase of the cycle (Zimmerman & Campillo, 2003) were applicable to and applied by most students in this group, however, there was less evidence of the use of the strategies in the other two phases. This was not an area which was focused on in the

interviews; more research is needed to clarify the situation. In terms of Martin's (2007) Motivation and Engagement Wheel, the students who were taking a chosen subject were displaying the adaptive cognitions of self-efficacy, valuing school and often exhibiting a mastery orientation in that subject. The same participants also reported performing the adaptive behaviours of planning, task management and persistence to varying degrees.

In subjects where the placement of a student involves limited or no choice, there is little evidence of the student being intrinsically motivated (Alderman, 2008; Lepper et al., 2005; Martin, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2008; Schunk et al., 2008); they seldom valued the subject (Eccles, 1994; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) and there was a general feeling that they lacked autonomy and agency (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman et al., 1992). For many of the boys, there was little indication of feelings of self-efficacy towards the subject. The impeding cognitions listed in the Motivation and Engagement Wheel (Martin, 2007) increasingly came to the fore and students often commented on their lack of engagement.

English is the only compulsory subject at Year Twelve and it was concerning to hear some of the boys talking about it in much the same terms as subjects they had been placed in due to limited choices. Some resented having to study it, and felt that English offers little of value for them, including little utility value. There were a few boys who enjoyed English and another two who valued it because they realised the skills they would acquire would be essential for tertiary study or in the workplace. This is a major concern in light of the very real concerns relating to boys' literacy. Despite government signalling the importance of English in the curriculum by stipulating the literacy requirements needed to attain Level One NCEA, and those needed to gain university entrance at Level Two, the perception amongst Year Twelve boys that it lacks intrinsic, attainment and utility value is alarming.

Worthy of note was the school that had implemented an option programme outside of the standard Year Twelve programme. The timetable was structured in such a way

as to allow three periods of options each week. There were two blocks of options, each running for half the school year. Students selected from a range of options that interested them, some specifically offered because of their appeal to adolescent boys and others to provide academic support. Most of the boys from this school commented on their enjoyment of their options and welcomed the opportunity to have a break from their academic studies during the school day. Most were confident of getting their choice; there was a sense of anticipation even amongst those boys who felt disenchanted with their academic programmes.

This study clearly demonstrates that the degree of student choice regarding subjects has major implications for student engagement. Other studies (Education Review Office, 2008; Irwin, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2006) report similar findings and highlight student choice as being a key factor in enhancing the academic engagement of boys. The manner in which the timetable is structured determines the ability of schools to offer students their choice of subjects and to acknowledge and accommodate boys' interests and needs. It is essential that every effort is made to accommodate as many of the boys' subject choices as is possible. For a subject, such as English, which is compulsory, it is vital that academic leaders within the school consider ways of structuring the subject to offer some degree of student choice.

5.4 Having a goal for the future: Participating in career-based programmes

A second recurring theme throughout the interviews, and one which I had not initially anticipated, was the importance that career-based programmes played in enhancing student engagement. The majority of boys were emphatic that access to such programmes, whether provided by the school through the Careers Advisor or by outside agencies, is essential. They repeatedly made the connection between having goals for the future set alongside a proposed career pathway and engagement in their academic studies. Equally, they felt that lack of future direction was a key factor in poor student engagement. The boys who commented on this aspect came from a

variety of academic backgrounds: some had been in accelerated programmes in the junior school and others were currently taking predominantly alternative and/or practical subjects.

There is much in the motivation and engagement literature that offers insights into why involvement in quality career-based programmes enhances student academic engagement. The boys in the study who had set goals and decided on a future pathway, either in conjunction with an informed adult or as part of an organised programme, spoke of feeling they had a direction and a plan that would allow them to achieve their goals. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, most of those who had not done so were unsure of where they wanted to go following school and, in one or two cases, were harbouring ideas that were completely unrealistic. It can be expected that having a goal and a realistic career path to follow will encourage feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) as well as a sense of autonomy and of being in control (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) contend that a student who feels this way will often continue to be motivated and engaged, even when a task is not intrinsically motivating, because they can see the need for it and because they have chosen to participate in it.

Another theory of motivation that seems to offer some clue with regard to the connections the boys are making between clear goals, career pathway and academic engagement, is the Expectancy-value Theory (Eccles, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). If a student has been involved in one or more career-based programmes and has had time to seek advice and carefully consider their future career options, it can be reasonably assumed that their decisions will be both realistic and achievable. It is likely, therefore, that the academic course of study they have embarked upon, presuming they have been given the subjects they requested, satisfies the first three components of subjective task value: that is the task has intrinsic, attainment, and utility value (Eccles, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The fourth component, cost (Eccles, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), is more likely to be manageable if the student's decisions about their future are attainable. At times when the cost may seem to be becoming over-burdensome, the student is more likely

to stay committed if subjective task value remains high. It follows that those who have had opportunities to partake in a variety of forms of career education are more likely to have made decisions regarding their future and will be more fully engaged in their academic studies.

Many of the boys who reported that they were working towards future goals displayed several of the characteristics associated with either a mastery-approach orientation or a performance-approach orientation (Elliot, 1999, 2005; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Most of these boys spoke of being determined to gain credits in the subjects most relevant to their goals and of putting more effort into these subjects. They were deploying meta-cognitive strategies and were demonstrating many of the traits of self-regulated learners. As can be expected with both these groups, most reported being engaged in their studies and particularly so in those areas most relevant to them.

In terms of Martin's (2007) Motivation and Engagement Wheel, most of the students who had thought about and made some decisions regarding their future displayed both adaptive cognitions and adaptive behaviours. They were self-efficacious, valued the tasks offered by the school and the role school played in meeting their goals, and their goal orientations were consistent with the adaptive behaviours of planning, task management and persistence. Whilst Martin (2007) does not acknowledge the performance-approach orientation and instead focuses on mastery orientation, much of the available literature (Elliot, 1999; Midgley et al., 2001) points to the many positive attributes of those with a performance-approach orientation. These positive characteristics include the adaptive behaviours highlighted in the Motivation and Engagement Wheel. It is perhaps the concerns relating to long-term well-being (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Moller, 2003; McGregor & Elliot, 2002) that have resulted in the exclusion of a performance-approach orientation from Martin's (2003) framework.

The schools involved in this research are already offering a range of career-based opportunities that the boys are taking advantage of. The boys spoke of having the

chance to do some work experience, several within the Gateway programme. They have benefitted from visits by various universities, and groups such as the Army, and from local careers expos. Some of the boys, however, feel that the school needs to be more proactive in terms of the Career Advisor's role. They believe that offering one-on-one meetings with boys in Year Twelve is leaving it too late. They suggest it would be more beneficial if opportunities were provided for the Career Advisor to meet with all boys at Year Ten and again at Year Eleven.

Other research studies have also highlighted the need for schools to provide easy access to a variety of careers-based programmes. A report commissioned by the Australian Council for Educational Research (2008) highlights the effectiveness of career education in secondary schools, particularly if the career programme has multiple modes of delivery. As with this study, it also shows that most boys at the Australian equivalent of Year Twelve value the opportunity to participate in career programmes, perceive them as useful and strongly believe that access to quality career-based programmes is imperative. It does not, however, set out to investigate any link between careers programmes and student engagement. Other studies do this.

An American study conducted by C.L. Martin (2008) shows the positive effects of involving at-risk 15 to 17 year olds in a structured, in-school careers programme. By the end of the first year of the programme, the students were attending school more regularly and were achieving at a significantly higher level. In New Zealand, the *Consultation on 'Staying at School'* (Ministry of Education, 2006) report stresses the need for at-risk boys to have access to work experience programmes, perhaps even spending a part of each school week in work placement. In the concluding statements from a synthesis of literature relating to school-based career programmes, Hughes and Karp (2004) state that "students do seem to benefit, both vocationally and academically, from participation in career courses" (p. 29). The authors point out, however, that there is little evidence that this is maintained over time.

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education has had a focus on career education for some time. Many of their documents make a clear link between quality career

education and academic engagement. The *STAR (Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource) Handbook* (Ministry of Education, 2008) states that the STAR programme provides students with "an opportunity to increase their engagement in learning as they come to recognise the relevance of their schoolwork to their future plans" (Section1). An Education Review report *Designing Careers - Tracking beyond the Pilot* (2007) states that an important aim of the Designing Careers Pilot Scheme was to ensure "students are making appropriate subject choices, and that students' understanding of the relevance of school to their future goals has improved" (p. 24). Because of their belief in the importance of careers education, the Ministry of Education has promoted a number of programmes and schemes in recent years: STAR, Gateway, Designing Careers, CPaBL, ASDAN and the Youth Apprenticeship Scheme.

The boys in this study were adamant that a careers education programme needs to be multi-faceted. This is supported in a variety of publications and programmes. The government funded Career Services website has an extensive section specifically developed for practitioners and educators. They advocate very strongly for a whole-school integrated approach. They argue that this helps "students develop a better understanding of how subject areas and the skills they're learning are relevant to their post-school life and career options" (Career Services, 2009). They also state that the involvement of the whole school and wider community is essential. Each of the schools in this research study had taken on board the latter recommendation and the boys were involved in a variety of school visits, experiences in the workplace and the like. From the boys' perspective, however, there was little in the way of a whole-school integrated approach.

A number of the boys mentioned that they felt their schools were providing insufficient career education in early year levels and that it was too late at Year Twelve. Much of the material mentioned (Career Services, 2009; Education Review Office, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2008; Rothman & Hillman, 2008) concurs with this sentiment. Hughes and Karp (2004) assert that "given the finding that career guidance and academic counseling is potentially very effective with middle school

students, a greater investment in these activities in the middle schools should be made" (p. 31). This certainly aligns with the recommendations made by some of the boys in this study. There is a need for more research, particularly longitudinal, in this area in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons why boys believe that quality career education impacts so significantly on academic engagement and to the extent to which the benefits can be maintained.

5.5 Class size

Another theme that emerged from the research was that of class size. Many of the boys referred to class size as a factor that both enhanced and hindered their academic engagement. Those who suggested the former effect mentioned that many of their classes in Year Twelve were smaller and this helped them to engage more fully in their studies. Those who talked about class size being a hindrance spoke of the difficulties of being in large classes. These included the attitudes of teachers, weakened teacher relationships, difficulties getting the teacher's assistance, problems relating to discipline and the effects of disruptive students, and insufficient resources, including classroom furniture. Conversely, those in smaller classes spoke of the positive relationships they were able to establish with their teachers and the fewer disruptions they experienced, both factors that resulted in their being able to engage more fully in their studies.

There is much debate within academic circles over the effects of class size on student engagement. A number of studies echo the findings of this study. A New Zealand longitudinal study (Boozer & Maloney, 2001) found significant correlations between persistently smaller class sizes and improvements in literacy. Anderson (2002) asserts that class size does indeed make a difference as teachers can be "more concerned about managing the learning and less concerned about managing the learners" (p. 58). Graue, Hatch, Rao and Oen (2007) believe that "the positive effects of CSR [Class size reduction] are thought to be derived from closer relationships between teachers and students, more finely grained knowledge of student assets and

needs, more opportunities to learn the cultural rules of being a student, fewer disciplinary problems, positive attitudes, and ultimately, more learning" (p. 676).

Each of the above studies makes the point that whilst class size is an important factor relating to academic engagement, having smaller classes does not in itself guarantee greater student engagement. This begs the question, why might smaller class sizes make a difference to student engagement? Anderson (2002) says "it is what teachers do in and with smaller classes that makes the difference, not simply being in smaller classes" (p. 52). From this perspective, then, it is the quality of the teaching in the smaller class that will ultimately make the difference. A study conducted by Finn, Pannozzo and Achilles (2003) investigated why smaller classes often have a positive impact on student engagement at the elementary level. Whilst any findings of a study conducted at this level must be treated with some caution when considering the academic engagement of Year Twelve boys, Finn et al.(2003) found that students in small classes were generally more engaged and there were fewer incidences of disruptive behaviour. They offer a number of possible reasons for this. Firstly, teachers' interpersonal skills are able to come to the fore and stronger teacher/student relationships tend to be forged. Secondly, the students' behaviour is influenced through the increased visibility of the individual in the classroom and a greater sense of belonging. By increased visibility, Finn et al. (2003) suggest that in smaller classes each student is more visible and teachers tend to see individuals rather than "seeing the class as a sea of faces" (p. 352). As a consequence, students are called upon to be more attentive and to participate more fully. Smaller classes are more cohesive and there is more pressure from peers to be engaged. Students will often feel a greater sense of belonging.

Other studies (Irwin, 2007; Willms et al., 2003) also highlighted a sense of belonging as being particularly important for boys if they are to fully engage in their studies. Interestingly, the only boy to pick out the theme of a sense of belonging in this study was quite scathing of its inclusion. He was adamant that most boys did not feel they belonged at school and were merely there because they had to be: school as a transitional place to be endured until they got the qualifications they needed and

moved on. Some of the boys interviewed certainly gave the impression of feeling comfortable in the school environment, others seemed less so, but none of the boys made a direct connection between sense of belonging and academic engagement.

Larger classes, according to Finn et al. (2003), encourage diffusion of responsibility and social loafing. The former refers to the state where individuals in a larger group often feel less responsible for completing set tasks and the latter relates to the decreased effort individuals often make in comparison to individuals in smaller groups. They also comment that larger classes encourage groups of students to behave in ways that are counter-productive to a quality teaching and learning environment. The findings of this study suggest that these three phenomena exist in larger classes in boys' schools in New Zealand. Many of the boys reported the lack of work being done in larger classes, the difficulties teachers were experiencing with discipline and the disruptive nature of many students. Larger classes seem to 'encourage' the proliferation of maladaptive cognitions and behaviours (Martin, 2003a, 2007) particularly those concerning failure avoidance, self-handicapping and disengagement.

A New Zealand study (Hattie, 2005) questions the gains that can be achieved if class sizes are reduced to 15 to 18 students. Hattie claims that class size is not significant in itself; however, he acknowledges that effective teaching practices are more likely to flourish in smaller classes rather than in larger ones. Hattie claims that New Zealand teachers believe the optimal class size at Year Twelve is 19 students which he notes "is not that different from the actual class sizes in NZ secondary schools" (p. 417). If this were the case and most classes were around 19 then his assertion that further reductions in class size would not result in significant gains has some validity. Unfortunately, according to the boys, classes at Year Twelve are often much larger than Hattie's (2005) study suggests: some are even over 30 students, which Finn et al. (2003) label as "truly overcrowded" (p. 352). My own experience in boys' schools is similar to those which the boys reported; few Year Twelve classes would be as low as 19, a fair proportion would be in the mid to late twenties and some are

over 30. Class size is often a major issue for those focused on enhancing student engagement.

Following the analysis of a number of research studies, Hattie (2009) restates his claim that there is little evidence that having smaller classes alone will increase student achievement. He suggests the following reasons for this: that poor teaching is equally ineffective in a small class as it is in a large class and that some teachers do not have the knowledge or the skills for excellent small class teaching. He believes that if class sizes were to be reduced, a comprehensive teacher professional development programme would be essential to ensure significant gains. Furthermore, Hattie (2009) emphasises the importance of effective feedback on student engagement and achievement. It is difficult, however, to imagine how teachers can give quality feedback in some of the classes the boys described. When a teacher has so many in a workshop-based class that feedback cannot be given until the next period and all work has to stop until then, or when a class has so many students that there is a race to get there quickly to ensure a seat, it seems that the chance of each student receiving personalised and timely feedback is small.

After listening to the voices of the boys and their comments relating to class size, I was dismayed to hear a Treasury official (Television New Zealand, 2009), when talking about another matter, commenting that savings could be made in the education sector. One of the areas that he suggested could be targeted was the size of classes; his comment was that recent research showed that class size was not a significant factor in student achievement. The findings of this study plainly show that from the perspective of those who are the key stakeholders, class size does matter and that any move to change the status quo should be towards reducing class sizes rather than increasing them.

5.6 Access to computers

During the interviews there were many comments about the role computers play in student engagement. Many of the boys felt that their academic engagement would be enhanced if they had easier access to computers in general and were able to use them in class. The reasons for wanting greater access to computers varied. Most of those who spoke about this matter wanted to use computers as word processors because they either found the act of writing laborious or did not like the look of their work when it was handwritten. These boys often avoided work, or did as little as possible if there was writing involved. A second reason given to support their preference for greater computer use was the amount of research required in some subjects. The comment was made that there needed to be easier access to computers at lunchtimes and after school so that homework could be completed. For some boys, doing work at home which required the use of a computer was difficult. Most reported having a computer at home, although some commented that the home computer was slow and it took too long to do research and other school-related tasks.

Whilst most of the boys spoke about computers as a tool for writing or researching, one spoke of it as a medium for instruction. Interestingly, he was not impressed with its use in this area and felt that this hindered his engagement in his studies. This particular boy was doing well in his studies and had come through his school's accelerated programme. From his perspective, the overuse of PowerPoint presentations caused him to disengage. He did not enjoy lessons where this was the predominant method of instruction, but preferred greater variety and found it easier to engage with printed texts.

Whist many of the comments were general and not specific to one curriculum area, the subject which was identified most often by the boys as needing greater access to computers was English. These boys felt strongly that being able to word process their essays would greatly enhance their engagement. The boys also reported that their teachers, from non-computer based curriculum areas, often had difficulty

accessing the school computer suites for more than the occasional lesson. This, they believed, hindered their academic engagement.

Boys who were interviewed as part of another New Zealand study (Irwin, 2007) also reported not enjoying the mechanics of writing and they, too, spoke of disengaging because of the amount of writing in a school day. Irwin (2007, 2009) believes that teachers need to utilise computers to a greater degree, for word processing, researching and as an instructional tool. Two Australian studies (Cuttance et al., 2007; Zbar, Bereznicki, & Trist, 2003) specifically investigated boys' engagement and found that "ICTs are an effective way of engaging boys in learning and extending their research capacities and thinking skills" (Zbar et al., 2003, p. 48). A third Australian study (The Innovation and Best Practice Project, 2001) sums up the role of ICT in boys' education stating, "ICT itself can act as a catalyst to learning, can be effectively utilised to improve learning outcomes in both the cognitive and non-cognitive domains, and can be integrated into learning environments to support significant enhancements in student engagement, enjoyment and motivation to learn" (Executive Summary). A recently released ERO report, *Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* (2008), based on case studies of ten secondary schools throughout New Zealand, also highlights the use of computers as a means of engaging boys. As with the boys in this study, the authors of the ERO report view computers as a tool to encourage boys' writing. A best evidence synthesis that scrutinized a number of studies (Alton-Lee, 2003) highlights the need for "ICT usage to be integrated into pedagogical practice across the curriculum" (p. 67). The boys' responses make it clear that they expect to access ICT in all curriculum areas.

A note of caution has been introduced to the discussion by Hattie (2009). His meta-analysis also shows that the use of computers can have a place in enhancing the engagement of students and a flow on positive effect on achievement. He believes, however, that they are useful only when a number of criteria are met: when they are used as one of many teaching strategies, when teachers have been given some professional development in their effective use, when there are multiple opportunities to learn, when the student is the agent of their own learning, and when

peer learning is optimized. Whilst Hattie (2009) does not focus his investigations on the effects of the use of computers on the academic engagement of boys, nor specifically any one level, the findings of this study suggest that his note of caution needs to be heeded. As previously mentioned, the repeated use of computers in the same manner can have a detrimental effect on student engagement, as it did for one boy in this study.

5.7 Setting expectations

In much of the literature concerning boys' education (Education Review Office, 2008; Irwin, 2007, 2009; Lashlie, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2009b) the setting of clear expectations is highlighted. The boys in this study often commented on this matter and talked of the many forums in which their school set expectations for them. The note of pride in one of the boy's voices as he told me that his school set high expectations is a comment that stands out for me. It seems that in many of their daily interactions with their curriculum and tutor teachers, their deans, and their principals, boys are being exhorted to lift their achievement. At times, this message is being taken on board with some students feeling increasingly motivated and engaged in their academic studies. For other students, however, the messages are not received as positively and can cause them to disengage.

The question is why does the same message bring about such divergent reactions? The boys suggest that it depends very much on the manner in which the message is articulated. In an effort to lift student achievement, many schools have focused on students gaining higher Merit and Excellence grades, and have set about articulating the message that this is the level that boys should be aiming for. The findings of this study indicate that for boys who are self-efficacious about their learning and who believe that they are capable of achieving at this level, the message inspires them to work harder. When rewards are also available in the form of certificates received in assembly for achieving Excellence and NCEA endorsements, the message becomes

even more salient and they are motivated to lift their achievement. Subsequently, their academic engagement is enhanced.

Unfortunately, not all the boys reported responding to the message in this manner. One boy in particular had made the connection between the message he and his peers were receiving and their alienation from it, and the potential for this to hinder his and others' academic engagement. He is an articulate young man who was able to share his thoughts with me. For him, the message asks something of many students that they are not capable of delivering. He felt very strongly that a number of students firmly believe they are incapable of achieving at a Merit or an Excellence level and see themselves as 'Achieved or Not Achieved' students. Hearing the message and interpreting it as resetting the benchmark for success, at a level they don't feel they can achieve, is demotivating and has serious implications for academic engagement. A number of boys commented that the message to work hard and to achieve as best you can is a more effective message than to aim for Merit and Excellence. As another boy explained to me, in that way a boy who usually gets an Achieved can aim to get Achieved and sometimes a Merit and a boy who usually gets a Not Achieved can aim for Achieved. In such cases, the boys would be more inclined to engage in their studies and become more positive about their achievements.

There are a numbers of clues in motivational literature as to why boys might respond this manner to a message that seems on face value to be uplifting. Intelligence or ability is often viewed by adolescent boys as fixed (Alderman, 2008; Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Stipek, 2002). When the boys describe themselves as being an Achieved or Not Achieved student they view ability as being relatively fixed. They do not see a strong likelihood of being able to significantly change the situation and therefore view the chances of their gaining the higher grades as being slim. Any reduction in a student's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) is likely to affect engagement. If, as some boys suggested, they also perceive the message as suggesting that an Achieved pass is of little value and they believe that is as good as they are likely to get, they might also experience feelings of low self-worth and a lowered self-esteem, both of which can impact significantly on

academic engagement. An Australian publication *Schooling issues digest* (Frydenberg, Ainley, & Russell, 2005) lists a number of situations where engagement declines. One of these situations is "when schools are seen by students to value the highly successful students only and not all students" (p. 14). There may be a danger of some students feeling that only those who gain Merit or Excellence are valued. If this is so, then it is probable that their engagement in their academic studies will be adversely effected.

Another consequence of messages of expectation being articulated in this way is the emphasis on performance rather than on mastery. As the message focuses on the grades and not on the learning, it could further encourage boys to adopt a performance orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). As already pointed out, this does not necessarily lower engagement if it is a performance-approach orientation rather than a performance-avoidance orientation (Elliot, 1999, 2005; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Urdan, 2004). If boys with a fixed view of ability believe they are not able to achieve the grades they are being encouraged to strive for, they are more likely to adopt a performance-avoidance orientation which has serious consequences in terms of academic engagement and general well-being. They are also more likely to engage in maladaptive strategies or behaviours such as self-handicapping (Elliot, 1999; Martin, 2003a, 2007; Urdan, 2004).

The ERO Report (2008) included a list of key questions schools need to address if they are serious about improving boys' motivation and engagement. Included in this list is the question, "how does your school set high expectations for boys about striving to reach their potential?" (p. 37). The wording of this question is important. It is not, how does your school encourage students to gain Merit or Excellence? The key words are "striving to reach potential". The emphasis is on learning not on grades, and the wording implies that the emphasis is on individualized expectations. Cresswell (2004) asserts that effective schools set high expectations for their students, communicate them clearly, set challenges and help them to meet these. The findings of this study suggest that there needs to be one further addition and that is that expectations are communicated in such a way that they are perceived to be

realistic and attainable for all students. While Cresswell (2004) may have intended this, it is imperative that this be stated overtly, rather than by implication.

If situations such as those reported by the boys in this study are to be avoided, educators working in boys' schools need to be aware of the multiple ways in which the messages they give can be interpreted. Their messages must be carefully considered and articulated clearly so as to lessen any ambiguity.

5.8 Structure of the school day and timetable

Many of the boys were very clear about the ways in which the school day could be arranged to help them stay focussed on their studies. It was particularly noticeable amongst the boys of one school. At the beginning of the year the school had decided to change the structure of the day. They had retained the five period day but changed from the two-one-two format to a two-two-one format. The boys reported being unsure of the change at the time, but after reverting back to the old structure for the week prior to the interviews taking place, they were convinced that the new structure best suited boys. They enjoyed working hard in the morning, having a later lunch and then only one period before school finished.

The optimum number of periods in a day is often hotly debated amongst staff. The majority of the boys who commented on this factor reported preferring the five period day. At one school, an extra period was added to three days to allow for the provision of an option programme. Whilst most of the boys reported preferring the five period structure at this school as well, they were happy to accept the six period days as they welcomed the opportunities the option programme offered. Only one boy commented that he would prefer to have shorter periods and more subjects in a day.

Whilst few boys mentioned it, those that did prefer a five day timetable over the six day timetable operating in some schools. One boy commented that it was just too

difficult to be organised with a six day timetable and felt that, particularly for boys, a five day timetable was preferable. The biggest challenge for one of the boys was following a holiday break: he struggled to remember which 'day' of the timetable the new term would be starting off with.

On the *Success for boys* website (Ministry of Education, 2009b) there is a section directed at Boards of Trustees and principals which lists some key questions they need to consider to ensure the needs of boys are met. One question that has particular relevance is: "Are your school structures supporting boys to take responsibility for their own learning, manage themselves, and relate positively to others?" The responses of the boys in this study indicate that having a five period school day, and a five day timetable, suits them by helping them better manage themselves and their learning and thereby enhancing their academic engagement.

There seem to be few, if any, other research studies that have reported such findings. Some, however, have investigated the degree to which school-wide factors have an impact on student achievement. The results of Hattie's meta-analysis (2009) suggests that school wide factors have little impact on student achievement and it is what teachers do that has the most effect. The purpose of this study is not to discount the impact teachers have on achievement but to find out what school wide factors the boys perceive to be important in determining their engagement. The suggestion made by many of the boys is that they are able to engage for more time when they have only five periods in a day, and when they only have one period after lunch. If students are more engaged in their academic studies, learning is more effective and there is a reasonable likelihood of a positive effect on achievement. The boys' perspectives offer a unique insight into how they believe the structure of the school day enhances their engagement in their studies.

5.9 The effects of disruptive students

The boys repeatedly spoke of the effects of disruptive students in class. They reported having students in most of their classes who were disengaged and disrupted the learning of others. According to many of the boys, these students had little direction, did little work and often made the job of teaching as difficult for the teachers as learning was made for the learners. The boys spoke of their effect being greater in some classes than in others. In larger classes, the teachers generally seemed to have more difficulty handling these students and in some subject areas it was more of an issue. English was the subject the boys spoke of most often. As a result of the combined effects of English being the only compulsory subject and, for many of the boys, their largest class, the number of disruptive students was often higher than in other subjects. The boys' solution to the problem was generally agreed upon, the school needed to get tougher and ask those that did not want to learn to leave.

Wylie et al. (2009) mention the problem of disruptive students and much of what they say aligns with the boys' experiences. They outline how most of the schools surveyed put their timetables together and the effect this has on class composition. They identify four clusters of subjects that the lines of a school timetable are based upon. With regard to concerns of disengaged and disruptive students the report states "at age 16 [Years Eleven or Twelve], it was the students in the "contextual" and "vocational" subject clusters who were thought by their deans to be more likely to experience hindrances to learning from other students" (p. 85). When speaking of contextual and vocational the report is referring to the clusters that offer either a mix of traditional and alternative subjects or predominantly alternative subjects respectively. The concluding paragraph includes the comment that "students in the latter two cluster groups were more likely to attend less, and show less engagement with school, with the unintended outcome of sometimes making these classes more difficult for fellow students to learn in at the same time" (p. 87).

Very few documents offer specific suggestions as to how the situation can be resolved. Wylie et al. (2009) suggest that adhering less strictly to traditional timetable structures will help the situation. ERO (2008) offers little in terms of specifics. The report shows case studies of schools that have responded to concerns about boys' achievement by offering a rich and varied curriculum and a focus on professional development that concentrates on best practice for the teaching of boys. The section labeled *Disengaged boys*, however, is woefully short and offers little in the way of guidance for schools.

In the report *Staying at school* (Ministry of Education, 2006), the results of questionnaires completed by principals show that 29% disagree to varying degrees that "even though some students are disruptive, the benefits of keeping them at school means every effort should be made to ensure they stay" (p. 37). In addition, 63% of principals agree, to varying degrees, with the statement "keeping students at school who want to leave causes more problems than benefits" (p. 38). The authors of the report also note that "it was suggested by educators in the qualitative research that removal of disruptive students allows *"those who want to learn to do so"* and that this policy gives the teachers more teaching time to concentrate on these students (who they believe are in the majority)" (p. 38). These sentiments are remarkably similar to those of the boys in this study.

As the author of this study, I do not advocate the exclusion of those who are disengaged from their studies, despite the often considerable efforts already made by schools on their behalf. The findings of the study do, however, give a strong indication of the impact they are having on the academic engagement of students whose learning is being adversely affected. It is vital that the voices of our boys are listened to, so that those involved at a national level address this situation in a meaningful way by formulating fiscally-supported policy that enables those in leadership positions within our secondary schools to have viable and realistic options in this regard.

5.10 NCEA

For the boys in this study, NCEA is just another aspect of their school life; they have known no other assessment regime. After reading many reports, both in the media and from within educational circles that claim NCEA does not suit boys, I was surprised to find that generally the boys, themselves, do not feel this way. Once again, they impressed me with the manner in which they are thinking about their schooling and the connections they are making. They find a lot to like about NCEA and can link this to their increased engagement. Equally, they are able to identify aspects of NCEA that are less motivating for them and which they feel need to be adapted.

Many of the findings of this study echo those in a report produced by Hipkins and Vaughan (2005) in which they conducted focus groups to find how students perceived NCEA. Whilst the focus of this study is not NCEA but student engagement, and the scale is much smaller, there are some key similarities. Most Year Twelve students in both studies reported valuing NCEA. Many of the participants spoke of strategically managing NCEA in a number of ways: skipping standards, both internal and external; counting credits; and making use of resits. The reasons given for the use of these strategies were also remarkably similar. However, the concerns noted by Hipkins and Vaughan (2005) were different to those mentioned by the boys in this study who tended to focus on the marking of some standards and the width of the grade bands.

The three most commonly reported aspects that students like most about NCEA and the three they like least about it are outlined in a study by Starkey (2006). The results are a close match to those mentioned by the boys in this study. They like the internal/external mix because it takes some of the pressure off at the end of the year, they can spread the workload across the year, and they know how they are going as the year progresses, but they do have concerns about the assessment pressure points at certain times in the year. The factor labelled *Motivation and impact on learning behaviours and achievement* (Starkey, 2006) was another that was both most liked

and least liked. Students like that the units are achievable, and that you have to work all year, which impacts on their motivation and engagement. They report not liking the focus of the course being on credits and that students will often only do the bare minimum to achieve. It is important at this point to comment on the effect the new endorsements have had on the boys in this study. Most of the more able boys had their certificates endorsed last year and wanted the same this year. They were definitely not hoping just to pass; they wanted the Merit and, in some cases, the Excellence grades.

The final item on the list of the in the top three most liked aspects of NCEA was labelled *Choices, options flexibility* (Starkey, 2006). Positive comments were made on the number and variety of standards available, and the versatility offered by NCEA. The boys in this study also spoke of the flexibility of NCEA, some were studying at multiple levels, and for one boy the school had been very flexible and created a mixed-media course. The response in Starkey's (2006) study that topped the list of least liked aspects was the manner in which some standards were marked. There was mention of the grade allocation process being flawed and of the lack of percentages for comparison with other students. Both of these were mentioned by a small number of boys in this study.

It is interesting to note the similarities between the two studies outlined above and this one. Much of the concern about NCEA, expressed predominantly by practitioners, relates to the feminisation of assessment practices. Both Hipkins and Vaughan's (2005) and Starkey's (2006) studies sampled the views of both girls and boys and it is a joint perspective that is available to the reader. This study's sample consisted of boys only and yet the findings of all three are remarkably similar. It seems that from the boys' perspective the arguments relating to feminisation are not as much of an issue as many believe.

The issue most often reported by the boys was the jump in the level of difficulty between Year Eleven and Year Twelve, and the required workload from Level One to Level Two. For many this is proving to be a major stumbling block. My own

experiences support the boys' comments. For some boys who had to work hard to achieve at Level One, the next step is just too great. They often feel demoralised and consequently disengage in Level Two classes. This is particularly noticeable in some subject areas. There is currently much talk in education circles about NCEA Level Two being the preferred level of attainment for school leavers. From the boys' comments, this is not going to be easy for a number of them to achieve, particularly in some of the more traditional subjects. As an English teacher, I know of a number of boys who despite their and the school's best efforts will struggle to achieve at the required standard for Level Two. There needs to be sufficient flexibility in programmes of work to offer the less academically able students a chance to achieve success. The schools involved in his study are clearly already expending considerable energy on addressing this issue.

5.11 Other areas of interest

There were some other areas affecting engagement that were mentioned on more than two occasions. The boys who mentioned these were convinced of their contribution to their engagement. These will be addressed briefly at this point.

5.11.1 Examination support

At various times throughout the interviews, boys spoke about the support their schools gave them at examination time. One boy felt that the inclusion of a mid-year and an end-of-year examination was one way in which the school supported his studies. He found them a useful benchmark in that he was able to see how well he was doing in the external standards and in which areas he was weakest. He felt that these opportunities to evaluate his progress helped him refocus and maintain his engagement in his studies. Generally, the boys who mentioned examination support spoke of the efforts their schools made to give them study tips and advice. This was done through a number of media: school diaries, the daily notices, newsletters, moodle, at year level and senior assemblies, during tutor class, and in subject classes.

Most boys were happy with the existing level of support, although one boy listed it as one of the changes he would make. He felt that there needed to be more effort made to show boys how to study. He wanted to see more than just quick tips being given and saw a need for study skills and goal setting to be part of each curriculum area. This is an area that boys see the value of, and is one way in which their school can support them to do well in school and NCEA examinations.

5.11.2 Study periods

Another often mentioned theme was the use of study periods to support boys in completing their homework tasks. It has become clear from the interviews that many boys do not expect to work at home in their own time. They admit to rushing to complete homework in class so there is no need to do so at home. Some spoke of struggling to complete work at home, often due to lack of motivation, even though they knew it would be beneficial for them to do so. Two boys listed the inclusion of a study period as one of the changes they would make. They felt that the provision of school time would ensure more boys complete their homework. Interestingly, one of the boys had had his NCEA Level One certificate endorsed with Excellence and preferred to get his homework done at school in order to free his evenings up for study, particularly as examinations loomed. Another solution mentioned by one boy was the establishment of an after school homework centre.

5.11.3 Access to music

Three boys felt that being able to listen to music whilst completing in-class tasks would help them engage more fully. One boy, in particular, had the evidence to support the use of music to help lessen stress, but the most compelling argument from all three boys was that listening to their own music devices allowed them to filter out other students and focus on their work without being distracted. The boys who felt this helped them were allowed to listen to their music during classes when the instructional period was completed and individual tasks had been set. They were appreciative of the opportunity some teachers gave them to do this, although each of

the schools had a ‘no music in class’ policy. The idea of using music to enhance engagement in academic studies is one that often gets aired by boys in class and is an area where more research is needed.

Another boy felt strongly that music devices should be allowed at school for use during breaks. In fact, he felt so strongly about this matter, that he listed it as one of his changes. He was a musician and enjoyed listening to music for both interest and relaxation. Whilst having music devices at school can cause problems in terms of loss and theft, for those boys who have little interest in playing sport during breaks, it does allow them to pursue other interests.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This study has investigated the school-wide factors that enhance and hinder boys' academic engagement in boys' schools by asking the boys themselves. The focus has been on gaining greater insights into their daily reality, and it is entirely proper that their voices dominate. Listening attentively to their messages provides educators with new understandings and new ways forward.

6.2 Contributions to knowledge

This study seeks to add, in some small measure, to the growing body of literature relating to boys' education. Being granted the opportunity to step out of the classroom, to leave my managerial and leadership responsibilities behind and have the luxury of reading and thinking has been very special to me. As a researcher-practitioner whose everyday work is solidly anchored in a boys school, I have been in awe of those researchers whose readings have inspired, and challenged me, sometimes exciting me with a new perspective and at other times creating a sense of agitation which has forced me to re-evaluate my own beliefs.

Albeit small, this study has much to offer educators in schools who seek to find solutions to the current concerns relating to our boys. If, on reading this, they are excited by a previously unimagined perspective that will be immensely satisfying to me and, I am sure, to the boys who described their situations, gave their reasons and offered some valuable insight into the ways we can move forward from here. If on the other hand they feel agitated by some of the findings of this study and are forced to re-evaluate their beliefs, the countless hours of hard work by myself and the many people who have supported me will have been worthwhile.

6.3 Limitations of this study

All research studies have their limitations. This study does not make extravagant claims, nor does it pretend to be exhaustive. For a sole researcher there are practical limits on what is achievable and the study is of necessity small in scale. Fifteen interviews and 15 transcriptions to type up and then code, were more than enough. Increasing the sample size might bring new insights but Kvale (2007) suggests that a handful of additional interviews would intensify workload with little commensurate gain.

This study offers a snapshot of the academic engagement of Year Twelve boys. Through their responses, we get a clearer view of the manner in which schools impact on their engagement. As with all snapshots, however, the view is not focused on one particular aspect. As the researcher, I have made many decisions that have impacted on the direction this study has taken. Ultimately, however, it is the boys who have decided on those aspects that gain dominance. The fact that there is not just one, but a selection, may well be seen as a limitation by some, and yet to repeat the words of Cohen et al. (2007) schools are "messy, full of contradictions, richness, [and] complexity" (p. 167). Consequently, in addressing the question this study poses, we cannot expect there to be just one solution. This study offers some insight into how the school-wide factors highlighted by the boys impact on their motivation and academic engagement. Further research is needed if we are to gain a deeper understanding.

For some, the student perspectives may lack legitimacy. As the researcher, I acknowledge that there are other stakeholders within a secondary school context whose perspectives are equally legitimate and valuable. It is true that if the perspectives of those from other interest groups were sought, there would be some conflict between the various groups and even within each group. This study did not seek to legitimise one group's perspective over another, nor seek balance between the groups. The topic came from my own concerns and a desire to understand the

viewpoints of Year Twelve boys. I make no apologies for exclusively seeking out their views.

6.4 Implications for schools

This study has highlighted a number of areas that need careful consideration if the academic engagement of our Year Twelve boys is to be enhanced. I recommend that all boys' schools:

- Provide **quality career education programmes** as a compulsory part of the curriculum at all secondary school levels. Whilst there is already a legal obligation to provide this, it is clear that many schools are paying lip-service only. The emphasis must be on quality; the programme must utilise a variety of media, include group and individual approaches, and be available to all boys in Years Nine through to Thirteen.
- Employ a **full-time specialist Careers Advisor.** In many schools, the Careers Advisor is a well-meaning teacher who has stepped out of the classroom for a few hours to take on this role. The provision of quality careers advice has such a marked effect on academic engagement that it requires a staff member who is trained in that area and devoted to that alone.
- Reduce classes that are currently over the **optimal 19 students for Year Twelve** to ensure all boys have a greater opportunity to form stronger relationships with their teachers and receive effective feedback, both of which are vital factors in enhancing their engagement in their studies.
- Are very clear about how they **set and articulate their expectations.** It is vital school's expectations are perceived to include and be accessible to all boys.
- Ensure that students and their classes have **easy access to computers** in all curriculum areas, for homework completion during their breaks, and for some time after school.
- Revamp the **structure of their timetable** to provide greater flexibility, thereby ensuring that all boys, at whatever level of ability, or in whatever cluster of subjects, have an equal opportunity to get the subjects of their choice.

- Decide how they are going to meet the challenge of our **most disengaged and disruptive students** in a manner that is fair to all students. These students are having a marked effect on the engagement of many boys who want to learn.
- Offer a well-developed **professional development programme** that focuses on how best to utilise school-wide initiatives that set the scene for enhancing boys' engagement.

6.5 Final remarks

The last few months has provided me with an opportunity to meet with Year Twelve boys in a very different context to that which I have been used to. Those who volunteered to be part of this study have impressed me with their ability to articulate their thoughts and have put a very real face on the problem of boys' academic engagement. As the end of this project draws near, I am left with a much greater appreciation of the wisdom of boys. They have much to offer this debate. Their perspective is invaluable if we are to find a way forward.

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