The Lived Experience of Teenage Alternative Entry Students

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to all the Diploma of General Studies pathway students who completed at least a semester of the program during my 27 years of involvement. Nearly half of you went on to complete a bachelor's degree at this institution (formerly a college of higher education, now a university college) while an untold number completed degrees at other institutions. This is an outstanding performance, given attrition rates of around 50 per cent in Australian Alternative Entry Programs. We have reason to be proud of this record.

CERTIFICATION

Statement of Original Authorship

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at this institution, an Australian or overseas university or any other institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed: David Potter

Date: 20 July 2020

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation describes a qualitative grounded study that examines the lived experience of teenage Alternative Entry Program (AEP) students, using data from two male and two female participants enrolled in an AEP at a private college of higher education (now a university college) in regional New South Wales. From the literature, it is evident that age tends to be an impediment to the academic progress of such students, with younger age being associated with higher attrition rates. Having a better understanding of the causes might make it possible to address the attrition and improve the performance of younger AEP students, thereby producing savings in time, money, and resources. The findings of the study show that teenage AEP students can perform effectively from Day One even after two years out of school, and despite not having completed Years 11 and 12. This success appears to be independent of their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), but closely linked to agency, which receives impetus from student goals. Success is likely to follow when career goals have been explored, matched to self-recognised potential, committed to, and then converted to strategic study goals. The research design is a bricolage of paradigms (constructivist-interpretivist and narrative), methodologies (mini-case study and grounded theory), and methods (narrative). The data were constructed, using reflective documents written by the participants, interviews, and researcher observations. The more successful participants were goal-driven and agentive. They engaged in study from Day One, having processed the experience of past academic underperformance and brought to the AEP new attitudes to study. Less successful students appeared to learn less from their initial self-analysis, to undervalue the AEP, and to resist taking responsibility as agents. The plans that teenage students institute in the orientation phase of an AEP set the tone for their unfolding semester. Making a positive start enables them to consolidate in the middle phase, where they grow in confidence and self-efficacy through interacting in the educational interface, and end the semester well, feeling satisfied—even excited—to be a step closer to commencing a degree program. The study fills several gaps in the literature, including the need for qualitative studies that feature the teenage voice, including the male voice. It reinforces the point that ATAR has limited value as an indicator of academic potential. And it demonstrates the value of

second-chance education for teenage AEP students, providing evidence that not all the students with academic potential are identified in senior high school.

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GLOSSARY

This list identifies the key words, expressions, and abbreviations used in the dissertation:

Academic game. A metaphor for the experience of learning. Bourdieu (1985) wrote about students developing a "feel of the game" (p. 14). The most successful participant in this study was a very successful sportsman who appeared to see the AEP as a new game to be mastered and won. Playing the game seemed an apt metaphor for the challenges faced by teenage AEP students.

Agency. Acting intentionally to influence one's functioning. Students demonstrate agency by making strategic decisions that move them in the direction of attaining their study and career goals.

Alternative Entry Program (AEP). An orientation program designed to enable "the person to undertake a course leading to a higher education award" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 302). AEPs are qualifying courses that offer a second chance to earn a university place, thereby providing alternative matriculation. Such courses are usually one or two semesters in length. They may be called enabling, bridging, transitional, preparatory, or access programs and may include AQF level 5 diploma programs used as pathways to undergraduate degree programs.

ATAR. Australian Tertiary Admission Rank, a percentile ranking that indicates a student's position relative to other students based on Year 12 results. Most, but not all, Year 12 students in Australia earn an ATAR.

AQF. "The Australian Qualifications Framework is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. It incorporates the qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications framework" (AQF, 2013, p. 9).

Backstory. An AEP student's backstory is defined by the experiences they have before enrolling in an AEP, including their family *habitus*, their school experience, and their experience of participating in the cultural life of their community.

Battle. A term borrowed from Krause (2005) to encapsulate the struggle many AEP students have in attempting to prioritise study over competing interests or roles, and engage consistently with their coursework.

CALD. Culturally and linguistically diverse. This term has replaced terms like LBOTE (language background other than English), and NESB (non-English-speaking background).

Centrelink. Centrelink is an Australian Government service that provides support to Australians facing financial hardship.

Direct entry students. Students who possess the requisite qualifications to commence a course of study, for example, Year 12 students whose ATAR qualifies them to enrol in a university course. These are sometimes referred to as *traditional* students as distinct from *non-traditional* students, who earn entry via some other pathway such as an AEP.

DGS. Diploma of General Studies, a 1-year course offered at Avondale College of Higher Education (now Avondale University College) and accredited as an AQF level 5 diploma. The course had previously been a 2-year diploma (1995-2014). Used as a pathway, not an end in itself, it produces no DipGenStuds graduates.

Educational interface. The psychological space in which academic engagement occurs, including the physical space provided by the institution and the various channels of interaction available to students, lecturers and support staff in the processes of learning.

Emotions. No attempt is made to define emotion, but a range of emotions believed to be experienced by AEP students is identified and discussed.

Engagement. The time, effort and resources that students apply to their study.

FIF. First in family to participate in higher education. Such students are thought to be deficient in cultural capital and to lack insider knowledge of the rules of the academic game.

Goals. Two types of goal contribute significantly to the academic performance of AEP students: career goals and proximal study goals. AEP students typically form a career goal in the backstory. If it is a stable goal, it may be used to generate proximal study goals.

Habitus. A concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1973; 1979) to refer to patterns of thinking, acting, and classifying, developed subconsciously by individuals in their milieus.

Identity. The meanings, role performances, and self-understandings that define individuals, enabling them to be recognised as a certain kind of person.

LSES. Low socio-economic status.

Maturity. The stage of being fully adult. A teenage individual commencing an AEP is not likely to be fully mature as a student, but some are more mature than others in that they demonstrate a willingness to engage in the coursework at a depth that is acceptable to lecturers. Those who do not achieve this may be judged to be *immature*. The literature identifies the characteristics of such students.

Narrative. A qualitative research paradigm that uses stories from the lived experience of participants to reconstruct, analyse, and make sense of their experience. The restorying process creates not history, but interpretations and partial truths, giving such narratives a fictive quality. Narrative is useful for studying complex human phenomena such as identity formation and complements other interpretivist paradigms. Narrative involves the co-creation of extensive data, using multiple methods, honouring the perspective and voice of participants and benefiting from researcher reflexivity.

Non-traditional students. A term that originated in North America and refers to students with at least one of these characteristics: delayed enrolment, studying part time, full-time worker, financially independent, has dependants, a single parent, lacks a high school qualification. In Australia, non-traditional students have at least one of these characteristics: mature age, VET pathway, AEP pathway, LSES, CALD, Indigenous, rural, FIF, part-time, flexible entry, early school leaver, gap year(s), full-time worker. Some question whether traditional university students still exist as most university students now have part-time employment. The concept of the traditional

university student arose in the elite era when most university students came from backgrounds of wealth and privilege, straight from high school (often a private school), and studied on campus, full time.

NUHEP. Non-university higher education provider. When this study commenced, the host site was a NUHEP. It is now a university college.

Orientation. The transition period of the AEP experience, typically the first few weeks. While an AEP is a tertiary orientation program, students commencing an AEP usually receive an orientation at the commencement of the program.

Second chance. Most AEP students experience their first chance to matriculate at high school, by earning an acceptable ATAR in Year 12. An AEP provides a second chance for students who do not achieve this.

Self-efficacy. Confidence in one's capacity to successfully perform tasks like academic tasks.

SES. The social and emotional supporters who help to sustain students, including family members (especially parents), teachers, peers, and significant others.

SEL. Socio-emotional learning. Learning is generally a social process, wherein students interact with others, including family, peers, teachers, other institutional staff and community members.

Student-parent. An individual who is both a parent and a higher education student.

TAFE. Technical and further education. These institutions provide a more practical approach to education than universities and offer flexible pathways to higher education.

VET. Vocational education and training, an education sector that provides hands-on training to develop work skills in a range of technical and practical areas.

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

Conference and symposium presentations

Potter, W. D. J. (2010, October). Overview of Avondale College's Diploma of General Studies (1991-2010). *Extending Access to Higher Education.* Symposium conducted at the meeting of the Council of Private Higher Education, Kirribilli, NSW.

Potter, W. D. J. (2012, October). *Numbers don't tell the whole story: A tertiary diploma pathway course widens access to higher qualifications*. Paper presented at the L. H. Martin Institute conference, AQFs 5 & 6: Debating the Future of Mid-level Qualifications in Australia. Melbourne, VIC.

Potter, W. D. J. (2014, November). *Extending literacy: Addressing the needs of marginalised groups in Papua New Guinea and Australia*. Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Literacy Conference of the Reading Association of Papua New Guinea (RASPNG). Waigani, Papua New-Guinea.

Publications

Potter, W. D. J. (2012). Numbers don't tell the whole story: A case study of an alternative pathway to tertiary studies. *Teach Journal, 6*(2), 39-45. Available at https://research.avondale.edu.au/teach/vol6/iss2/10

Potter, W. D. J. (2014). Extending literacy: Addressing the needs of marginalised groups in Papua New Guinea and Australia. *PNG Journal of Literacy, 1*, 1-14.

Chapter 1: The Game Begins

1.1 Introduction

The focus of this dissertation is the lived experience of teenage students in alternative entry programs (AEP) as illustrated by four research participants—two male (Andrew & Ben) and two female (Jodi & Gaara)—who were in classes that I taught when they enrolled in the Diploma of General Studies (DGS). Pseudonyms are used for these participants throughout the dissertation. The study examines the expectations, goals, self-beliefs, and emotions that teenage AEP students bring with them from high school, showing how these attributes fare as the students move through the program and attempt to re-engage with study processes and form a college student identity. While the dissertation responds, in part, to Newell's (2012) identification of the need for qualitative studies about students' perceptions of the effectiveness of AEPs in preparing them for subsequent degree study, the central focus is the student experience.

1.1.1 Subject matter

Since the emergence of the Open Foundation Program (OFP) at the University of Newcastle in 1974 in response to the desire of unqualified mature age students to access degree programs, the availability of AEPs has expanded in Australia. Most universities now offer such programs, which cater for a wide range of non-traditional students, including teenage second-chance students. Much has been written about the need for these programs and their impact on the enrolees. It seems such courses will be needed as long as there are students who finish high school unprepared for higher education, yet harbouring life goals that require a university degree. While most school leavers aspire at some point to continue with study, many fail to make study a priority, develop effective academic skills, or become agents of their own academic success.

The purpose of AEPs is to prepare the students for the next step by teaching them the "rules of the [academic] game" (Nairz-Wirth, Feldmann, & Spiegl, 2017, p. 15). This re-orientation involves gaining an understanding of the tacit dimension of university culture and the kind of thinking that is valued at university level, as exemplified in the expectations of lecturers (Devlin, 2013). Students from privileged

backgrounds, with parents who are graduates, are more likely to have knowledge of these rules than students whose parents have no experience of higher education. The literature identifies the special challenges faced by non-traditional students, for whom any of these disadvantages may apply: LSES (low socio-economic status), FIF (first in family to attempt higher education), CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) [formerly NESB, non-English speaking background], regional or remote, low basic skills, early school leavers, negative past experiences of education, low self-esteem, immaturity, and low study motivation. Such disadvantages are experienced by students from many culture groups, including Indigenous Australians (Hall, 2015). These students need help in developing the self-belief and self-efficacy that facilitate becoming successful independent learners. The participants in this study achieved success despite coming from backgrounds that involved varying kinds of disadvantage.

The traditional path to higher education requires Year 12 students to earn a qualifying ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank). Most AEP students lack a qualifying ATAR, and many have no ATAR, due either to poor advice or to their own choice. ATAR can be a source of discouragement to them. Without AEPs to turn to, these students would be unable to access higher education. Were the ATAR a reliable mechanism for identifying potential higher education students, the value of AEPs could be questioned, but there is evidence that the ATAR has limited predictive power. It has been found that ATAR tends to reflect SES (Gale & Parker, 2013). It has also been found that Year 12 results have no "screening potential" (Whannell, 2013, p. 291) for accepting students into an AEP. While ATAR is still used to select students into undergraduate programs, it is just one of many selection criteria. In 2016, only 26 per cent of students were admitted to university based on ATAR (Pilcher & Torii, p. 8, 2018): almost three quarters of entrants met some other criteria. While there is a positive relationship between ATAR and academic performance, there is "huge variation" (Messinis & Sheehan, 2015, p. 18) among individual results. Many students with a low ATAR do well academically while many with a high ATAR underperform. It is true that there is a correlation between ATAR and degree completion rates, but many with low ATARs perform well in degree programs; for example, half (50.6%) of students with an ATAR in the 30-50 range (too low for university entrance) complete a degree within 6 years of starting

(Kemp & Norton, p. 17, 2014). AEP students need to know that ATAR is no longer relevant to them.

There are many alternative pathways to higher education, including schemes that modify admission qualifications, special entry provisions, sub-degree programs such as diplomas, VET pathways, and enabling programs (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014). Enabling programs come in a range of types, using various names, including foundation studies, foundation access, university preparation, university access, tertiary enabling, tertiary access, and the like. The purpose of these programs is to help identify students with the potential to succeed in higher education, or to better prepare students who have been identified as having skills deficits. In this dissertation, the acronym AEP includes any program—including sub-degree programs—offering a course of study designed to prepare students for entry to a bachelor's degree program. Generally, these courses are one to two semesters in length. Most Australian universities offer such courses (Bookallil & Rolfe, 2016). The AEP taken by the participants in this study was a 2-year sub-degree diploma that has subsequently been reduced to one year, the DGS, an accredited Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level 5 diploma, offering units that meet the AQF level 7 criteria.

Australia's AEPs are helping to meet an agenda of widening access to, and participation in, higher education, especially among disadvantaged groups such as those listed above (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). These students benefit from ongoing academic support (Carpenter, Dearlove, & Marland, 2015) of the sort typically provided by AEPs. This support achieves its purpose as the performance of many AEPs indicates, with two thirds and more of the students articulating into degree programs successfully completing their degrees (Newell, 2012). Former AEP students report that the AEP helped them become better students, with improved skills in critical thinking, self-regulation and organisation, and time management; the courses gave them a "head start" (Levy & Earl, 2012, p. 333) over other students in their degree program and putting them ahead of the game. The present study supports this finding.

1.1.2 Major findings

While no studies specifically address the lived experience of teenage AEP students, information about the performance of younger students is available (Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999; Ballantyne, Madden, & Todd, 2009; Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Cantwell, Archer, & Bourke, 2001; Hodges et al., 2013; Johns et al., 2016; May & Bunn 2015; Whannell & Whannell, 2014). The first point to note is that AEPs make a useful equity contribution to Australian higher education by improving access for students from under-represented groups (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014). Around half of AEP students complete their AEP, and about one third articulate to degree programs (Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011). By facilitating entry to higher education (Archer et al., 1999; Blyth, 2014), AEPs help meet student and institutional needs (Johns et al., 2016), as well as national objectives for the higher education of young Australians (Bennet, Powter, Clarke, & Goode, 2013; Newell, 2012). Some researchers have found evidence that students articulating to university from an AEP are less likely to drop out of their course than traditional entrants (Chesters & Watson, 2016). This study reveals why some students have a very low risk of dropping out while others have a higher risk.

A finding that causes concern is the correlation between age and academic performance for AEP students: being younger is associated with lower academic success and higher attrition. Younger AEP students tend to have poorer writing skills, to be less engaged academically, to bring a superficial approach to learning, to attempt to pass with minimal effort, and to suffer from academic inertia (Archer et al., 1999; Ballantyne et al., 2009; Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017). With targeted socio-emotional support, an appropriate curriculum that offers challenge as well as scaffolding, and teachers who make them feel that they belong, even young AEP students can develop the skills and self-efficacy needed for academic success (De Jong, Cullity, & Ashton, 2011; La Guardia, 2009; McNaught & Benson, 2015). Younger AEP students can also benefit considerably from family support, especially parental support as this study demonstrates.

The literature shows that student goals matter: having clear career goals contributes to academic success (Ryan & Hopkins, 2013). These goals may include not just self-goals, but also service goals that provide a sense of making a worthwhile contribution to humanity (Yeager, Bundick, & Johnson, 2012). Personal

goals can be a powerful motivating force when converted to study goals. Enrolling with the goal of doing just enough work to pass puts students at greater risk of not passing (Archer et al., 1999; Cantwell, 2004). Being uncertain and unclear about goals is a major factor in attrition (Hodges et al., 2013), but being focused and having clear goals is an important factor in student success (Levy & Earl, 2012), encouraging students to become agents of their own success. This study reveals the degree to which the career goals of the participants impacted their academic performance. Envisioning a professional future can boost identity development and academic achievement (Sica, Crocetti, Ragozini, Sestito, & Serafini, 2016).

1.1.3 Unresolved issues

The present study offers insights into the issues identified here. One issue to be resolved is the question of whether AEPs actually widen participation or whether they just give a second chance to underperforming middle-class students (Wheelahan, 2009). What is being achieved at some universities suggests that the reality matches the rhetoric (McMillen, 2017; Newell, 2012). Whether second-chance students deserve this second chance may be the wrong question to ask. What really matters is how well the students respond to their second chance and how successful they are in subsequent degree study. A growing body of literature is providing answers to these questions (Habel, Whitman, & Stokes, 2016).

Another question to be considered is whether students articulating into degree programs from AEPs lower undergraduate standards (Shah & Whannell, 2017; Southgate & Bennett, 2014). Some claim that standards have been compromised (Stokes & Wright, 2012). Others argue that structural inequality is the real problem and that steps must be taken to up-skill LSES students and help them develop the tacit knowledge needed for success in higher education (Devlin, 2013).

There is the question of what can be done to address the “stubbornly persistent under-representation of disadvantaged groups” (Sellar, Gale, & Parker, 2011, p. 50). Students from these groups are not underrepresented on account of lack of ability, but because of life events like financial pressure (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011; Gale & Parker, 2013; Munro, 2011; Whannell & Whannell, 2015).

While the problem of high attrition rates (Hodges et al., 2013) needs to be addressed, restricting entry defeats the objective of widening participation. Ways of improving student engagement must be found (Hellmundt & Baker, 2017).

Not enough is known about what happens to AEP students who withdraw or fail as their voices are not currently being heard (Habel & Whitman, 2016). Perhaps there are things to be learned from their experience that could improve retention rates, curriculum decisions, and processes of socio-emotional support.

There is more to learn about the part played by emotions in the experience of AEP students. The contributions of academic staff can provide emotional support for these students and boost their sense of hope (Haigh, Reynolds, & Levy, 2007; Rowe, Fitness, & Wood, 2015; Stone, 2008).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Not enough is known about the lived experience of teenage AEP students and what being an AEP student means to them. A grounded study is needed to examine the processes at work, including the impact of their career goals; the contributions made by their socio-emotional supports, including family; their emotional responses to the institution, the AEP, the academic staff, and their peers; their engagement in the educational interface; and their embracing of the student role and progress in forming a college student identity. This mix produces considerable variation in the outcomes achieved by individual students. It is known that younger AEP students have lower completion rates and higher attrition rates than their more mature peers. The cost of this underperformance is high. A better understanding of the student experience is needed if progress is to be made in improving their academic engagement and reducing the high attrition rates. This knowledge could lead to greater efficiencies as well as greater personal satisfaction and joy for the students.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a grounded qualitative study of the lived experience of teenage AEP students. To create data, four participants were selected from one student cohort of an AEP offered at a regional college of higher education—now a university college—in New South Wales. It is a case study, with four embedded mini-cases (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2012), employing a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), a narrative

paradigm (Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1996; Charmaz, 2011) in the analysis. The original purpose of the study had been to assess the effectiveness of the AEP, but in the planning phase the purpose evolved and the study became a narrative investigation of the student experience, giving voice to the stories of the selected participants. See Appendix A for a brief history of the AEP taken by the four participants in this study.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the understanding of the lived experience of teenage AEP students, showing how they respond to the institution, the course (curriculum), the lecturers, the pedagogy—or, more precisely, andragogy (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2015)—the support staff, their peers, and the academic load. It further reveals how they manage to balance the study role with other competing roles, especially paid employment, plus social and sporting commitments (none of the participants had significant domestic commitments). Given the high attrition rates of younger AEP students, it is arguably a matter of urgency that steps be taken to address the problem. Studies like this can help to identify areas where improvements might be made. This knowledge offers benefits for all stakeholders, including policy makers, institutions, curriculum planners and deliverers, support personnel, plus students and their families. It holds the promise of uncovering ways to improve the quality of the student experience and of student engagement—which might be expected to result in improved academic outcomes. Currently, we know that younger AEP students are underperforming; but what is not clearly understood is the lived experience of these underperforming students, why it is that they underperform, and what might be done to improve their academic performance.

1.5 Primary Research Questions

After a lengthy gestation period, the primary research question emerged:

What does being an AEP student mean to teenage AEP students?

Four subquestions were developed to help drive the search for answers to this question:

1. How do teenage AEP students connect with the AEP?

2. How do teenage AEP students connect with socio-emotional supports?
3. How do teenage AEP students connect with themselves?
4. What explains the variation in the academic outcomes of teenage AEP students?

It can be seen that the student experience is the primary focus of the study. The findings deliver results that have implications for a range of stakeholders, including not just AEP students, but also institutions, teachers and tutors, curriculum developers, and the families—especially the parents—of teenage AEP students.

1.6 Research Design

The methodology (Chapter 3) explains the selection of the participants and the data-gathering instruments, plus the procedures that were followed in the pilot study and throughout the data-gathering phase. Convenience was a factor in the selection of participants in that those selected happened to be in the AEP class when the researcher was ready to begin amassing data, and "purposive sampling" (Robinson, 2014, p. 32) was used to select 4 from the 19 volunteers who expressed an interest in joining the study. A balanced gender representation was sought, and only teenagers were chosen. Stratified sampling was used to select participants with different levels of qualification—two with an ATAR and two without, including a Year 10 leaver who had been working for two years since leaving school. The main data-gathering phase covered their first semester at college as AEP students. The first data-gathering round at the start of the course (Wk1) sought information about their backstory (home & school experience) and how they came to be in the AEP. An instrument was developed for this purpose (see Table 6) and a pilot study was undertaken. Throughout the remainder of the semester, data were gathered systematically in three forms: semi-structured interviews, reflective documents written by the participants, and researcher observations. The reflective documents, including a reflective journal, constituted part of the coursework for two of the AEP units. These data were used in building the mini-case studies at the heart of the project. The AEP phase of the participants' stories yielded evidence of the participants' attitudes to study and their interactions in the educational interface, providing a basis for making judgments about their success in forming a college student identity in the AEP. It showed how well they had learned the rules of the academic game and how effectively they were using them.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the principle that "narrative inquiry is stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), that stories are the basis of our learning. The narratives reconstructed here arise from the co-created understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) of the participants and the researcher. The guiding theory is a bricolage that borrows from the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2013) and the narrative paradigm (Bamburg, 2004; Bruner, 2006; Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008; Spector-Mersel, 2010). Both paradigms involve interpretation and construction, and the constructed narratives provide the data analysed in the study.

1.8 Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Researchers cannot avoid making assumptions about components of the research process. They also have to face the reality that their studies are limited in what they achieve as well as limited by constraints that apply in the research setting, including delimitations they have chosen to apply.

1.8.1 Assumptions

Researchers necessarily make assumptions, especially in the early stages of their planning as assumptions help to drive curiosity. Researchers need to identify these assumptions and not let uncritical assumptions drive research processes and introduce distortions. Given that qualitative research is inductive, with a strong subjective element, researchers need to resist the temptation to predetermine their findings. As the structure of a project evolves, the findings need to be grounded in the data. I have made a number of assumptions in this study. First, I have assumed that the cohort from which the participants were chosen was a typical group of AEP students and that the experience of the chosen participants would help to answer the research questions. I have assumed the narratives of the participants have intrinsic value apart from any generalisable value. I have assumed the participants have answered truthfully and accurately to the best of their ability and provided quality data. The truth they share is their narrative truth (Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2008), a subjective interpretation of their experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Like all qualitative accounts, their emerging self-understandings have a fictive quality (Mus, 2012). Their self-accounts may vary from one telling to another, depending on

the occasion, the audience, and their intended purpose (Chase, 2005). I have assumed that these narratives constitute reliable evidence (Polkinghorne, 2007) for developing a thesis about identity formation among teenage AEP students.

1.8.2 Limitations of the study

All studies have limitations, matters over which researchers have no control. Researcher bias is a reality in all research, bringing the possibility of perceptual misrepresentation. This can be minimised by having rigour built into the methodology. A convenience sample might not adequately represent the population, and a sample of four participants cannot possibly represent Australia's population of more than 20,000 AEP students (McMillen, 2017). The participants in this study were not chosen randomly, but were selected from a small pool of around 20 potential candidates. As a fee-paying program offered by a NUHEP, the DGS might not be a typical AEP. The study was also limited in time as the data had to be collected in the one semester that I shared with the participants.

1.8.3 Delimitations

By choosing particular problems, research objectives, and research questions, researchers set boundaries and delimit the scope of their research projects. Studies are further delimited by the chosen theoretical perspectives, site(s) and participants, starting time for data collection, and duration of the data-collection phase. This study was delimited in all these ways.

1.9 Organisation of the Dissertation

This first chapter has sketched the main features of a research project designed to explore the lived experience of teenage AEP students.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature that has informed the study, including the history of AEP education in Australia plus the issues of agency, academic engagement, socio-emotional learning, and identity formation—specifically college student identity formation.

Chapter 3 explains the emergent methodology of the project, including the selection of the research question, the site, and the participants, plus the methods of data creation and data analysis, and the issues of representation in relation to the writing of the report.

Chapters 4 to 7 present the findings and discussion: the backstory (Ch.4), the orientation period or "opening game" (Ch.5), the consolidation period or "middle game" (Ch.6), and the final weeks or "endgame" (Ch.7). A postscript reports how three of the four participants completed a bachelor's degree after leaving the AEP.

Chapter 8 concludes the study, reflecting on the findings, making recommendations for the key stakeholders, and suggesting directions for future research. It also identifies the contribution this study makes to knowledge in the AEP field. The study shows that it is possible for teenage AEP students to boost their self-efficacy and begin to develop a college student identity quite quickly, giving evidence of this within a month of commencing an AEP. They can start playing the academic game and gaining skill from Day One.

Summary

This chapter has outlined a qualitative research project designed to gather rich data for the purpose of examining and describing the lived experience of teenage AEP students and improving our understanding of the uneven success they achieve. The next chapter will examine the literature that has informed the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the literature that has informed the study, including the literature on alternative entry programs (AEPs), socio-emotional support, student engagement, agency, and identity formation—specifically, student identity formation. The literature on AEPs helps to contextualise the study by noting what is known about AEP students. While an AEP is a group setting where people can share and gain mutual encouragement for learning, not all teenage AEP students take the opportunity to share in this way. This study notes the importance of socio-emotional supporters to the thriving of AEP students. Given that younger AEP students can be emotionally vulnerable, the quality of their socio-emotional support matters significantly. While participants in the academic enterprise can encourage one another to engage—a process that institutions can facilitate—individual students make choices about the extent of their academic engagement. Teenage students, in particular, need encouragement to use personal agency effectively so that they make academically beneficial choices. Success demands that they put effort into their academic tasks—physical, emotional, and cognitive effort. By learning how to interact effectively in the educational interface, AEP students begin to form a student identity, something that for a range of reasons most did not achieve at high school. The literature provides insights into these reasons. This study adds a grounded perspective, based on the experience of four teenage AEP students, showing how and why they failed to form student identities at high school and how three of them turned this around during one semester in an AEP.

2.2 Alternate pathways in focus, past to present

In the US, many students complete high school without being adequately prepared for college (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Kuh & McCarthy, 2006; Kuh, 2009). The same appears to be the case in Australia, where it is reported that "many first year students … are considered ill-prepared for tertiary education" (Lake & Boyd, 2015, p. 58). Significant numbers do "not enter university with the kinds of study strategies, skills and attitudes which would assist them in succeeding in their studies" (Carpenter et al, 2015, p. 294). Their academic engagement is problematic (Kinzie, 2009; Krause, 2005). Many suffer from inertia and apathy and most devote

less than an optimal amount of time to study. While some of these under-prepared school-leavers do not aspire to continue with study, most do (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012; Kuh & McCarthy, 2006). The opportunity or desire may or may not be present when they leave school, but as their lives unfold, many seek to return to study via an AEP as the number of mature age students enrolling suggests (Lake & Boyd, 2015).

An AEP is a course designed to enable "the person to undertake a course leading to a higher education award" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 302). AEPs serve the needs of non-traditional students by providing a transition experience that can enlarge their understanding of university culture (Whannell & Whannell, 2014) and teach them the "rules of the [higher education] game" (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017, p. 15). In an AEP, students can develop confidence and self-belief (Elsom, Greenaway, & Marshman, 2017), which grow as they improve skills like "critical thinking, academic writing, researching, referencing, paraphrasing and literacy" (Hodges et al., 2013, p. 15). This study shows that teenage AEP students who engage effectively are likely to increase their self-efficacy and develop a sense of empowerment that prepares them for higher education (James, 2016).

Students who take AEPs are a heterogeneous aggregate, comprising individuals who typically have one or more of the following characteristics: low SES, CALD (formerly NESB), negative past experiences of education, negative personal feelings like low self-esteem, immaturity, and low study motivation; they may also be from regional or remote areas, have low basic skills, or be early school-leavers (Hall, 2015). Other sources of disadvantage include lack of appropriate careers advice, parental discouragement, and health issues (Shah & Whannell, 2017). The following section provides an overview of AEP education in Australia. The discussion includes sub-degree programs (SDP) under the general heading AEP. While SDPs usually lead to an award and incur a cost to students (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014), they are used by students to gain entry to degree programs at Australian colleges and universities. The four participants in this project were enrolled in an SDP at a private college of higher education in NSW, Australia.

2.2.1 Second-chance matriculation

The primary purpose of AEP programs is "to prepare students for tertiary study" (Baker & Irwin, 2016, p. 487). In Australia, the traditional way to matriculate (earn university entrance) is by achieving an entry level ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank), a percentile rank based on Year 12 results (Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2018). In 2016, the proportion of commencing university students accepted in this way was 26 per cent, with some 60 per cent gaining admission based on other criteria (Pilcher & Torii, 2018). AEPs make a significant contribution to this "other" admission category. They offer recent school-leavers a second chance to access higher education (Collins & Penglase, 1991; James, 2016; Ross & Gray, 2005; Shah & Whannell, 2017), contribute to the lifelong learning of mature-age students (Stehlik & Christie, 2007; Vandyke, Shanahan, & Wieland, 2012), and provide an orientation to Australian higher education for overseas students and the children of refugees (Hossain, Gorman, Lawrence, & Burton, 2012; Kong et al., 2016; Phakiti, Hirsh, & Woodrow, 2013). They also increase Indigenous participation in higher education (Clerehan, 2003; Hall, 2015). Students sometimes have more personal reasons for enrolling in an AEP. Mature age students may enrol in an attempt to inspire their children to pursue higher education; others enrol because they want to boost their self-efficacy; and some enrol to avoid unemployment (Elsom et al., 2017). An AEP is for many students a positive experience, like a door to heaven; but for others it can be an alienating experience that widens gaps between people, making it seem more like a door to hell (Habel & Whitman, 2016).

2.2.2 Value of the ATAR

The Year 12 rank has been used by Australian universities as the conventional method of selecting students since the 1960s (Cullity, 2005), when it was known as the Universities Admission Index (UAI). The UAI was replaced in 2009-2010 by the ATAR. The ATAR is now "the conventional method of university access in most Australian states" (Goggin, Ranking, Geerlings, & Taggart, 2016, p. 698). It has been considered a reliable predictor of university performance (Anderton, 2017; Baker, 2007). Previous academic performance—including high school performance—is still viewed as either the best, or a significant, predictor of university performance (Kim, Newton, Downey, & Benton, 2010; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Madigan, 2006; Roodenrys, 2008). The correlation between

ATAR and university performance for students with ranks above 80 is strong (Murphy, Papanicolaou, & McDowell, 2001; Pilcher & Torii, 2018). There is a positive relationship between ATAR and GPA (Stokes & Wright, 2012), and the better university results (i.e., higher grades) tend to come from students with an ATAR (Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2018). Completion rates also correlate with ATAR. More than 90 per cent of students with an ATAR above 90 complete their degrees (Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2018). There is also a high correlation between low ATAR and attrition (Hodges et al., 2013). This evidence is used to justify ATAR as a fair and equitable basis for distributing university places (Chesters & Watson, 2013). AEP students are likely to have no ATAR or a low ATAR (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017). A secondary interest of this study is the relationship between ATAR and academic performance for AEP students.

2.2.3 Limitations of the ATAR

Despite the positive findings about the usefulness of the ATAR, there is evidence that it is not a strong predictor for LSES students (Cullity, 2005). Nor is it a strong predictor for those with an ATAR below 80 (Pilcher & Torii, 2018). Academic success is not determined solely by a student's ATAR (Blyth, 2014; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Levy & Murray, 2005). ATAR does not always reveal a student's full potential (Haigh et al., 2007; Potter, 2012), nor does it necessarily predict a student's study skills (Carpenter et al., 2015). In teacher education, "ATAR, by itself is only a moderate indicator of academic success" (Wright, 2015, p. 12). A study of law students revealed that alternative entry students required no more support than ATAR entrants, leading to the conclusion that "law is not just the domain of high ATAR achievers" (Evers, Olliffe, & Dwyer, 2016, p. 18). There is evidence that alternative entry students can be less likely to contribute to attrition than ATAR students in undergraduate programs (Chesters & Watson, 2016). ATAR has no screening value for accepting students into AEPs, as Year 12 results correlate with neither academic performance nor attrition (Whannell, 2013). It seems that ATAR does not measure academic potential (Kemp & Norton, 2014).

Explanations have been offered for the limited predictive power of the ATAR. The clear advantage of having an ATAR above 80 has been noted, but ATARs of 80 are above the level typically achieved by AEP students. The average Year 12 rank for students in the Monash DoFS course, a sub-degree diploma (Baker

& Irwin, 2016; Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014), in the years 2000-2003 ranged from 53.7 to 55.6 (Levy & Murray, 2005). Year 12 rank, it appears, can be skewed by private schooling (Haigh et al., 2007). Students from government schools perform as well at university as students from private schools with Year 12 ranks "five to 10 points higher" (Edwards, 2008, p. 295). Many researchers have sounded warnings about the limitation of Year 12 ranking (CSHE, 2010; Carpenter et al, 2015; Dobson & Skuja, 2005; Duke, 2000; Edwards, 2008; Gale & Parker, 2013; Magennis & Mitchell, 1998; Urban et al., 1999). Further, there is evidence of a close correlation between Year 12 rank and SES (Cardak & Ryan, 2009; Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, & Huo, 2015; Pilcher & Torii, 2018; Teese, 2007). Year 12 ranks "are correlated with socioeconomic status and therefore create socioeconomic imbalances in the extent and nature of tertiary education participation" (James, Bexley, & Shearer, 2009, p. 16). AEPs serve as a mechanism for redressing some of the inequity caused by structural factors in the system.

Despite its strength, the ATAR appears to be under pressure, with its usefulness "diminishing across the sector" (Pilcher & Tori, 2018, p. 10). Given that ATAR is not an absolutely reliable selection method, it has been suggested that alternative selection approaches should be explored (Blyth, 2014; Haigh et al., 2007; James et al., 2009). Alternative methods now being used include aptitude tests, alternative entry schemes, tertiary preparation and enabling courses, plus "interviews, portfolios, auditions and admission essays" (Pilcher & Torii, 2018, p. 13). A purpose of this study is to show that without AEPs "much talent would … be lost" (Haigh et al., 2007, p. 6). AEPs provide a second chance for many deserving students.

2.2.4 Types of AEP

Because Australia does not have a national framework for open access enabling courses, the nature and structure of courses varies considerably (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011; Shah & Whannell, 2017). Typically, an AEP involves one or two semesters of full-time study (or part-time equivalent). Some courses enable students to earn academic credit that can be transferred to a subsequent degree, some offer only preparatory units providing no degree credit, and some offer a mix of the two. There are AEPs for overseas students (Phakiti et al., 2013), including Foundation Studies courses and Advanced English for Academic Purposes (University of

Newcastle website, 2019). There are courses for Indigenous students only, for example, the University of Newcastle's Yapug (Vandyke et al., 2012), Sydney University's Cadigal program (Clerehan, 2003), the Curtin University Indigenous Tertiary Enabling Course (university website, 2019), and the New England University TRACKS Tertiary Preparation Program (university website, 2019). In Western Australia, where less than half of Year 12 students are on a pathway to university (Prodonovich, Perry, & Taggart, 2014), a Murdoch University access program, TLC110 (Goggin et al., 2016), gives Year 12 students the opportunity to prepare for university entry while completing Year 12. These examples represent the wide variety of alternative entry approaches being used by Australian universities and other higher education providers.

2.2.5 Courses and schemes

A distinction is made between an AEP and an alternative entry scheme or access pathway (Christensen & Evamy, 2011). An AEP is a course that leads to an award. For example, students successfully completing the Monash DoTS (Diploma of Tertiary Studies) graduate with the diploma (Levy & Treacy, 2013). Alternative entry schemes and access pathways that target particular groups may offer bonus points to disadvantaged students to boost the ATAR and provide direct entry to an undergraduate program (Blyth, 2014). The focus of this study is a stand-alone AEP offered by an institution that was a non-university higher education provider (NUHEP) and is now a university college. While this AEP leads to a one-year AQF Level 5 diploma—the DGS—given that students use the course as a pathway, it does not produce DGS graduates.

2.2.6 Age of AEP students

The focus of this dissertation is the AEP experience of four teenage participants. Studies correlating academic performance with age consistently show poorer performance and higher attrition among younger AEP students (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Cantwell et al., 2001; May & Bunn, 2015; Whannell & Whannell, 2014; Shah & Whannell, 2017; Whitson, 1995). Age is a trait that younger AEP students share with younger undergraduate students in degree courses (Ballantyne et al., 2009). For both groups, age is the strongest predictor of attitude to study. Younger students appear to be less engaged, less confident in their writing skill, and less likely to complete the assigned course reading. Despite this, with suitable

support, second-chance students can develop the needed skills and build the "self-efficacy" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175; Habel, 2012, p. 812; Kahu & Nelson, 2018, p. 64) needed for success in higher education. Regardless of their age, AEP students can thrive in situations where they feel connected, valued, supported and challenged by the curriculum (Ryan & Hopkins, 2013; Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013). They can engage with assignments, interact with peers and lecturers, and begin to master the student role and form a student identity (Whannell & Whannell, 2015). Other researchers have reported on the experience of mature age AEP students (Stone, 2009; Willans, 2010). Less has been written about the second-chance experience of teenage students taking an AEP. We know about the negative correlations, but less is known about the processes whereby teenage AEP students achieve academic success and form a student identity.

2.2.7 High attrition

Attrition rates in Australasian AEPs are high (Bennett, Powter, Clarke, & Goode, 2013; Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Elsom et al., 2017), as high as 50 per cent and more (Goggin et al., 2016; Kemp & Norton, 2014; Pilkington & Lock, 2012). Age is a major factor in this attrition. Older AEP students typically perform better academically than younger students. Compared with school leavers, mature-age students tend to be more self-motivated learners, to have a wealth of life-based knowledge, and to have better ability to transfer knowledge (Debenham & May, 2005). Mature age students seem to adopt a deeper approach to study (Archer, Bourke, & Cantwell, 1996; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002) and to be less likely to be motivated to pass with minimal effort (Archer et al., 1999). Some researchers use the word "immaturity" (Cantwell et al., 2001, p. 232; Hall, 2015, p. 247; Shah & Whannell, 2017, p. 55) when discussing the attitude of younger students who have higher absentee rates, lower final grades, and poorer relationships with academic staff. While AEP attrition rates are high, with the right kind of support, students are able to develop the academic literacy that makes it possible for them to move on with their higher education.

2.2.8 Widening participation and academic standards

Widening participation in higher education in Australia involves accepting increasing numbers of non-traditional students. This is driven not only by equity considerations (Gale & Tranter, 2011; Leach, 2013), but also by students seeking a

second chance to matriculate (James, 2016; Shah & Whannell, 2017). Some argue that AEPs contribute little to equity in Australian higher education as the main function of the programs is to provide a second-chance mechanism for middle-class students who underperform in Year 12 (Thompson, 2009; Wheelehan, 2009). Increased access to higher education does seem to provide a greater benefit to those who can afford the cost (Altbach, 2010) than to LSES students, who continue to be under-represented. AEPs attempt to address this challenge by catering to the needs of minority and LSES students. Significant numbers of AEP students are finding places in undergraduate programs, and increasing numbers of Year 12 students with ATARs below 50 are gaining direct entry, especially at regional universities (Carpenter et al., 2015; Edwards, 2008).

Some fear that widening participation is lowering standards and increasing dropout rates (Altbach, 2010; Stokes & Wright, 2012) while others insist that the massification of higher education has had no detrimental impact on academic standards (Pitman, 2014). Formerly, only 5 per cent of school leavers—the elite—had sought higher education (Altbach, 2010). With massification, the proportion continuing on to university has gone up by a factor of ten, to around 50 per cent. It seems reasonable to expect that this dramatic increase may have put extra strain on the system by increasing the number of students needing extra support (Lake & Boyd, 2015). The performance of AEP students in undergraduate programs appears to be a little below the performance of other students: their progression rates are lower and they have around 10 per cent fewer completions (Shah & Whannell, 2017). It could be noted that AEP students are not the only ones needing academic support (Carpenter et al., 2015). Many students are not well prepared for university by their high school experience (Levy & Campbell, 2008). It is not the case that students entering degree programs via an AEP are dragging down the rest.

2.2.9 The Newcastle experiment

The largest provider of AEP courses in the region where this study was conducted is the University of Newcastle, where the history of alternative entry in Australia began with the inauguration of the OFP in 1974 (May & Bunn, 2015). Given that this region has one of the highest rates of Year 12 non-completion in Australia (Cullity, 2006), the university was responding to local demand. The success of the OFP was followed by an AEP for school-leavers, Newstep, which

commenced in 1990 (Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Vandyke et al., 2012; Whitson, 1995). The extensively studied Newcastle courses (Archer et al., 1996; Archer et al., 1999; Bourke, Cantwell, & Archer, 1998; Cantwell, Bourke, & Archer, 1997; Cantwell et al, 2001; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Collins & Penglase, 1991; Penglase & Collins, 1995; Stone, 2008) inspired similar initiatives elsewhere. As a result, enabling education in Australia has grown considerably (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Shah & Whannell, 2017). For example, the University of Adelaide's Foundation Course has been operating since 1982 (Habel, 2012), and a number of papers plus a book have examined the Monash Diploma of Tertiary Studies (DoTS, formerly DoFS), a 1-year course for recent school-leavers, begun in 1999 (Haigh et al., 2007; Levy & Campbell, 2008; Levy & Earl, 2012; Levy & Murray, 2005; Levy & Treacy, 2013). Table 1 lists a selection of academic papers examining AEPs at Australian universities.

Table 1: Selection of papers about Australian alternative entry programs

Collins & Penglase	1991	Offering a second chance—Who accepts? Characteristics of entrants to the University of Newcastle Open Foundation Course [OFC]	Profiles mature age students taking the OFC in 1988, showing that 68% were female, most were in their 20s or 30s, and many had taken a TAFE or college course.
Penglase & Collins	1995	Quality assurance in adult education: The Tertiary Access Program [Newcastle's OFC]	Examines the effectiveness of the OFC as an adult matriculation course, noting that retention was 60%-65% and the course was meeting its objectives and the objectives of students.
Whitson	1995	The maturing of the Newstep Course, the University of Newcastle, 1990-1993	Describes the beginnings in 1990 of Newstep, an AEP for selected school leavers aged 17-20. Half of the initial cohort of 70 commenced undergraduate study in 1991.
Archer, Bourke, & Cantwell	1996	Mature age students in an 'enabling' course at university: Their achievement goals, beliefs about leaning, confidence, course satisfaction and performance	Identifies 5 learning profiles, from mastery oriented to alienated. The students tend to have a deep approach to learning. No data was available to compare former OFC students in degree courses with other undergraduates.
Cantwell, Bourke, & Archer	1997	The effectiveness of enabling programmes for university entrance	Compares 2 groups of undergraduate students, 8 ex-OFC and 7 HSC, for motivation, confidence, efficacy and learning management and concludes that the OFC is meeting equity and

			access objectives.
Bourke, Cantwell, & Archer	1998	Evaluation of an equity program for university entrance	Compares achievement and attitudes of 2 groups of undergrads, 71 ex-OFC and 60 non-OFC and found that midway through their degrees, ex-OFC were as successful as the others, based on GPA.
Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke	1999	Coping at university: An examination of achievement, motivation, self-regulation…	Compares 71 ex-OFC and 61 HSC undergrads on a range of measures, including GPA and finds no significant difference in academic performance.
Cooper, Ellis, & Sawyer	2000	Expanded future opportunities provided by a bridging course at a regional university campus	Reports on a 1yr Foundation Course for mature-age students that began at Whyalla in 1988. The course evolved into the Human Services Bridging Program, which is providing access to careers in nursing and social work for a range of underprivileged students.
Cantwell, Archer, & Bourke	2001	A comparison of the academic experiences and achievement of university students entering by traditional and non-traditional means	Compares 4 groups of undergraduate students, 3 gaining entry via an AEP—OFC, TAFE TPC, & Newstep—and HSC entrants. The AEP entrants performed at a lower level than the HSC entrants, with the Newstep students being significantly below the rest, showing a strong link between age and performance.
Cantwell & Grayson	2002	Individual differences among enabling students: A comparison across three enabling programmes	Compares psychological attributes of students from 3 AEPs, the Uni of Newcastle OFC, Newstep, and TPC (TAFE). Again age was a factor. The OFC students brought a deep approach to learning, while Newstep and TPC students "retained a predominantly surface approach" (p. 305).
Levy & Murray	2005	Tertiary entrance scores need not determine academic success: An analysis of student performance in an equity and access program	Analyses the performance of AEP students (80% school leavers, 20% mature age) in Monash University's DoFS and reveals that, with appropriate support, their academic performance compares favourably with that of other entrants.
Habel	2012	'I can do it, and how!' Student experience in access and equity pathways to higher education	Shows that the Foundation course at the University of Adelaide increases student self-efficacy within one month, making it an effective pathway to university.
Hall	2015	What are the key ingredients for an effective and	Preparation for Tertiary Success, an AEP for Indigenous students from

		successful tertiary enabling program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? An evaluation of the evolution of one program	school leavers to mature age adults, first offered by the Batchelor Institute in 2000, is empowering students to move into higher education.
Whannell	2013	Predictors of attrition and achievement in a tertiary bridging program	Reports on a study of 295 students in an AEP at a regional university in NSW and identifies age (18-24) and missing classes as the main predictors of attrition. Continuing is associated with developing supportive relationships and having experiences of academic success. It is important to encourage students to begin developing a scholarly identity early in the course.

A major impetus for adding enabling programs has been the pull from above, the need of universities for more students. Because ATAR does not supply enough students (Blyth, 2014), universities increase their numbers by adding programs to upskill non-traditional students (Chesters & Watson, 2016). With most Australian universities now offering enabling courses (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017), augmented by the TAFE sector and private providers, access to higher education for non-traditional students has been significantly increased. The AEP offered by the institution where this study was undertaken was established as part of the general expansion of AEP education, accepting its first intake in 1991.

2.2.10 Necessary student skills

To succeed in higher education, AEP students need "university literacy" (Miller & Schulz, 2014, p. 78), which comprises a spectrum of skills that "can be taught" (Levin, 2012, p. 8; Levy & Campbell, 2008, p. 18). These skills include technology competency, problem-solving ability, critical thinking, and communication skills (Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010); understanding the nature of learning at university, and becoming independent learners (Turner, Krenus, Ireland, & Pointon, 2011); and knowing how to use lectures, how to conduct research, and how to prepare for exams (Levy & Murray, 2005). As Cantwell (2004) notes, AEP students need increased "intellectuality" (p. 386), at the heart of which is critical thinking, an essential skill for all higher education students (Chesters & Watson, 2016). Echoing Cantwell, Cullity (2006) notes that effective pathways promote "intellectuality [and encourage] deep learning practices" (p. 191). For a range of

reasons, students may need further education in the skills and practices valued at university. If they lack the "cultural resources" (Goldthorpe, 2007, p. 19) to "play the [academic] game" (Miller & Schulz, 2014, p. 83), students are likely to be disadvantaged. While many AEP students start their course with an inadequate understanding of the rules, it is clear that AEPs give students the opportunity to learn the rules, hone academic skills, and achieve academic success.

AEP courses that are one or two semesters in length provide rich opportunity for "enculturation" (Holden, 2005, p. 37) in the ways of higher education. The quality of the courses seems to be more significant than the length. An AEP, regardless of length, can provide a successful experience that puts students on the road to academic achievement, or it can see students repeat past patterns of behaviour that end in failure and attrition (Whannell, 2013). Many AEP students "need a boost" (Kuh, 2009, p. 685) because they are poorly prepared. For this reason, it is helpful to find out "who students are when they start college" (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008, p. 546) and why they are under-prepared for higher education. While many students may have skill deficits, deficit thinking is not an adequate response: students must be offered effective orientation and mentoring (Clerehan, 2003). AEP curricula need to be relevant and interesting, engendering in students a passion for learning (Rowe et al., 2015). Likewise, AEP teachers need a passion for inspiring students to learn, not just a passion for their subject area.

2.2.11 Undergraduate performance of AEP matriculants

A significant measure of the success of AEPs is the performance of AEP matriculants in subsequent undergraduate study. There is abundant evidence that students accepted into degrees from AEPs perform at a level that is comparable to that of other undergraduate students. For example, the degree performance of mature age students completing the University of Newcastle's OFP, compares favourably with the degree performance of students entering by other means (Cantwell et al., 1997; Bourke et al., 1998; Archer et al., 1999; Cantwell et al., 2001). The authors reported that "method of entry to a degree was not significantly related to performance in degree studies" (Bourke et al., 1998, p. 8), and former OFP students were coping "at least as well" (1999, p. 52) as other entrants in their university courses. Their comparison of the performance of students entering university from three AEPs—Newcastle's OFP, Newstep (for students aged 17-20 years), and the

TAFE Tertiary Preparation Course (TPC)—found that the performance of alternative entry students was "only slightly below" (Cantwell et al., 2001, p. 233) that of traditional entry students. Less encouraging was the evidence that the younger "Newstep students performed significantly worse" (Cantwell, et al, 2001, p. 230) than students from the other two groups, suggesting that age is a factor in the academic success of AEP students.

The University of Newcastle data reinforced the findings of a UK study of 6,866 students, which yielded two significant results. First, age was a powerful predictor of student outcomes, with mature students performing better academically than younger students. Second, giving non-traditional students university entry had "not led to any diminution of standards" (Hoskins, Newstead, & Dennis, 1997, p. 317). The different approaches to learning taken by OFP and Newstep students appeared to be the likely reason for the poorer performance of the younger students (Cantwell et al., 2001). OFP students brought a deep, achieving approach to their learning while Newstep students wanted to pass "with a minimum of effort" (p. 232). From the start of the OFP in the mid-1970s, students who chose to stay in their degree courses demonstrated that "almost without exception [they] were capable of university level study" (May & Bunn, 2015, 149). In summary, the undergraduate performance of former OFP students is comparable with that of traditional entrants qualifying by ATAR. By comparison, younger students matriculating from AEPs perform at a significantly lower level than their mature-age peers.

Similar successes are reported for other AEPs. The academic performance of former DoTS students in degree courses at Monash University is similar to that of direct entry students (Levy & Murray, 2005). More recently Levy and Treacey (2013) examined the performance of 191 former DoTS students in the first year of degree study at Monash. The former DoTS students had progression rates, retention rates, and weighted average marks that compared favourably with those of traditional entrants, leading to the conclusion that former DoTS students were "highly successful in widening access and participation in higher education" (p. 9). Likewise, the performance in degree courses of students progressing from the pre-tertiary Human Services Bridging Program at the Whyalla campus of the University of South Australia "is comparable on average with students from other backgrounds"

(Cooper, Ellis, & Sawyer, 2000, p. 5). These examples provide evidence of the success of AEPs.

Thomas (2014) interviewed teachers and leaders from 12 Australian universities to find out how AEP graduates performed in subsequent undergraduate study. The participants claimed that AEP students gaining access to undergraduate programs performed as well as students entering "via traditional pathways" (p. 811). Thomas then added the qualifying comment that his participants "struggled to provide data to support" this claim. Others have cited Thomas's data without noting his qualification (Chesters & Watson, 2016). Even so, there is evidence that many AEP matriculants perform at a comparable level to traditional students in terms of academic performance, attrition rates, and the effects of age (older students do better than younger) and gender (females do better than males) (May & Bunn, 2015; Johns et al., 2016). This dissertation adds evidence in support of this contention.

2.3 Socio-emotional learning

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) owes a debt to James Comer, whose working-class parents espoused education (Panjwani, 2011) and encouraged their children to aspire to "get a good education" (Comer, 2013, p. 95). An oft-quoted claim from a 1995 speech by Comer asserts that "no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (Hall, 2014, p. 4). The most important relationships involve teachers, peers, and families. The emotions that students experience in these relationships "can facilitate or hamper their learning and their ultimate success in school" (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004, p. 3). The relationships formed in these social situations interact with students' "cognitive success, personal identity and self-esteem" (Camilleri, Caruana, Falzon & Muscat, 2012, p. 34). As plants thrive in well-watered soil, people thrive in supportive socio-emotional environments, where their emerging identities are nourished. Through its focus on the social nature of learning and identity development and the part played by emotions, SEL theory adds to our understanding of the formation of student identity.

2.3.1 The emotional turn

The "emotional turn in higher education" (Gilmore & Anderson, 2016) reveals an increasing awareness that learning is not just a function of cognition.

Emotions—both positive and negative—play a significant part in student success (Postareff, Mattsson, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Hailikari, 2017). Making their own contributions to student well-being and emotional engagement are institutions, lecturers and the curriculum (Kahu & Nelson, 2018, p. 64). Given that strong emotions can be involved in learning contexts, students and teachers need SEL skills to manage these emotions and maintain positive relationships (Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Zins & Elias, 2006). SEL skills enable individuals to "set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others … make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively" (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011, p. 406). AEP students may lack understanding of their affective states, especially in relation to academic learning, and may commence their course with low motivation and "high levels of anxiety" (Levy & Campbell, 2008, p. 17). They can, however, work their way through these conflicts by building up their social and emotional skills (Main & Whatman, 2016).

Emotion impacts learning in complex ways. Both positive and negative emotions can support learning, and both positive and negative emotions can impede learning (Postareff et al., 2017). Positive emotions like enthusiasm for study and enjoyment of learning have beneficial effects, but positive emotions like relaxation and relief can lead to passivity, which does not benefit learning. Negative emotions like dissatisfaction, confusion, and feeling incompetent are unlikely to be beneficial; but negative emotions like shame, anxiety, and anger can drive students to greater efforts that result in academic success. A list of 21 emotions (9 positive, 12 negative) likely to be experienced by first-year students has been identified (Hailikari, Kordts-Freudinger, & Postareff, 2016). These are all emotions likely to be experienced by AEP students, who stand to benefit from learning how to manage them.

2.3.2 Feelings about self

As noted in the previous section, AEP students may commence their course with mixed emotions that include anxiety, fear and self-doubt. They can respond to such emotions by giving in to defeat or by accepting them as a character-building challenge (Baesler, 2017). Those lacking the confidence to deal with their confusion may benefit from interventions like "appropriate scaffolds" (D'Mello, Lehman, Pekrun, & Graesser, 2014, p. 167). Without effective intervention, the result can be poor academic outcomes and a surface approach to learning (Postareff et al., 2017).

To offset their poor academic record, AEP students need experiences that restore a sense of pride and enhance their self-efficacy. Doing well in early assignments contributes to this, as does connecting with academic staff (Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010; Micari & Pazos, 2012). Having a feeling of competence supports the exercise of personal agency, a significant key to academic success (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Making agentive choices boosts students' self-confidence (Daniels & Brooker, 2014; Stone, 2008). They are further empowered as they develop skills, strategies, and increased understanding (Hall, 2015). Attaining their goals brings happiness (Rowe et al., 2015) and a feeling of competence (Denham & Brown, 2010). They gain a greater sense of worth and authenticity (Stets & Burke, 2014). Self-emotions play a major part in the processes whereby AEP students reconnect with learning and reconnect with themselves.

2.3.3 Socio-emotional learning skills can be learnt

Students who struggle with the challenges of study and self-management need to know that SEL skills can be learnt. School interventions show that SEL can be taught (Guerin, 2014; Osher et al., 2016; Swartz, 2017), including the core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Guerin, 2014). Studies conducted in US primary schools found that SEL programs had "significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and … improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 417). Even a non-cognitive construct like personality may be amenable to change, as personality is comprised of skill sets, and skills can be changed (Kyllonen, Lipnevich, Burrus, & Roberts, 2014). As Hall (2014) reports, academic performance can be improved by teaching children non-cognitive skills such as "integrity, perseverance, responsibility, collaboration, and stewardship" (p. 1). Such findings provide hope for AEP students struggling to form a student identity. They need to know and accept that it is possible to develop the skills and self-discipline needed in order to become effective students.

2.3.4 Adjusting to study

The capacity of students to adjust effectively to a study program is enhanced when they enjoy positive socio-emotional support. This applies regardless of age. It benefits early childhood students (Curby, Brock, & Hamre, 2013; Durlak et al., 2011), primary school students (Berger, Alcalay, Torretti, & Milicic, 2011), high

school students (Brown, Kanny, & Johnson, 2014; Camilleri et al., 2012; Denham & Brown, 2010; Hall, 2014), pathway students (Chesters & Watson, 2016; Elsom et al., 2017), and undergraduate students (Delahunty, Verenikina, & Jones, 2014; Kelly, LaVergne, Boone, & Boone, 2012; Pitman & Richmond, 2008; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011). Studying in an environment that provides socio-emotional support helps students who are in the process of developing an academic identity (Brown et al., 2014; Lieff et al., 2012; Quigley, 2011; Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden, & Isaacson, 2009; Whannell & Whannell, 2015). They begin to believe that they can achieve academic success. With their confidence and self-belief boosted, they are likely to use a more flexible approach to persevering with study and achieving their goals (Durlak et al., 2011).

2.3.5 Parents and family *habitus*

Habitus has been defined as "acquired patterns of meaning, beliefs, behaviors and tastes" (Decoteau, 2016, p. 305), and primary *habitus* (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017) is the ways of thinking and behaving acquired by children in their home setting, where parents are usually the principal agents of support. Parents can continue to be a significant source of support for commencing AEP students (Levy & Earl, 2012). Parents may provide accommodation, financial support, help with transport, and other kinds of support, but parental support extends beyond this type of help. Their love of learning, combined with their extensive general knowledge, and passionate desire to see their children achieve, confers family capital (Gofen, 2009). Parental expectations can be more influential on a student's decision to attend university than the expectations of teachers or peers (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, & Dixon, 2010). By "providing a more stimulating physical, cognitive and emotional environment in the home" (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009, p. 244), parents can encourage their children to form "college-going *habitus*" (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, 2010, p. 24), which encourages students from an early age to assume that they will go to college. Parents with a college education are more likely to encourage college-going *habitus* (Dubow et al., 2009; Chesters & Watson, 2013). In such families there tends to be greater harmony between family *habitus* and university *habitus* than exists in families where the insider view is absent (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). University *habitus* gives students an advantage in de-coding hidden aspects of university culture (Clegg, 2011). First-in-family students are more likely to drop out

than those with parents who are graduates (O'Shea, 2016). Despite this, "*habitus* works largely independently of social class origins" (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, 2010, p. 30). College-going *habitus* is not limited to children with educated parents; disadvantaged students can also possess it and benefit from pursuing it. Disadvantages like LSES can be overcome if family values and support for learning are strong. Family can also play a large role in helping students to persist in the transition to higher education (Kelly et al., 2012). While "parents of all social backgrounds typically expect their children to attend college" (Gofen, 2009, p. 117), students may not perform well in Year 12. But changed circumstances can make family capital more educationally effective after a student decides to take an AEP.

2.3.6 Institutional support

There is evidence of a paradigm shift in university education, with a new emphasis on providing education, not just instruction (Alauddin & Ashman, 2014). There was a time when few institutions or programs placed special emphasis on students' "pastoral care" (Levy & Murray, 2005, p. 130). This situation is changing as universities respond to the needs of diverse student populations (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010). With 35 Australian universities now offering AEPs (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017), there is a greater responsiveness to the socio-emotional needs of students and the impact of emotions on learning (Rowe et al., 2015). Improved pastoral care can help students regain confidence lost through negative school experiences. Institutions providing such care become safe places for students to explore their academic potential. However, there are aspects of care that cannot be mandated and are not easily measured, despite their significant impact on students. One such aspect is kindness (Clegg & Rowland, 2010), a quality students value in teachers. Kindness is not leniency, but a quality of interaction that makes students feel valued and respected as individuals. While institutions cannot mandate kindness, they can and should encourage it as students who feel supported by their institution are more likely to achieve academic success (Meeuwisse et al, 2010; Schreiner et al., 2011; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

2.3.7 The course

An AEP course can be "transformative" (Johns et al., 2016, p. 69; Potter, 2014, p. 11), changing students' lives, unlocking the potential within, providing a bridge to higher education, and giving students a sense of empowerment (James,

2016). Students' self-efficacy grows as they develop skills in critical thinking, academic writing, researching, referencing, paraphrasing, and general literacy (Chesters & Watson, 2016). Desirable features of AEP courses include appropriate pedagogy, careful provision for student placement, valuing of students' cultural capital, integrated teaching approaches, inclusive and affirming classroom environment, contextualised learning, collaborative and problem-based learning, integrated assessment with frequent feedback and early opportunities for success, and committed staff who are keen to teach the course and ensure that students have the support they need (Trewartha, 2008). An important aspect is the provision of strong academic support during transition (Newell, 2012).

Effective courses provide scaffolding, which might include the use of shorter readings, with narrower initial interpretations, and more teacher talk (Gibbs, 2014); exemplars and model assignments can be used to demystify the process (Cullity, 2005). Scaffolding can help students avoid giving in to discouragement by showing them the way forward (D'Mello et al., 2014). In doing so, it can encourage persistence and exploration (La Guardia, 2009). Tutoring and mentoring services can provide scaffolding, thereby contributing significantly to student confidence (Debenham & May, 2005; Hodges et al., 2013).

Consideration should be given to the length of lectures. Focusing on lectures for long periods may not be to the liking of many AEP students as they tend to learn by doing and being actively involved in the learning process (Torenbeek, Jansen, & Suhre, 2013). Scheduled course hours could be limited to around 10 to 12 hours per week. The curriculum should not be narrowly focused on test preparation as this devalues non-cognitive skills and may not capture the imagination of students (Levin, 2012). AEPs are successful to the extent that they give students hope and reasons to believe that academic success is achievable. As Habel (2012) notes, effective AEPs "increase students' confidence in their ability to study at university … [and] can be highly effective in promoting academic self-efficacy" (p. 821). Courses can contribute to this through a coherent curriculum, augmented by extra-curricular activities like sport and debating clubs (Markwell, 2007) as these help to build relationships and a sense of belonging.

2.3.8 Lecturers

Lecturers have the potential to boost students' affective experience through the positive qualities they bring (Zepke & Leach, 2010), notably enthusiasm, energy, passion, and a genuine interest in students (Chernikova & Varonis, 2016; Rowe et al., 2015). My awareness of this, combined with an intrinsic desire to see students succeed, contributed to my passion for teaching. Effective lecturers understand that learning is communal, they value students' knowledge and opinions, and their classrooms are subject-centred—forums for investigating the "community of truth" (Palmer, 2007, p. 118). Students feel encouraged when they see lecturers as authentic and are significantly impacted by forming positive relationships with them (Schreiner et al., 2011). Such relationships increase the likelihood that students will be inspired to pursue academic success (Comer, 2001; Rich & Schachter, 2012). Lecturers who "bring themselves to the classroom help create a connection to students that promotes student success" (Micari & Pazos, 2012, p. 45). As noted above, students value kindness—the sort of kindness embodied in the feelings of care one has "for the life projects of the other … [making them feel] attended to, respected, or treated with care rather than indifference" (Clegg & Rowland, 2010, p. 727). The behaviour and attitudes of lecturers can benefit students at risk and improve retention (Schreiner et al., 2011), making the empathy of lecturers an important factor in AEP students successfully completing their course (Elsom et al., 2017).

2.3.9 Peers

Peers are a powerful socialising force (Brown et al., 2014). Having supportive relations with peers in the post-secondary academic environment contributes to a sense of belonging and well-being, increasing the likelihood of success (Douglass & Islam, 2009; Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Peers can include friends, classmates, or teammates; their common interests draw them into identity-forming groups through sustained interaction (Sallee & Tierney, 2007). Peers can play a part in mooring an emerging student identity (Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2007). Interacting with peers improves student morale, increasing students' awareness that the AEP journey is a shared experience, builds a feeling of belonging (Debenham & May, 2005; Meeuwisse et al., 2010), and gives students opportunity to use emotions to facilitate learning (Denham & Brown, 2010). The benefits can

promote academic success (Whannell, 2013; Poldin, Valeeva, & Yudkevich, 2016), reduce attrition (Whannell & Whannell, 2014), and encourage persistence and higher completion rates (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009). In contrast, students who distance themselves from their academic peers may find themselves at risk academically (Merrill, 2015). The peer influence on academic performance can be strong (Renninger, 2009). Through their relationships with peers and other supports students can learn how to "relate to themselves, as students" (Daniels & Brooker, 2014, p. 69).

2.4 Student engagement

Some definitions of engagement focus narrowly on what students do. For example, engagement has been defined as "the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes" (Hu & Kuh, 2002, p. 555). A more inclusive definition extends the concept of engagement to include what institutions do: "student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college *and* what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities" (Kuh, 2009, p. 683). However, this definition is not inclusive enough. The dimensions of engagement include at least three strands: the behavioural, the psychological, and the socio-cultural (Kahu, 2013); an adequate definition must include all three. Given that engaged students "are more likely to be successful" (Kahu & Nelson, 2018, p. 59), student engagement deserves careful attention. Through the quality of their academic engagement, AEP students demonstrate their acceptance of the student role, a prerequisite to forming a student identity.

2.4.1 Behavioural perspective

While there is no consensus on the dimensions of engagement (Burch, Heller, Burch, Freed, & Steed, 2015), several aspects have been examined, including behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Trowler, 2010). Behavioural engagement is easy to observe and has been the focus of much research (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006). It seems reasonable to expect students to spend time on campus, putting effort into their study, not just in the classroom, but also in out-of-class learning experiences (Krause, 2005). What students do matters as it directly affects their learning (Kuh et

al, 2000). While behavioural engagement is observable, students' reasons for engaging are less visible. The same can be said for the quality of their engagement. By putting effort into their behavioural engagement, students can avoid boredom and reduce the risk of dropping out (Whannell, Allen, & Lynch, 2010). Yet, despite attending every class, an AEP student might show little evidence of critical thinking and turn in poor quality assignments. Nevertheless, there is a correlation between class attendance and academic success (Crede, Roch, & Kieszczynka, 2010; Torenbeek et al., 2013). To achieve academic success, AEP students must develop effective study behaviour.

2.4.2 Psychological and emotional perspective

Emotional engagement concerns students' affective responses to study, that is, the extent to which they find study interesting or enjoyable, and the degree to which study gives them a feeling of belonging (Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Trowler, 2010). Many students find study a "battle" (Krause, 2005, p. 4), a "joyless slog" (Bryson & Hand, 2007, p. 356), a "struggle", or "drudgery" (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013, pp. 320-321). These negative emotions can put students at risk of dropping out or failing their course. On the other hand, "positive emotions … extend cognitive functioning" (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 15), improving student performance and making them feel more attached to their work (Sharma & Bhaumik, 2013). The relationship between emotions and learning, however, is complex (Postareff et al., 2017). While positive emotions tend to have the most positive effects on learning, negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and frustration can drive student perseverance. As Wimpenny and Savin-Baden (2013) note, some students persist despite feelings of alienation, irrelevance and drudgery; but grades tend to suffer if a student's anxiety produces feelings of incompetence. Emotion must be appreciated if the student experience is to be understood (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

2.4.3 Engagement as autonomy

Autonomy and agency are components of psychological engagement that contribute to self-belief and student success (Zepke, 2013). Higher education can help to build self-belief and empower students (Holden, 2005; Krause, 2005) as they work to become independent learners (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012; Turner et al., 2011). Autonomy is a basic psychological need that contributes to psychosocial development (Irwin, 2013; La Guardia, 2009). Students' "locus of control" (Kuh,

2009, p. 684) shifts as they learn that they can control the events that affect them. By becoming autonomous and choosing when and how to engage or disengage from study, they shift from "unfamiliarity and self-consciousness to self-sufficiency" (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013, p. 316). Being in control boosts both their motivation and their affective state (Moreira et al., 2014). Student autonomy can benefit from a well-designed curriculum that fosters self-regulated learning (Torenbeek et al., 2013; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Lecturers and tutors can also support students' evolving sense of autonomy (Micari & Pazos, 2012).

2.4.4 Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement has been viewed separately from emotional engagement, but it is helpful to see cognitive engagement as a dimension of the psychological approach, along with the behavioural, affective and conative dimensions (Kahu, 2013). Cognitive engagement refers to the thoughtfulness of a student's approach to study (Fredricks et al., 2004); it includes the depth and strategy of the effort that students expend, their self-regulation, and their developing self-efficacy. Students can bring either a surface or a deep approach (Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Habel, 2012; Massingham & Herrington, 2006). They can settle for rote learning, or they can make a deep attempt to build understanding, master material, develop self-regulation and become strategic learners. Being strategic and systematic results in efficiency, which is more important than the quantity of time spent studying (Nonis & Hudson, 2010) and improves the ability to concentrate or focus (Moffitt et al., 2011). Being committed to study involves self-discipline and the "denial of personal pleasures" (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013, p. 321). Committed students can become so "invested in their learning [that they] go beyond the requirements" (Trowler, 2010, p. 5) to engage at a deep level, pursuing mastery goals (Walker & Greene, 2009) and developing higher level thinking skills. Critical thinking is improved as students engage, especially with people whose "views and backgrounds [are] different from their own" (Markwell, 2007, p. 11). AEP students who are cognitively engaged bring a deep approach to learning as they strive to master academic material and develop critical thinking skills.

2.4.5 Engagement at the interface

Engagement is complex, involving a partnership between students and institutions, with people working together in "the educational interface" (Kahu &

Nelson, 2018, p. 67). The interface is a busy space. Teachers can contribute to student engagement by providing timely feedback, which in turn boosts students' self-efficacy (Habel, 2012; Henri, Morrell, & Scott, 2018; Merrill, 2015). Teachers can contribute to students' sense of belonging through their willingness to develop positive relationships with students (Micari & Pazos, 2012; Walker & Greene, 2009). As larger numbers of non-traditional students commence higher education, institutions have to find appropriate ways to accommodate their differences and assist them in making the transition (Gale & Parker, 2014). The cultural capital of all students must be recognised and valued so that all feel included. An adequate understanding of engagement is broadly based, encompassing the commitments of not just students, but also institutions, teachers and tutors, as well as other supporters.

2.4.6 Conclusion

Engagement has been conceived as a continuum (Bryson & Hand, 2007), bookended by the disengaged and alienated at one end and the deeply engaged at the other end, where students are in the "flow" (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 436; Sharma & Bhaumik, 2013, p. 27). Positive engagement is "associated with positive academic outcomes" (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 87). Students are more likely to engage in study if they feel good about their experiences in the "educational interface" (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Feeling well disposed to the institution, the course, lecturers and fellow students encourages effective engagement and confirms that the academic journey "is a shared responsibility" (Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2014, p. 395). While a student's approach to academic work will be located somewhere on the surface-deep continuum, those with a deep approach are likely to achieve more (Chan et al, 2014). Even so, the aim may not be to make surface learners into deep learners, but to encourage the development of problem-solving skills (Alauddin & Ashman, 2014). As students develop these skills in a supportive environment, they are empowered with the freedom to engage in their preferred ways; and as their self-belief grows, they develop an academic identity (Brown et al., 2014; Munns, Nanlohy, & Thomas, 2000; Stone, 2008). Everyone benefits from student success: student retention rates improve, the supply of graduates increases, and Australia moves closer to achieving its target of having 40 per cent of young Australians complete a bachelor's degree (Bradley et al, 2008).

2.5 Agency

A central concern for social theorists is the "enduring dilemma" (Block, 2013, p. 127) around the relationship between social structures (Connor, 2011) and agency (Bandura, 1989; 2001; 2006). Some insist that the *habitus* and cultural capital of Bourdieu (1973, 1998) are deterministic (Archer, 2007). While "social selves are always situated" (Decoteau, 2016, p. 303), agents are not necessarily prisoners of *habitus*. It is more helpful to see *habitus* as tendencies, not rigid reproduction (Faber, 2017). Agents can, and do, make decisions about the structures they have been influenced by and can reflexively influence those same structures (Sewell, 1992). Agency has been defined as "the ability of individuals to affect [*sic*] change, make autonomous and independent choices and act in self-determining ways" (O'Leary, 2007, p. 2). Being agents enables them to "play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal" (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). Environment and structure have explanatory power that accounts, in part, for the different educational outcomes of traditional and non-traditional tertiary students (Clegg, 2011; Meuleman, Garrett, Wrench, & King, 2015; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). But as Davis (2015) notes, the key to the formation of student identity is agency, not environment. The environment and its structures—the institution, curriculum, staff, peers, and other supports—can facilitate the academic journey, but students' own volition (Shah & Whannell, 2017) determines how they embrace the student role. They get to choose when to engage with study tasks, how much time and effort to invest, and whether to make learning a shared experience by interacting with tutors and peers. By choosing to be strategic, AEP students can become autonomous, self-regulated learners, determining their own academic destiny (Carpenter et al, 2015; Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2011). Exercising agency increases students' sense of control and self-efficacy (Stets & Burke, 2014) and boosts their belief in their ability to perform academic tasks (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). As Habel (2012) notes, successful AEP students develop the confidence to boast, "I can do it, and how!" (p. 811). The ways in which AEP students can exercise agency are discussed below.

2.5.1 Agency and goals

AEP students benefit from having clear goals in place from the start. A lack of clarity around goals is a major factor in attrition (Hodges et al., 2017). Individuals develop goals by examining their career options, finding a career they identify with,

and committing to it (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). It is essential that they have a clear sense of purpose (Whannell & Whannell, 2014) plus focus and aspiration (Levy & Earl, 2012). This brings the imagination into play as students strive to envision possible future selves (Clegg, 2011; Oyserman, 2013; Oyserman, Destin, & Novin, 2015; Sica et al., 2016). Personal goals, however, do not always come into focus early enough to motivate high school students to obtain an ATAR that earns university entrance. Such students need a second chance to matriculate. Students with unclear goals can benefit from an AEP that incorporates career planning in the curriculum (Ryan & Hopkins, 2013). Students tend to have instrumental, career-related reasons for attending university (Chan, 2014; Davis, 2015) and see study as a means to an end (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Chan et al., 2014; Massingham & Herrington, 2006, p. 84; Thunborg, Bron, & Edstrom, 2012). Nevertheless, a career goal is an important component of student motivation; however, to attain their career goal they must first form a student identity. Self-projections about occupational paths have been linked with the reconstruction of self and "ego identity development" (Kroger & Marcia, 2011, p. 33). An envisioned career goal can inspire AEP students to successfully complete their course. Those who lack a strong long-term career goal may have problems with the transition to higher education (Ryan & Hopkins, 2013). Goals can help students to be strategic when they encounter extracurricular distractions and other barriers to academic success. Disadvantaged students such as LSES students are more likely to be challenged by these barriers (Thomas, 2013). For these students, there is more likely to be a gap between their future goals and their academic attainment (Oyserman, Bybee & Terry, 2006). They may dream of finishing university and starting a professional career, but the lack of congruity between their family *habitus*—the system of schemes and dispositions they have acquired (Lizardo, 2004; Lizardo, 2012)—and university *habitus* (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017) can make it difficult for them to appreciate the linkages between agency, effort and the achievement of long-term goals (Oyserman, 2013). It is vital that AEP students learn to make these connections.

2.5.2 Agency and belonging

Belonging is "a fundamental human need" (Kahu & Nelson, 2018, p. 65). AEP students benefit from feeling that they belong at college or university (Meuleman et al., 2015). Feeling they belong promotes feelings of self-worth

(Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Stets & Gardner, 2014), makes the experience more enjoyable (Bryson & Hand, 2007), and contributes to retention (Chesters & Watson, 2016; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016). Belonging in an academic environment builds a new norm "of academic success" (Ryan & Hopkins, 2013, p. 109) and furthers academic progress (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Increasing self-belief fosters positive relationships with peers and staff, resulting in beneficial interactions both inside and outside the classroom (Ensign & Woods, 2014). Belonging empowers students to feel like insiders, not outsiders (Delahunty et al., 2014). As insiders, they learn the "rules of the [academic] game" (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017, p. 15). Positive experiences in the interface (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) where the game is played out encourage a sense of belonging and build self-efficacy. While institutions can encourage a sense of belonging, they do not bestow it. Students earn it for themselves through engaging with the course and investing in learning (Zepke, 2013, p. 7). In this way they increase their effectiveness as agents in their own learning processes.

In view of the importance of belonging, it is concerning that less than half of first-year university students feel connected to the university community (Baik, Naylor, & Arkoudis, 2015), and most "spend too little time studying" (Nonis & Hudson, 2010, p. 229). It seems that students are so busy that study can be just another appointment in a busy schedule (Krause, 2005). Many students engage in paid work that occupies them for more than 20 hours per week (Munro, 2011). As noted above, their sense of belonging can be improved if the AEP offers an effective transition experience that promotes a shared sense of community (Chesters & Watson, 2016; Levy & Murray, 2005; McGregor & Mills, 2012). This can begin with simple steps like teachers getting to know students' names (O'Shea & Vincent, 2011). Students feel affirmed when staff make the effort to get to know them (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Walker & Greene, 2009). A sense of belonging is engendered when students feel connected to the school, the staff and their peers (Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Main & Whatman, 2016; Ryan & Hopkins, 2013); when they establish quality friendships at university (Pittman & Richmond, 2008); when they enjoy an engaging curriculum (Wolf, Loker, Ertle, Justus, & Kelly, 2016); when they feel connected to the course (Kahu, Nelson, & Picton, 2017); when they participate in cohesive group learning (Delahunty et al., 2014); when they engage in study (Trowler, 2010); and

when they have extracurricular involvements that enable participation with socially valued groups (Kort-Butler, 2012).

2.5.3 Agency and persistence

To succeed in higher education, students need "navigational capacities" (Parker, Gale & Bok, 2012, p. 1). Lacking this, many—especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds—are at risk of dropping out as attested by AEP attrition rates of around 50 per cent (Shah & Whannell, 2017). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have a lower sense of agency and be less likely to persist (Burger & Walk, 2016). This includes LSES students, who may be "unlikely to feel at home" (Elsom et al., 2017, p. 245) in higher education and may lack the relevant cultural capital (Devlin, 2013). LSES students typically have poorer educational outcomes (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) and are far more likely to drop out than those with parents who are graduates (O'Shea, 2016). The transition period of an AEP can be a time of crisis, with students facing a range of obstacles (Whannell & Whannell, 2015), including dislocations related to living arrangements, travel, distance from home, separation from former friends, fears about fitting in socially, and fears about the academic challenge. Recognising the importance of the AEP to their lives and finding satisfaction in the academic activities that are offered encourages persistence and engagement with study (Chesters & Watson, 2016; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Nora, 2004). AEP students who lack college-going *habitus* have the challenge of finding among their peers and tutors partners who will help them develop a sense of belonging as they learn the rules of the academic game, engage actively with the student role, and persist with the challenge of forming a college student identity.

2.5.4 Agency and assessment

The first assignment is the first big test for most AEP students. It can be the start of a journey to success, or it can be a "crunch time" (Debenham & May, 2005, p. 93), a contributor to attrition (Hodges et al., 2013). It may be the first deadline students have faced since leaving school, making it a source of considerable anxiety. A student's future could hinge on the outcome of the first assessment. A successful outcome can make a student "ecstatic" (Debenham & May, 2005, p. 92), encouraging them to believe that they can manage university study after all; or it can be "a nightmare" (p. 93), not the start they had hoped for. Earning a poor grade or failing to submit the first assignment puts students at risk of failure (Whannell &

Whannell, 2015). By exercising agency in choosing to prioritise the first assignment, students reduce their risk of finding the experience a nightmare. Consulting tutors can help them deal with these early academic struggles (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013).

Final assessments and exams provide the last potential crunch time for AEP students (Whannell & Whannell, 2014). Those who have chosen to engage consistently are likely to be in the top half of AEP students, making good progress and passing the course (Chesters & Watson, 2016; Hodges, et al., 2013) while the bottom half contribute to the high AEP attrition rate (Elsom et al., 2017; Goggin et al., 2016). Final assessments measure the success of AEP students in identifying with the student role and enable them (and others) to make inferences about their success in forming a college student identity. The variations in outcomes can be largely explained in terms of agency. As noted by Sewell (1992), "agency differs enormously in both kind and extent" (p. 20), varying with gender, wealth, prestige, class, ethnicity, occupation, education, knowledge, and resources. And it varies among teenage AEP students in personal ways identified in this dissertation. Such complexity allows for considerable variation in outcomes and helps to explain why one half of AEP students succeed in their academic endeavours and the other half do not. The challenge for AEP students is to exercise agency in such a way that they achieve their academic goals and successfully form a college student identity.

2.6 Identity formation

As Erikson (1968) notes, "In the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity" (p. 130). Having failed to earn university entrance through their Year 12 performance—if they completed Year 12—some students take an AEP as a second chance to matriculate (Ross & Gray, 2005; Shah & Whannell, 2017). Becoming successful students involves forming a student identity (Carter, 2013; Daniels & Brooker, 2014). It has been claimed that individuals have multiple identities (Gee, 2000; La Guardia, 2009; Maciel & Knudson-Martin, 2014), which are constantly evolving (Kasworm, 2010; Marcia, 1980; Sheridan, 2013), empowering them to fulfil the roles they embrace; however, it may be better to view identity as an integrated, holistic concept, comprising "numerous aspects of self" (Galliher, McLean & Syed, 2017, p. 2013), that is, one self with one identity, but many roles that take self-development in multiple

directions and develop various aspects of self. Examining identities reveals who people perceive themselves to be as well as who others perceive them to be (Stets & Burke, 2014). It is a delicate psychosocial balancing act (Sheridan, 2013), with identities constructed around social roles, in social settings (Marcia, 1980; Thornberg, 2015) where the actors make representations of themselves that others confirm or disconfirm. This dissertation examines how AEP students who finish high school without developing a student identity change their low trajectory of underperformance and build a college student identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). This section examines how these identities are formed.

2.6.1 Defining identity

Identity can be understood in various ways, including how people see themselves as individuals, as group members, and as role occupants (Carter, 2013). Definitions of identity abound. For Stets and Burke (2014), identity is "a set of meanings that defines [*sic*] individuals" (p. 412). For Renninger (2009), identity "refers to the learner's self-representations as a person who pursues particular content and the processes that inform the development of this self-representation" (p. 106). For Johnston (2012), identity is "the collective aspect of the set of behavioural and personal characteristics which identify a person as a distinct individual" (p. 2). Other definitions of identity emphasise the social aspect. For Simon (2004), an identity is "an internalized set of role expectations" (p. 23). For Burke and Reitzes (1991) identities are "the shared social meanings that persons attribute to themselves in a role" (p. 242). And for Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009), identity is "one's personally held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups and the ways one expresses that relationship" (p. 577). While identity has "a great many different meanings [in essence it means] being recognised as a certain kind of person" (Gee, 2000, p. 99), the definition used in this dissertation.

Identity is dynamic, "emergent … always in the process of becoming" (Scanlon et al., 2007, p. 227). It is a life-long project that encompasses choices and priorities that reveal "the basic tenets that guide our life" (Nair, James, & Santhosh, 2015, p. 173). In self-accounts of their life experience, individuals reveal who they think they are (Bruner, 1991), thereby locating themselves in the world. In summary, identity is a "social construct" (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 417) that develops through interactions (Renninger, 2009). It involves two main processes: "self-verification"

(Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284) and the responses of others to these self-projections. The responses moderate the self-conceptions of the one forming the identity. Individuals experience fulfilment when others verify and accept the identity they project (Carter, 2013). AEP students demonstrate success in forming a student identity by accepting the student role, demonstrating appropriate role behaviour, and earning satisfactory grades. Feedback from peers and staff helps them confirm the success of their identity efforts.

2.6.2 Adolescent identity development

Adolescence is the life stage that begins with puberty and ends around the age of 18 years (Arnett, 2016). It is the fifth of Erikson's (1950, 1963) eight stages of psychosocial development, which continue to have currency among identity researchers (Brown et al., 2014; Galliher et al., 2017; Kroger, 2016; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; La Guardia, 2009; Marcia, 1980; Palmer, Hunt, Neal & Wuetherick, 2015; Rageliene, 2016). Adolescence is the stage of identity formation, described by Erikson (1968) as a "formidable task" (p. 163). In the modern era, this task has not been simplified; rather, it has become more complex. As Kroger (2016) notes, the process of constituting identity has changed. In Medieval times, social rank and kinship networks prescribed identities for both adolescents and adults. People tended to live the lives they were born into, reproducing familiar social patterns. By early modern times, wealth became more important than kinship networks and money provided access to life opportunities. In the first half of the twentieth century, more liberal forms of education opened up the future possibilities confronting adolescents. Thus, by the middle of the twentieth century, in many parts of the Western world, the challenge of forming an adult identity had devolved upon adolescents themselves. It was up to them to decide between a multitude of possible life trajectories brought within reach by education. The identity work begun in adolescence continues into young adulthood for teenage AEP students.

Identity formation covers multiple domains, including the educational and interpersonal domains (Albarello, Crocetti & Ruvini, 2018). The educational domain is the main focus of this dissertation. As Marcia (1980) notes, "identity formation does not happen neatly" (p. 160). Nor has research proceeded neatly. Numerous theories and approaches have been developed, including many that borrow the twin ideas of exploration and commitment from Marcia's (1980) identity status model

(Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje & Meeus, 2010). Approaches include, among others, Berzonsky's (1988) social cognitive model, Waterman's (1993) self-expressive model, La Guardia's (2009) self-determination perspective, the three-dimensions model of Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, and Meeus (2008), and a five-dimensions model of Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2008). Marcia's (1980) model uses ideas taken from Erikson (1968) to describe a process that involves four stages—foreclosure, moratorium, achievement, and diffusion—representing varying degrees of exploration and commitment. An individual in foreclosure has committed to a position without thoroughly exploring the range of possible career or ideological positions. Moratorium is the exploration stage in which individuals consider their options before committing. Passing through a successful moratorium stage enables individuals to make considered, self-chosen commitments by which they avoid identity diffusion, the directionless state of those who fail to adequately explore their options or commit to particular careers or ideological positions. AEP students will be situated somewhere on Erikson's (1963; 1968) continuum between identity attainment (Marcia's achievement status) and role confusion (Marcia's diffusion status).

Identity encompasses the choices individuals make about their life priorities, and the ideology that guides their decision making (Nair et al., 2015). Family and school are the main environments where these processes unfold (Xie, Yan, Wang, Han & Gai, 2018). Adolescents create an identity (a self) by modelling themselves on parents, friends, and other role models, not simply by copying, but by integrating desired attitudes, values and behaviours into their own personality (Palmer et al., 2015). In time, peer groups assume more importance than the family as peers take the central place in the social lives of adolescents (Rageliene, 2016; Schwartz, 2016). A trusted peer group is a place where adolescents can safely explore their identity in a risk-free environment. Adolescents typically function in multiple peer groups. Friends from outside of school are chosen; classmates are not chosen (Albarello et al., 2018). In their peer groups, adolescents learn how to define themselves as they learn how to relate to others in the groups. Each group may contribute something different to the self-meanings that are created. These groups are the "social laboratories" (Albarello et al., 2018, p. 691) in which adolescents try out their chosen identities. To be accepted by a group, individuals must pass the group's evaluation.

They make an emotional commitment to groups in which they find acceptance, and they work to maintain these relationships for the contribution they make to their sense of self. In early adolescence, individuals may try many activities, but as they mature, they reduce the range and begin to focus on a smaller number of activities which they then strive to master. Identifying with peer groups and the activities associated with group membership becomes increasingly important to them as their growing competence becomes part of the answer to the 'who-am-I' question (Kort-Butler, 2012). Such identity commitments are related to well-being and positive psychosocial adjustment. Increased maturity generally improves the ability to make multiple identifications. Adolescents who identify with two or more groups have higher self-esteem than those who identify with fewer groups (Albarello et al., 2018). The groups that AEP students identify with can be a help or a hindrance in their quest to develop a student identity.

While adolescence can be a conflicted stage, characterised by uncertainty about relationships, personal skills, life goals, and identity, conflict can be a driver of change (Kroger, 2016). It can drive adolescents to an increased exploration of their options and encourage them to commit to making changes. This could include identifying with groups that help them achieve their goals (Albarello et al., 2018) and withdrawing from groups that do not. Adolescents deal with the sense of crisis they might experience by taking encouragement and comfort from the social support offered by the individuals and groups that matter to them (Nair et al., 2015). AEP students are likely to benefit from identifying with peer groups that share their academic goals and aspirations, as significant others in the groups influence the way they set their goals and the way they engage in goal-directed behaviour (Reese & Dietrich, 2014).

2.6.3 Emerging adulthood

As noted in the previous section, there was a time when people transitioned quickly between adolescence and adulthood. Now, a new life stage has been identified, emerging adulthood, a time of identity exploration and the delaying of the acceptance of responsible roles like "marriage, parenthood and stable work" (Arnett, 2010, p. 89). There is some debate as to whether Arnett has identified a new life stage (Cote, 2014), but a growing body of literature suggests that young adulthood has been accepted as a "legitimate field" (Swanson, 2016, p. 392). It is the stage

most teenage AEP students have reached as they try to resolve the conundrum of what to do with their lives and how becoming a student might contribute to the successful achievement of their goals. This dissertation focuses on the emergence of a student identity among teenage AEP students as they pass through the life stage now recognised as emerging adulthood.

2.6.4 Bases of identity

Three bases of identity have been identified: personal identity, social identity, and role identity (Carter, 2013; Stets & Burke, 2014). An individual's core personal identity is who they think they are; it is the choices, goals and strategies they espouse for themselves (Albarello et al., 2018; Oyserman, 2013); it includes their "values, beliefs, goals, and roles" (La Guardia, 2009, p. 91). Values are thought to be the core of personal identity (Hitlin, 2003; Torres et al., 2009), embodying the meanings that make an individual unique (Stets & Burke, 2014). This core self has been thought to be relatively "fixed" (Block, 2013, p. 130; Gee, 2000, p. 39), but change may result due to one of three causes: dissatisfaction with achieved identity, a significant life event (job loss, graduation, bereavement), or planned interventions designed to produce identity change (Vignoles, 2017).

Second, while identity is personal, it is also "fundamentally relational" (Shakouri, 2012, p. 583), shaped by social and group interactions (Bruner, 1991; Sheridan, 2013); it is socially constructed (Delahunty et al., 2014) as individuals are drawn to groups of like-minded people, who share their values and goals (Stets & Burke, 2014). Thus, social identity is linked to the social groups or categories that a person belongs to (Shakouri, 2012; Stets & Burke, 2000). Because identity is dynamic and constantly evolving (Marcia, 1980; Sheridan, 2013), especially during adolescence (Topolewska-Siedzik & Cieciuch, 2018), group membership may be subject to continual revision as individuals work to resolve incompatibilities in their multiple identities (Blume, 2010). When a social identity comes into conflict with one's imagined future self (Oyserman et al., 2006), an individual may choose to reduce contact with, or withdraw from, the group threatening their identity work.

Third, forming an identity involves accepting the meanings attached to a role (Stets & Burke, 2014). Roles are learned through interacting with group members and reflecting on the received feedback (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Collier, 2001).

Roles provide a sense of belonging and self-fulfilment. As with social identities, people have multiple role identities. Just as social identities can be in conflict, so too can role identities. When role conflicts arise, individuals have to prioritise and establish a salience hierarchy that determines which identity is activated in a given situation (Davis, 2015). In the context of this study, it is worth noting that role performance varies as different individuals may not be motivated to achieve the same degree of role mastery (Stets & Burke, 2014).

2.6.5 Identity formation

Self is constructed through social and cultural interaction (Bruner, 1991). Having an identity begins with an idea. Children find meaning in their dreams, which are bounded only by their imagination. Turning a dream into reality requires moving on from dreaming. Thus, adolescents abandon childhood fantasies (Marcia, 1980) and begin to focus on role acquisition and participation, major steps in the process of identity formation (Collier & Morgan, 2007). Young adults with a concern for their future look ahead and make plans, engaging in a process that has been called "futuring" (Sica et al., 2016, p. 183). Futuring can be especially challenging for individuals from underprivileged backgrounds, whose family *habitus* and LSES may make their dreams seem beyond their grasp. Futuring can be a messy process, presenting many difficulties and forcing people to move into unknown territory where they encounter new challenges (La Guardia, 2009; Nair et al, 2015). Two particular challenges that demand a response are the need to explore a possible future career or occupation, and having chosen one, to commit to it (Kroger & Marcia, 2011).

Identities can be viewed as narrative constructs (Bamberg, 2012), in which individuals present the situated self in story form in social settings, in particular cultural contexts (Sheridan, 2013). Whether the purpose of the stories is to entertain or to instruct, identity is formed through the interplay between introspection (inward focus) and projection (outward focus). These stories of self can vary according to the audience and the story teller's purpose. It is a process of meaning making that typically includes presenting the self as a good person. Exposing the self to others involves risk, as listeners will interpret for themselves what they hear and reach their own conclusions. Sharing in this way involves identity co-creation, with individuals participating in "each other's identity performances" (Blume, 2010, p. 96).

Things that influence a person's role performance contribute to the process of identity formation. Every role has associated identities. An AEP student working on developing a student identity will be adding this new identity component to a range of other identity components that include social components like race, class, gender, religion and more (Torres, et al, 2009). They might also include identity components associated with being a paid worker, dancer, sportsperson, musician, humanitarian advocate, and more. It is the roles that an individual commits to (La Guardia, 2009) that are most likely to become part of an integrated personal identity.

2.6.6 Forming a student identity

Driven by their career aspirations, students who fail to matriculate at high school take an AEP as a second chance to qualify for an undergraduate place at a university or college of higher education. Keeping their career goal before them, they can convert it into study goals, accept the student role, and begin interacting with others in the educational interface. With the help of socio-emotional supports, they can engage with the coursework. Earning success with early assignments shows students that they can do the work, and encourages them to begin to reconnect with themselves (Daniels & Brooker, 2014) as they take up the challenge of forming a student identity. The single most important factor in the process is how they choose to use personal agency. By making strategic decisions about study, teenage AEP students can put themselves on a path that is likely to end in success.

Student identities are generally developed in schools and colleges (Brown et al., 2014), where students are given challenges that test their academic potential. Failing to demonstrate sufficient potential in Year 12, some students turn to an AEP for a second chance at forming a student identity. If this was an easy task, most AEP students would pass and articulate to undergraduate degree programs. But, as Daniels and Brooker (2014) note, "identity is not a simple undertaking" (p. 73). Many AEP students struggle with the same identity and role conflicts that undermined their Year 12 performance. Competing roles and identities can get in the way. Forming a student identity demands focus and concentration (Levy & Earl, 2012; Nonis & Hudson, 2010). Those who are serious about the student role seek opportunities to study and to spend time with lecturers, tutors, and professors (Carter, 2013). These are part of performing the student role (Collier & Morgan,

2007; Devlin, 2013). As Whannell and Whannell (2015) note, the student role must be embraced if students are to form a student identity.

Some schools and colleges support identity development more effectively than others. Helpful factors include school climate (Nassar-McMillan, Karvonen, Perez, & Abrams, 2009; Rich & Schachter, 2012), a learner-centred curriculum (Hall, 2015; Willans & Seary, 2007), and the quality of students' "relational engagement" (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011, p. 47). Of particular importance is the teacher-student relationship and its associated interactions (Brown et al., 2014; Komarraju, Musulking & Bhattacharya, 2010). It is not enough that teachers be caring; they need to be role models in order to have a large impact on students (Rich & Schachter, 2012). By modelling critical thinking, teachers can impart a passion for learning. They can also create conditions that encourage students to develop a student identity and commit to career goals (Whannell & Whannell, 2015). For this to be effective, students need to carefully explore their career options before making a commitment (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Committing without adequate exploration may result in foreclosure, which can undermine student motivation and create uncertainty and confusion. By encouraging students to develop achievement and mastery goals (Was et al., 2009), schools promote both student identity and academic success as students with mastery goals tend to engage academically at a deeper level than those with instrumental goals.

It is generally believed that identity formation happens slowly (Burke, 2006; Marcia, 1980; Whannell & Whannell, 2015), but this dissertation shows that some AEP students develop a college student identity surprisingly quickly. As Habel (2012) notes, the self-efficacy of AEP students can be significantly increased in as little as one month. Those that find the AEP experience empowering develop academic skills, become strategic learners, build confidence, and increase their understanding (Hall, 2015). While this does not prove that a college student identity is developed in a month, it does denote the start of the process. The dynamic nature of identity formation makes identifying precisely when an identity has been formed problematic. What can be demonstrated is that around half of AEP students complete their course successfully, and the majority of these go on to complete an undergraduate degree (Chesters & Watson, 2016; Hodges et al., 2013). As May and Bunn (2015) observe, most of the students successfully completing an AEP

demonstrate that they are "capable of university level study" (p. 149). The academic success of AEP matriculants who go on to complete an undergraduate degree suggests that they have formed a student identity. And the groundwork for this was laid in the AEP, where their success in earning alternative matriculation bespoke an emerging student identity.

Given that AEPs contribute to the self-efficacy of students (Habel, 2012) and enable them to develop university literacy, it is not surprising that many students from these pathways perform successfully at university. As Australian university data show, the performance of alternative entry students indicates that they deserve the chance to study and have the capacity to perform at an acceptable level (Haigh et al., 2007). Accepting alternative entry students is "not only a social and ethical imperative, it is a pragmatic one as well" (Habel, 2012, p. 821), in that it boosts student numbers at Australia's universities and increases the number of graduates moving into the community to commence professional careers.

Identity theory as described by Stets and Burke (2000, 2014) draws together identity theory and social identity theory, combining three bases of identity—personal identity, category or group identity, and role identity. Seen in this way, identity theory provides a robust approach to the study of human behaviour (Carter, 2013). It gives insight into the complexity of the identity formation process based on the reality that, over a lifetime, each individual is a member of a unique set of social categories, ensuring that each individual has a unique self-concept (Stets & Burke, 2000). This helps to explain the variations in AEP student identity formation. Despite starting out with similar academic qualifications and intentions and being provided with similar learning opportunities, including mentoring and academic support, some participants are highly successful in forming a student identity and some are unsuccessful. Some develop a student identity and go on to complete an undergraduate degree in normal time with above average grades (Levy & Murray, 2005). Around 50 per cent of alternative entry students commencing undergraduate study complete a degree within 6 years (Newell, 2012). Others require more time to develop a student identity and may take significantly longer to complete a degree.

As has been noted, identity is unstable and changes over time (Burke, 2006; Vignoles, 2017). Identity is always in a state of flux, varying from day to day and

context to context (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010; Moje & Luke, 2009). Individuals are constantly recreating their identity in response to contextual factors like "family background, sociocultural influences, and current experiences" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 587). People making a career change can expect to modify their identity. When people marry, they leave behind their single identity. Someone who wins a lottery is a candidate for identity disturbance. Changing life contexts and associations impact identity development in many ways. Identity formation is a difficult process (Cote & Levine, 2002) that often involves conflict (Moje & Luke, 2009). The complexities of modern life place such large demands on people that they can struggle to make sense of their experience and be left uncertain about who they are and what to believe about themselves. The one constant about identity is change (Bamberg, 2012). Identity change is the focus of this thesis, in particular the way four teenage AEP students responded to the challenge of adding a college student identity to their integrated sense of self (Vignoles, 2017).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the literature that has informed this research project and surveyed alternative entry courses operated by Australian universities and other institutions. It has identified the key drivers of student identity formation for AEP students. A key finding of the literature is that learning is a social process that typically does not happen in isolation. Students benefit from a range of interactions and emotional supports, including family, school personnel, peers and other significant individuals and groups. With the help of these supports, AEP students choose the level at which they are willing to engage academically, on a continuum that ranges from superficial to deep. Their success in forming a student identity depends largely on their exercise of agency and development of self-efficacy, which is strengthened by making helpful choices that contribute to success. Each success achieved strengthens their intention to continue choosing to embrace the student role. This upward spiral is the process of student identity formation.

This study has been driven by the broad research question:

What does being an AEP student mean to teenage AEP students?

The dearth of qualitative studies explains why we do not have a clear understanding of the answer(s) to this research question. The voices of teenage AEP students have

not been clearly heard, especially male voices. Only by listening to these younger voices will we learn how their backstories contribute to their attitudes, especially their motivation, goals, decision-making processes, and initial orientation upon enrolment. We will learn how their personal *habitus* contributes to the way they adapt to the requirements of higher education, how they deal with the challenge of processing their underachievement at high school, and how successful they are in converting their career goal into proximal study goals. Listening to teenage AEP voices will reveal how these students deal with the battles they face as they attempt to re-engage with study in the educational interface. It will also improve our understanding of their predominant emotional states and what these contribute to their AEP progress. The study will show how these students exercise agency in their decision making and how they reconnect with themselves as AEP students. The next chapter describes the methodology that guided the study and explains its emergent design.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to account for the emergence of the methodology used in the study. It is underpinned by Guba and Lincoln's (2005) notion of emerging confluences and Pinnegar and Daynes's (2007) account of the "narrative turns" (p. 1) in qualitative inquiry. My research journey involved a series of turns, including the postmodern turn that pointed me to interpretivist qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), plus the narrative turns that directed me to narrative research. My work with mostly teenage AEP students raised questions to which I sought answers. In a single semester, students who had done poorly in Year 12 could be on a new trajectory, about to commence an undergraduate program while other students from seemingly similar backgrounds, with similar—sometimes superior—qualifications appeared to repeat the mistakes of the past. From my reflections on this conundrum emerged my research question:

What does being an AEP student mean to teenage AEP students?

Four subquestions help to answer this question:

1. **How do teenage AEP students connect with the AEP?**
2. **How do teenage AEP students connect with socio-emotional supports?**
3. **How do teenage AEP students connect with themselves?**
4. **What explains the variation in the academic outcomes of teenage AEP students?**

The research design had to make it possible to access rich data (Charmaz, 1996) about the experience of transitioning AEP students. Constructing the rich, thick descriptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Geertz, 1973; Gullion, 2016; Yin, 2012) would require spending extended time collaborating with participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Mertens, 2010) in order to capture the complexities of their nonlinear stories (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Accepting that stories are best captured by narrative research (Chase, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013), I abandoned my positivist leanings and turned to narrative. This chapter describes my emergence as a narrative researcher and the emergence of the research purpose, question, and design. The data

for the study have been constructed with the help of four teenage participants, enrolled in an AEP at a regional college of higher education in NSW. Their stories are not intended to be representative of any particular individual or group. Rather, they illuminate our understanding of the processes of college student identity formation among teenage AEP students.

3.2 Emergence of a qualitative researcher

The human ability to see and make meaning (Chase, 2011) provides people with a "thoroughly partial understanding" (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 963) of the things they observe and reflect on, including their own "storied lives" (Clandinen & Connelly, 2000, p. 7). Their stories represent a subjective understanding of reality, their "provisional truth" (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011, p. 476). As Mus (2012) observes, "Every qualitative account is a fictionalisation of the subject" (p. 145). These insights altered my understanding of reality and contributed to my emergence as a qualitative researcher.

3.2.1 Characteristics of qualitative research

Emphasising prediction and control (Ponterotto, 2005), traditional quantitative research takes an objective view of the world (Suter, 2012), emphasising the importance of numbers as data (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In contrast, qualitative research focuses on the specifics of the constructed subjective realities of individual lives (Andrews, 2012). Qualitative research is not easy to define, given its kaleidoscopic, jigsaw puzzle, symphonic nature (Suter, 2012), but Denzin and Lincoln (2011) offer this generic definition:

> Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

In summary, the features of qualitative research include studying phenomena in their natural settings, seeing the researcher as the key instrument, using multiple data

sources, using inductive and deductive approaches to analysis, foregrounding participant meanings, using emergent research designs, being reflexive, and writing a holistic account (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2.2 Narrative turns

Positivism emphasises the idea of a "'real' reality 'out there,' apart from the flawed human apprehension of it" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 203). As I worked on the research proposal, reading and reflecting led me to abandon my positivist leanings and take a new trajectory that I had not anticipated at the start. The shape of the research design was equally unanticipated. Table 2 summarises my emergent understanding.

Table 2: Emergence of research design and understanding of the researcher

Date	Changes in paradigm view	Change triggers	Realisations	My journal entries
20XX	Positivist/ postpositivist	[initial position]	Reality external and objective, facts, determinism	"Ignorance of the real world creates the distance between people" (5.1.10).
20XX (early)	Qualitative	Reflecting on Patton (2012) & responsive evaluation	Still planning to evaluate the DGS course	"The main emphasis [of the study] will be on qualitative data" (10.5.11).
20XX (late)	Constructivist-interpretive	Reflecting on Denzin & Lincoln (2011)	Multiple realities	"I like the constructivist emphasis on the importance of the views of participants and on worlds as constructions" (19.8.11).
20XX	Narrative	Reflecting on Clandinin (2006) and Pinnegar & Daynes (2007), and interacting with students	- Inspiration Aspect - Implementation Aspect - Representation Aspect Interactive quality of the relationship between researcher & researched	"I resonate with the democratic nature of narrative inquiry and the idea of using stories as data" (15.2.12).

Through working on this project, I experienced four narrative turns. First, I shifted from a broad interest in pathway programs and generalisable data, to a specific focus on one AEP. While I had always planned to study this AEP, my early

planning envisaged seeking survey data from students in several AEPs at more than one institution.

Second, my interest shifted from data in the form of numbers to data in the form of words (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), including participant stories (Bamberg, 2006). I accepted the claim that "numbers impress, but unfortunately, also conceal far more than they reveal" (Suter, 2012, p. 344). I sought more detail than numbers provide. To access the detail, I intended to encourage participants to reflect on their stories of education as they transitioned through the AEP so that, together, we could build a deep understanding of their experience. Their stories would be generalisable insofar as other students encountering them might hear echoes of their own experience.

Third, I came to a fuller appreciation of the value of "multiple ways of knowing" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25) and "multiple perspectives" (Willis, 2007, p. 9). The chosen participants would not just be generic AEP students. They would have unique stories and unique perspectives and would re-engage with study in different ways, achieving varying success in developing a student identity (Whannell & Whannell, 2015).

Fourth, I came to value respondents as full participants in the research process, not just sources of data. I felt encouraged to develop a "personally interactive role" (Mertens, 2010, p. 253) with these research "collaborators" (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011, p. 470). Together, we would co-construct the data. These four narrative turns confirmed my shift from traditional social science and took me down the path of narrative research.

Table 3: Emergence of the bricolage

Aspect	Flow
1. Inspiration	Emergent research purpose and paradigm
	Emergent research question
2. Implementation	Qualitative case study
	Data construction—tools and schedule
3. Representation	Constructivist-interpretive paradigm
	Narrative paradigm
	Constructivist grounded theory—data analysis
	Ethics—valuing the sacred
	Trustworthiness/rigour
	Representation—multiple perspectives and voices

In retrospect, I saw the research process as a three-stage journey (Reflective Journal, Jan 1, 20XX), but *stage* is not the best word as the process was not "linear" (Suter, 2012, p. 348), and the stages overlapped. *Aspect* is a more appropriate term. The three aspects to be discussed are inspiration, implementation and representation (see Table 3).

3.2.3 Selecting the site and the participants

The inspiration aspect saw the selecting of the site and the participants. Instead of gathering data from several AEPs, I decided to focus solely on students enrolled in the AEP where I lectured. This choice illustrates "convenience sampling" (Battaglia, 2008, p. 148). Working at this site provided in situ access to the "culture-sharing group" (Creswell, 2008, p. 473) from which the participants would be drawn. As one of their lecturers, I would be part of their "lived experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2). This would provide rich opportunity to interact, share our stories, and construct data.

At the beginning of the semester, I explained the research project to the students enrolled in GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing and invited them to participate. Consent forms (see Appendix B) were given to those expressing an interest. From a class of 21 students (12 female, 9 male), only two withheld consent. Two others were not invited to participate, one because he was over 21 (my focus was the teenage experience), and one because she was Indigenous (I did not have approval for research with Indigenous persons). Participants were selected using "purposive sampling" (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). I sought only recent school leavers, aged 18 or 19 years, as others (Stone, 2009; Willans, 2010) have studied mature age students in pathway programs. I sought a balanced gender representation: half male and half female. Males would be included as other studies have tended to highlight the female experience. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from a range of social and cultural backgrounds, and "stratified sampling" (Robinson, 2014, p. 32) was used to select participants with a range of high school qualifications, including some with an ATAR and some without. These criteria were used to select six female and six male participants. As the study progressed, this number was reduced to four (2 female, 2 male) for the purpose of developing four in-depth mini-

case studies (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2012). The same criteria were used in reducing the participants to four. Of the two females and two males, two had an ATAR, two had taken gap years, two were from the local area, and two came from interstate. Included were the one with the highest ATAR and the one with the lowest qualifications, a Year 10 leaver. Culturally diverse, all were native English speakers though one was Pacifica, coming from a home in which another language was spoken.

3.2.4 Overview of the three aspects

This chapter is structured as a triptych of three aspects (Table 3), explaining the emergence of the bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011): (i) inspiration, where the ideas for the study—purpose, question, and research design—began to emerge; (ii) implementation, where the data were constructed and the analysis was undertaken; and (iii) representation, where issues around voice and representation were resolved, the mini-case studies were constructed, and the dissertation was written. There was considerable overlap between the three aspects as the fieldwork and writing blurred into one another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These three aspects are discussed below.

3.3 Inspiration aspect

The inspiration aspect provided a chronological starting point for the project. This section describes the emergence of the research design, the research paradigms, and the research problem that generated the purpose, question and methods.

3.3.1 Emergence of the research design

A research design is "a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical materials" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 14). Designs can be classified along a continuum, with quantitative designs at one end, mixed methods designs in the middle, and qualitative designs at the other end (Creswell, 2009). I constructed a research design that matched my research purpose. Table 3 shows the emergence of the bricolage (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011) of paradigms, methodologies and methods. The project became a case study (Stake, 1995; Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Yin, 2009), employing case study and narrative methods to construct data and develop a suite of mini-case studies (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2012). Case study is most useful when the object of study is a "functioning body", "bounded system" (Stake,

2005, p. 444), or "bounded entity" (Yin, 2012, p. 6). In education, people, programs and program evaluation make interesting cases (Stake, 1995; Stake, 2005). The data have been analysed using a coding approach adapted from constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1996; 2000; 2005; 2006; 2011). Mixing these three qualitative approaches produced an effective research design for finding answers to the research question.

3.3.2 Emergence of the research paradigms

A paradigm is "a philosophical way of thinking" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 26), a researcher's worldview. My thinking came to be guided by the principles of two interpretivist paradigms: constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2013; Holstein & Gubrium, 2011; Schwandt, 1994) and narrative (Bamberg, 2006; Chase, 2011; Clandinen & Connelly, 2000; Clandinen & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinen & Huber, 2010; McNiff, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Riessman, 2008). I became a constructivist after recognising that individuals construct their own understanding and interpret their experience according to this constructed understanding. And I chose narrative after recognising that the way to gain deep understanding of an issue is by listening to the stories people construct about their life experience.

Constructivist paradigm.

Qualitative research methods are anchored by the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005), which holds that knowledge and understanding are "socially constructed" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 341) in the minds of individuals. This makes the process of knowledge creation both subjective and inter-subjective (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Hidden meanings can be brought to the surface through deep reflection, which can be stimulated through interacting with a mentor or researcher. I would work with my participants to co-create meaning by focusing on their lived experience of the AEP. Penetrating lived experience is the strength of the paradigm, creating understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

Narrative paradigm

The word narrative comes from the Latin *gnoscere*, to know (Van Manen, 1990). The object of narrative researchers is to know and to study the stories of their participants (Polkinghorne, 2007). The six dimensions of the narrative paradigm

(Spector-Mersel, 2010) parallel those of the constructivist paradigm. First, the ontological position is based on the reality of participant stories. Second, how participants interpret their reality and make it meaningful supplies the epistemological dimension. Third, the participant stories are the focus of the methodology, treating them as objects to be examined. Fourth, the objective can be either descriptive or interventionist as the paradigm can be used to enlarge understanding or to give voice to the marginalised and seek to change the world. My object was to enlarge understanding of the way in which some teenage AEP students transform their own world. Fifth, the researcher is not an objective observer, but has subjective values and interests that intertwine with what is being researched. Last, the participant is not a passive informant, but an active agent who is inseparable from the phenomenon being investigated. In this dissertation, the participant voice is clearly heard through the extensive use of quotations.

3.3.3 Emergence of the research problem, purpose/question, and methods

Emergence of the problem

Research is driven by questions that relate to a problem that appears to be unresolved in the relevant literature (Creswell, 2008). My experience with AEP students caused me to puzzle over the varied success of the mostly teenage students taking the course that I taught. There appeared to be no correlation between their high school qualifications (ATAR) and their AEP results or performance in subsequent undergraduate study. The literature suggested that while ATAR is a good predictor of performance, it is far from perfect, especially for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Cullity, 2005) and those with an ATAR below 80 (Pilcher & Torii, 2018). It is not a reliable predictor of academic success, academic potential or a student's study skills (Blyth, 2014; Carpenter et al., 2015; Levy & Murray, 2005; Haigh et al., 2007). Nor is ATAR useful for screening AEP students (Whannell, 2013). However, the association between age and academic performance for AEP students is well known: the younger they are, the poorer their results and the higher their attrition rates tend to be (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Cantwell et al., 2001; May & Bunn, 2015; Whannell & Whannell, 2014; Shah & Whannell, 2017; Whitson, 1995). There are associations between socio-emotional support and academic success (Chesters & Watson, 2016; Berger et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2014; Camilleri et al., 2012; Curby et al., 2013; Denham & Brown, 2010; Durlak et al.,

2011; Elsom et al., 2017; Hall, 2014) and between academic engagement and academic success (Hu & Kuh, 2002; Kahu, 2013; Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2007; Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013; Zepke & Leach, 2010; Zepke et al., 2014); however, there appear to be no grounded studies that track the journey of younger AEP students, in order to illuminate the disparities in their academic performance. This gap in the literature is partially filled by this dissertation. The findings enlarge our understanding of the experience of teenage AEP students.

Emergence of the purpose and question

My research purpose emerged through reflecting (Charmaz, 2000; Watt, 2007) on my experience with AEP students and on my reading of the literature, including literature on pathway education (e.g. Cantwell, 2004; Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001; Cullity, 2005; Debenham & May, 2005; Habel, 2012; Levy & Murray, 2005; Pendergast, 2000; Ramsay, Tranter, Charlton & Sumner, 1998; Penglase & Collins, 1995; Whitson, 1995) and student engagement (e.g. Coates, 2009; Krause, 2005; Krause & Coates, 2008; Trowler, 2010; Wimpeny & Savin-Baden, 2013). Many of these papers were written by academics at the University of Newcastle. As this project unfolded, I began reading about identity formation (Bruner, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Carter, 2013; Davis, 2015; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016; Oyserman et al., 2015; Reese & Dietrich, 2014; Stets & Burke, 2014; Vignoles, 2017; Whannell & Whannell, 2015; etc.). Table 4 shows how the research question emerged over time.

Table 4: Emergence of the question

Iteration of question	Emergence, time	Why	Date
1. How well does the DGS meet the academic needs of participants?	Inspiration aspect, 20XX research proposal	This question got me started and made me want to evaluate the DGS	This question had been in my mind well before I put it into words in my proposal
2. How are participants impacted by the DGS?	Inspiration aspect, May 20XX	My focus shifted from the DGS course to the students.	Reflective Journal (5.5.11). "The strength of this question is that it brings the students more into focus."
3. What is the perceived impact of the DGS on school leavers?	Inspiration aspect, January 20XX	Reading about narrative increased my interest in the participant	My journal shows the question worded thus a month before I started constructing data. The

		perspective.	main alteration here is the decision to use six participants.
4. How did a group of DGS students develop academic identities?	Implementation aspect as analysis revealed academic emergence, 20XX	This question was an attempt to find the right form of words for the study.	Initial analysis of the data showed that participants were developing academic identities (Journal).
5. How did a group of younger school leavers develop as students in their first semester in the DGS?	Representation aspect, April 20XX	This is the question that actually drove the research after my narrative turn.	Reflective journal (7.4.15). "The wording (#4) has been posed after the fact. It is not the question that drove the research. Reword!" This is the reworded question.
6. What does it mean to be an AEP student?	Representation aspect, August 20XX	The question is more generic	On 8.8.18, I emailed this question to my supervisors.
7. What does being an AEP student mean to teenage AEP students?	Representation aspect, late August 20XX	The question focuses on the perspective of teenage students.	30 August

As Creswell (2007) notes, the purpose of research needs to be explicitly stated, not just implied. The following synopsis fails to capture the complexity and messiness (Denzin & Lincoln 2011) of the process: The purpose of this narrative case study is to illuminate the experience of teenage AEP students enrolled in an AEP at a regional college of higher education. The study shows the extent of their success or failure in forming a college student identity. This purpose gave rise to the research question:

What does being an AEP student mean to teenage AEP students?

The four sub-questions used to unpack the issue focus on teenage AEP students, aged 18 and 19, with the purpose of improving understanding of the relatively poor academic performance of younger AEP students as reported in numerous studies, including many quantitative studies from the University of Newcastle. I anticipated that a qualitative study would provide a deeper understanding of the issues these researchers uncovered, in particular the poorer performance of younger students (Archer et al., 1999; Cantwell et al., 1997; Cantwell et al., 2001; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Whitson, 1995).

Emergence of the methods

The inspiration aspect included developing a bricolage (Kincheloe et al., 2011) of methods to facilitate a critical investigation of the participant experience. Creating the data would require spending time with the participants in a variety of contexts—in class, in interviews, and in informal settings. The participants would be invited to generate reflective written texts that would assist in tracking their emergence as students. These data would be supplemented by my observations plus feedback from other lecturers and tutors. In the interviews and the reflective texts, the participants would be encouraged to share their stories of education.

Case study approach

The decision to focus on the student experience shifted attention from an intrinsic case to instrumental cases (Stake, 1995). The AEP that I convened presented a potential intrinsic case, waiting to be studied. There were also students who might be studied, but choices had to be made about which students to select as participants. For their data to be representative of AEP students, the participants needed to be typical AEP students, not extreme cases. Deciding what is typical means making judgments. DGS students vary in ways that may have significance for the study: gender, mother tongue, completion of Year 12 (not all complete), ATAR (average around 45 in this AEP, but many have no ATAR), SES, parents' education, and more. Several kinds of "purposeful sampling" (Creswell, 2008, p. 214) were used to ensure variety, including "maximal variation sampling" and "extreme case sampling" (p. 215). The sampling was homogenous in that the four selected were from a single AEP cohort. The sampling was extreme in that it included the student with the highest ATAR (50.65) plus the one with the lowest qualifications, a Year 10 leaver. The selected participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. While all four were native English speakers, one came from a home where a Pacific language is spoken, one had an Asian biological father and a Pacifica step-father, and one had parents born in two widely separated parts of the English-speaking world. The sampling paid attention to gender balance, with two males and two females selected. All four were in their late teens, aged 18 or 19 years. While their stories would be unique and valuable in themselves, they would be studied for their usefulness in offering potential answers to the research question.

Case study is a multi-method research approach that uses more than one method of "data gathering" (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 289). I prefer the term *data construction* as qualitative data are not found, collected, or gathered; they are "constructed" (De la Cuesta, 2015, p. 888). A case study is "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a 'case'), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2012, p. 4). A case is a "bounded entity" (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 291; Yin, 2012, p. 6) or "bounded system" (Stake, 2005, p. 444) that is defined by its elements. Case study is a research approach that investigates a complex entity in its entirety, keeping the case intact. The case might be an individual, a group, an organisation, a partnership, a community, a relationship, a decision process, an event, a program or a project (Creswell, 2013; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Four types of case have been identified: the single, holistic case, the single case with embedded units, multiple cases (2 or more holistic cases), and multiple cases with embedded units (Yin, 2012). This study presents four holistic mini-case studies, embedded in a study of student identity formation.

Researchers are interested in many different kinds of questions, but the questions most appropriate for case study research are *how* and *why* questions (Mertens, 2010). The question examined in this study is a how question, with an implied why question. How do younger AEP students understand their AEP experience? And why are some more successful than others? Case study provides the rich, detailed description (Suter, 2012) required to answer such questions.

As Stake (2005) notes, particular aspects of cases are of interest. The first aspect is the nature of the case and what it exemplifies. The mini-cases described in this research were teenage AEP students, using the course as a second chance to gain access to higher education. Second, the history of cases is of interest as the backstories of the four mini-case studies reveal. Their histories of education play into their AEP experience in different ways. Third, cases can be impacted by the physical setting as this study shows. Fourth, other contexts can play a part. For students this can include things like paid work and sport as the study shows. Fifth, cases can contain echoes of other cases. Other AEP students reading these mini-case studies might resonate with them. Finally, there are the participants who provide the information. In this study, most of the data were provided by the participants

themselves, but additional insights came from other involved individuals, especially lecturers and tutors.

Evidence that can be used as data in a case study includes records, documents, interviews, observations, and physical artefacts (Yin, 2009). The data can also include stories (Suter, 2012), showing that case study and narrative are complementary research methods. This study is informed by the documents, interviews, and researcher observations that were used in constructing the participants' stories of education. As a case study researcher, my task was to make sense of the cases and build an argument that explains what was found and what was not found (Suter, 2012). The four mini-cases described in this dissertation provide accounts of the participants' AEP experience. While all four are of intrinsic interest, the purpose to which they are applied is instrumental in that they illustrate the academic emergence of AEP students and contribute to the conclusion that many AEP students are capable of achieving undergraduate academic success.

3.4 Implementation aspect

The implementation aspect saw the planning put to work in polishing the tools of data construction and then using them to construct, manage and analyse the data (Creswell, 2013). This aspect involved being in "sustained contact … over a period of time [4 months]" (Mason, 2004, p. 1022) with participants in the field, where we built relationships "akin to friendship" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 118). I remain in contact with the four participants several years after we constructed the data. Chronologically, the data were constructed in the participants' first semester at the college while enrolled in the college's AEP. [I subsequently followed the undergraduate experience of the four to see how successful they would be after leaving the AEP.]

3.4.1 Ethics

Given that this project involved human participants, an ethics clearance was required. An ethics approval was granted by the institution's Human Research Ethics committee (see Appendix C) the year before the project began. At that time the project title was *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Avondale's Diploma of General Studies*.

3.4.2 Literature

The literature that helped to shape the emergence of this project included literature on the development of AEP education in Australia, literature on socio-emotional learning (Bandura, 1986, 1989, 2001; Denham & Brown, 2010; Elias, Parker, Kash, Weissberg, & O'Brien, 2008; Guerin, 2014; Osher et al., 2016; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Postareff et al., 2017; Rowe et al., 2015; Qualter, Gardner & Whiteley, 2007; Schreiner et al., 2011), literature on student engagement (Krause, 2005; Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh et al., 2008; Coates, 2009; Kuh, 2009; Trowler, 2010; Zepke & Leach, 2010; Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013), literature on agency (Archer, 2007; Bandura, 1977; Bandura 1989; Bandura 2001; Bandura 2006; Block, 2013; Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu, 1998; Clegg, 2011; Connor, 2011; Eccles, 2008; Meuleman et al., 2015; O'Leary, 2007), and literature on identity formation (Arnett, 2000; Bamberg, 2012; Brown, 2014; Bruner, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Fenge, 2011; Gee, 2000; La Guardia, 2009; Komarraju et al., 2010; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; McAdams, 2008; Perez, Cromley & Kaplan, 2013; Rich & Schachter, 2012; Stets & Burke, 2014; Whannell & Whannell, 2015; Yeager et al., 2012).

3.4.3 The tools of data construction

For collecting data in qualitative research, the researcher is the "key instrument" (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). I chose to collect multiple types of data, sourced from documents generated by the participants (Patton, 2012), semi-structured interviews (Mason, 2004; Morse, 2012), plus observations (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011)—three types of data identified as being well suited to qualitative case study research (Suter, 2012; Yin, 2002). See Appendix D for details of the tools of data construction.

The data construction tools (see Table 5) were designed to capture the participants' understanding of their experience of education. Document 1, a pre-enrolment piece that I had not planned to use, added some important "historical background" (Stake, 1995, p. 447). Document 2 (Wk1), "A New Beginning", was designed to capture the feelings of the participants at the beginning of their AEP semester. Document 3 (Wk1), "My Story", was designed to provide insight into their backstories. Document 4 (Wk2) was a written reflection on their story of education to this point. Document 5 (Wk5) was a transcript of the first interview. Two more

documents that I had not originally planned to use were two essays written for another unit taken by three of the four participants. Document 6 (Wk5) was a short essay on the participant's personal learning style. Document 7 (Wk8), generated immediately after the mid-semester break, gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their transition to college in the first half of the semester.

Table 5: Data construction tools

Tool	Task/Protocol
1. Pre-enrolment placement piece	Tell me about your approach to study in high school.
2. Week 1 "A New Beginning" (GSEN15000)	So here you are, enrolled at [name] College; a new semester has begun. This is the start of the rest of your life. Tell me what it feels like to be commencing your new journey as a higher education student.
3. Week 1 "My Story" (GSEN15000)	Two-page survey seeking demographic data (age, ATAR, language used at home), with open-ended questions about their backstory and their expectations at the start of the AEP.
4. Week 2, Folio 1 (GSEN15000)	Outline the story of your educational journey up to this point, focusing on your school and post-school experience.
5. Week 5 Interview 1	Question guide for face-to-face, recorded, semi-structured interviews, with sections on family, school, community, and transition to college
6. Week 5 (GSEN16700)	Write a 500-word analysis of your personal learning style.
7. Week 8, Folio 3 (GSEN15000)	Write a short reflection on your transition to college in the first half of the semester.
8. Week 11 GSEN16700 essay	What do you see as the salient features of academic culture? To what degree have you embraced academic culture this semester? Is there anything you wish you had done differently? In what ways have you become a more critical thinker?
9. Week 12 Student journal (GSEN15000)	Keep a reflective journal [Wk1-12] in which you record your thoughts and feelings about your student experience this semester (your journey as a learner).
Exam [alternative Doc 9 for those not keeping a journal] (GSEN15000)	Reflect on your personal commitment and willingness to engage in study this semester. Identify the main strengths and weaknesses of your approach to study. Do you plan to change your approach next semester? Discuss the contribution of the unit, GSEN15000, to your learning.
10. Weeks 12/13 Interview 2	Question guide for face-to-face recorded, semi-structured interviews, informed by the data accumulated
11. Observations	Record of observations kept in researcher's reflective journal.
12. Interview 3	Conversations held after AEP semester.

Document 8 (Wk11) was a longer essay, in which the participants reflected on the way they had embraced academic culture in the AEP. One of the richest data

sources was the reflective journal (Doc 9), kept by participants throughout the semester and submitted in Week 12. In the journals, it was possible to track the participants' emotional states and their unfolding attitudes to study. One participant chose not to keep a journal. Document 10 was a transcription of the second semi-structured interview. Document 11, observation data, created the only data not generated by the participants themselves. The final tool, Document 12, was informal interview data provided after the end of the semester. These tools led to the creation of language-rich data of the kind preferred by narrative researchers and used in constructing the four mini-case studies presented in this dissertation.

Researcher role. As a qualitative researcher, I was interested in processes and meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013) more than statistics and generalising. I had to master two main roles: collector and analyser of qualitative data (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). I also needed an awareness of how I was situated in terms of social status, race, gender, personal perspective, age, and class (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011; Mertens, 2010). In addition to the researcher role, my other roles during this phase included lecturer, course convenor, and mentor to the four participants, with whom I developed relationships of trust that were akin to friendship. The requisite technical skills included the ability to conduct interviews, make observations, and analyse data, as well as embrace multiple views, and be open-minded and non-judgmental. As a check on allowing bias to creep in, I kept a reflective research journal (Creswell, 2007). I quickly realised the need to develop a double ear so that I could focus on both the content and the analysis as the research proceeded (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The skills of qualitative researchers are not unlike the skills of a detective: flexibility, patience, following up useful leads, and adapting to change (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Throughout the research process, researchers have a responsibility to be social, professional, and genuine (Mertens, 2010). Qualitative researchers have been invited to remember that they are the carriers of the complex history of qualitative research as they "confront the ethics and politics of research" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12). This calls for sensitivity as well as creativity in the way they play their various roles.

Story map. To help in the selecting and developing of the data construction tools, I created a story map (Table 6). Narrative research involves not just gathering stories, but constructing stories through the process of "restorying" (Suter, 2012, p.

369). This involves "reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework" (Creswell, 2007, p. 56). This is a three-stage process that involves gathering stories, analysing them for key elements, and rewriting them chronologically. Narratives involve times, places, and social interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), and have "plotlines, character, setting, and action" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 20) plus a "point of view" (Pelias, 2011, p. 661). The participant stories would help me answer the research questions. The backstories would be the starting point, contextualising the participants' experiences of education, and providing a basis for comparison. As Table 6 shows, the story map covers the past and the present, and considers the milieus with which the participants engaged.

Table 6: Story map for data construction

Past	**Family**	**School**	**Friends & community**
School – primary & secondary	Education level & education attitudes of parents & siblings	Relations with classmates & teachers	Influence of friends & community contacts (incl. church)
Present	**Family**	**College**	**Other roles**
1st semester at college in AEP	Level of ongoing support	AEP, physical environment, academic support	Extracurricular factors

Interview data. The most natural way to learn about people and their stories is through talking with them, making the interview a vital tool of narrative research. I chose to use semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Morse, 2012; Mason, 2004), using an interview guide to keep the conversations on track and ensure that similar ground was covered for all four participants (Pepper & Wildy, 2009). The question prompts gave participants the freedom "to fully express their viewpoints and experiences" (Turner, 2010, p. 756). Table 7 shows the interview schedule.

Table 7: Interview schedule

Name	**Round**	**Date**	**Length**
[to be inserted]	1	March/April	[to be inserted]
[to be inserted]	2	May	[to be inserted]
[to be inserted]	3	Various	[to be inserted]

The question protocols contained a core of standard items, supplemented by individual items arising from each participant's document and observation data. Recognising that "interviews are not neutral tools" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 698), that interviewers and interviewees bring their own purposes to a conversation, I strove to allow the participants to position themselves in ways that made them feel comfortable. The interviews were opportunities for active, responsive exchanges that would involve sharing and building mutual confidence. I planned for three rounds of recorded interviews, one five weeks into the semester, one at the end of the semester, plus a later follow-up interview. Allowing more than a month before the first recorded interview gave the participants opportunity to get to know their lecturer-researcher, thereby reducing the anxiety they might have felt about a recorded interview with a virtual stranger. I did not seek personal revelations about their family environments (Marjoribanks, 2005) but a general sense of their family *habitus* plus anything that may have impacted their developing attitude to education. The second interview would provide opportunity to follow up on issues arising from the analysis of the document and observation data accumulating through the semester. My primary interest was to learn how the participants had related to learning and how they had developed as college students in the AEP. A third interview would enable me to follow up issues arising from the ongoing data analysis and learn how the stories of the participants were continuing to unfold as undergraduate students. These would be likely to take the form of informal encounters around the small college campus.

Document data. As Creswell (2008) notes, "documents represent a good source for text (word) data for a qualitative study" (p. 231). Most of the data for this study is in the form of reflective texts, including student journals (Creswell, 2007) kept by the participants in their AEP semester. Eight of the 12 data-construction tools use protocols for eliciting field texts in document form. While a face-to-face encounter like an interview is a shared experience, a piece of reflective writing enables the author to tell the story freely, uninterrupted by the researcher. The first document was written in the familiar setting of their home, before the participants had been accepted into the AEP. The protocol invited them to reflect on their high school approach to study, providing an introduction to their backstory and a clue to their existing student identity. The other seven documents were written in their own

time as assignments for two classes, GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing and GSEN16700 Academic Skills.

Observation data. In the words of Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011), "qualitative social scientists are observers" (p. 467), observing the naturalistic unfolding of events as unobtrusively as possible, either as insiders or outsiders (Creswell, 2013). My position as a researcher-lecturer made me an insider, sharing daily in the participants' AEP experience. Questions have been asked about the objectivity of researchers who get too close to the phenomena they observe. In reality, "there are no objective observations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12). Observers, like speakers, are socially "situated" (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011, p. 467; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 960). As there is no escaping the situated nature of human existence (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, 2008), I recognised the importance of acknowledging upfront my researcher biases, values and experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Constructing the data. Before putting the data construction tools into practice in the "natural environment" (Suter, 2012, p. 344) of the AEP classroom and its environs, I trialled and refined them. Table 8 shows the data construction schedule and the data sources. Except for the pre-enrolment writing sample, the data were constructed during the participants' first semester in the AEP. As noted above, the document data, which began accumulating first, informed the interviews that followed. The interview data were co-constructed, but the document data were written by the participants, with minimal prompts from the researcher, especially the reflective journal, in which participants were free to write about their academic journey as they saw fit.

Table 8: Data construction schedule

No.	Source	Date	Provided by
1	Pre-enrolment placement piece	Before acceptance to the AEP	[insert]
2	A New Beginning (GSEN15000)	Week 1 (29 Feb)	[insert]
3	My Story survey (GSEN15000)	Week 1 (1 Mar)	[insert]
4	Folio 1 (GSEN15000)	Week 2 (9 Mar)	[insert]
5	Interview 1 transcript	Wk4-6 (22 Mar - 5 Apr)	[insert]
6	Essay (GSEN16700)	Week 5	[insert]
7	Folio 3 (GSEN15000)	Wk8 (27 Apr)	[insert]
8	Essay (GSEN16700)	Wk11 (17 May)	[insert]
9	Journal, or Exam (GSEN15000)	Wk12 (25 May), or Wk15 (12 Jun)	[insert]

10	Interview 2 transcript	Wk12-15 (21 May - 12 Jun)	[insert]
11	Researcher observation data	Pre-enrolment to Week 15	Researcher
12	Interview 3	After the end of the semester	[insert]

As noted above, seven of the eight items of document data were written as assignments. All of these documents invited participants to be reflective and discuss various aspects of their experience of education. The two GSEN16700 essays required some reading research in addition to self-analysis and reflection. The document data provided a trail showing how the participants related to the AEP course; how they were impacted by the institution, academic staff, family, and friends; how they engaged in study; and how their feelings about themselves as students evolved through the semester. The data were used for "restorying" (Creswell, 2007, p. 56) in the constructing of the mini-case studies.

3.4.4 Data analysis tool

Grounded theory. The analysis adapts the constructivist grounded theory of Charmaz (1996; 2000; 2005; 2006; 2011), an approach which facilitates the constructing of data "around emerging themes and questions" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 31). Aware that many AEP students change significantly through taking an AEP, I wanted to better understand how they experience and understand this change. The research was designed to allow "the categories of analysis to emerge from the data as the study progresse[d]" (Mertens, 2010, p. 225). Being a cyclical process involving "simultaneous data collection and analysis" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 360), grounded theory is well suited to this purpose. I began by coding with gerunds, themes, and in vivo coding (King, 2012; Rapley, 2011), and then identified the frequently recurring codes. Finally, I searched for the larger themes that emerged when related codes were combined—the process of "drill[ing] down" (Rapley, 2011, p. 284). I used three levels of coding: "line-by-line coding" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 39) to identify the initial codes; "selective or focused coding" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 516) to identify the recurring codes; and "theoretical sampling" (p. 519)—level 3 coding—to identify categories that could be used to develop a grounded theory. However, my purpose was not to develop a grounded theory, but to document the meaning teenage students found in the narratives of their AEP experience.

The explanatory ideas emerged inductively as I interacted with the data. For each segment of constructed data, I generated 3-column tables (Table 9). The first

column shows the initial codes; the second column, the participant data; and the third column, the rule that explains the linkage between the first two columns. At Level 1, there is just one main rule: use gerunds as far as possible to identify the actions that can be identified by working through the text line by line. In instances where in vivo codes or themes seemed more effective, these were used instead of gerunds.

Table 9: Level 1 coding

Level 1, Initial coding		
Codes	**Participant data**	**Rules**
[Insert codes]	[Insert data]	Use gerunds to identify actions
Example: Seeing himself improve in his study	"I'm seeing myself starting to pick up in my study."	

The Level 1 coding process was followed by a second round of coding. Using "constant comparative method" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515), I compared data source with data source and participant with participant to discover the "emerging themes" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 31) or focused codes (Charmaz, 2000). The coding strategy was aided by "memo writing" (p. 517), a process that stimulated my thinking and helped me to make connections. It was rather like putting together the pieces in a "jigsaw puzzle" (Suter, 2012, p. 348). Table 10 shows four fragments of data to illustrate focused coding. It shows two emerging categories: finding study a battle, and feeling good about study progress.

Table 10: Level 2 coding

Level 2, Focused coding		
Codes	**Participant data**	**Rules**
[Insert codes]	[Insert data]	[Insert rules]
Finding study a battle, trouble prioritising [Ben, Wk5]	"My studies have started to take second place. I know they should take priority over anything else, but I just find it all too grinding."	Identify codes that occur frequently in the data
Finding study a battle, prioritising only the start of the problems [Gaara, Wk5]	"Trying to concentrate and motivate myself to study can be difficult. Time management, being organised and distractions are my main weaknesses." [goes on to list other weaknesses: getting started, forgetting, not being punctual, leaving things to the last minute, chronic tiredness, sleeping in, missing lectures, being indecisive, daydreaming, and more]	
Feeling good about study progress [Andrew, Wk5]	"After a month of college I am very happy with the way that I am going … My sense of hope is quite high."	

Feeling good about study progress [Jodi, Wk7]	"I'm very proud of myself with the amount of study I have been doing the last week. I tried the 10 minute study burst and two hours later I was still there studying."	

Table 11 identifies the Level 3 category of socio-emotional connectedness that emerged from the data. Trial and error revealed which potential categories had the most explanatory power. Early memos used words like motivation, aspirations, reflections, engagement, disadvantage, self-beliefs, family influence, school effects, and bullying. From the initial analysis of one participant's data, 12 overlapping themes emerged. Seven of the 12 themes related to the participant's self-identity in terms of attitudes, values, aspirations, hopes and fears. Working on the data and writing the stories of the other participants suggested that the 12 themes could be collapsed down to three main categories: self-beliefs, the influence of family and friends, and response to study processes. Thus, the central theme was connectedness: feeling connected to significant people in their lives, feeling connected with academic learning, and reconnecting with themselves as they worked to develop new identities as college students. The category illustrated here—socio-emotional support—combines data that give evidence of contributions from a range of socio-emotional supports, including family, friends, other community members, former high school teachers, college lecturers, tutors, and other college personnel. Analysing the student emotion data was facilitated by the taxonomy of emotional categories described by Hailikari et al. (2016).

Table 11: Level 3 coding

Level 3 Categories		
Categories	**Participant data**	**Rules**
[Insert categories]	[Insert participant data]	Find larger categories that can accommodate related codes
Socio-emotional support (esp. family) providing encouragement	"My parents are supporting me a lot with my [college] work." [Jodi, Wk 3]	
Socio-emotional support (especially family) providing encouragement	"My family are one of the biggest support systems for me. I go to them for help and I go to them when I'm down and upset about my college journey." [Andrew, Wk8]	
[No references to socio-emotional support giving encouragement to study]	"A month has already passed; personally I cannot believe it has gone by so fast. I have started to … focus more on enjoying my time with my friends." [Ben, Wk5]	
[No references to socio-	"Although some [of my college friends] were	

emotional support providing encouragement to study.]	studious, there were those that gave most of their time to other things. This influenced me to follow their lead and prevented me from getting any homework done." [Gaara, Wk15]	

3.5 Representation aspect

The third aspect of the project was the construction of the text that reports the research findings. My interest was not propositional language and numbers (Willis, 2007), but creating a narrative of human experience. Today, the contrasts between traditional social science and poststructural approaches are seen not so much as a dichotomy, but as part of a qualitative continuum (Ellingson, 2011), with approaches that use the epistemological assumptions of positivism at the right-hand end, approaches that celebrate artistic expressions of human subjectivity, emotions, and stories at the other end, and social constructionist and postmodern-influenced perspectives in the middle. This project is situated in Ellingson's middle ground.

3.5.1 Issues in postmodern textual representation

Textual representation issues identified in the literature include voice, signature, narrative form, audience, the ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality, plus authority and interpretation (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Critical issues here include who has the right to describe the world, decide what to investigate or how to investigate it, and how to represent multiple voices. We could script a new world, or re-create the old one. My challenge was to create a reflexive text that would justly and harmoniously locate both the participants and me (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This meant finding a way to "represent reality in a postmodern world" (Tierney, 2002, p. 389), by reconstructing and examining the subjective understanding of the participants, not seeking correspondence with an abstracted reality (Mus, 2012). This dissertation does not depict reality; it "constitutes [a reality]" (Riessman, 2008, p. 193), a reality that represents multiple realities (Suter, 2012), multiple ways of knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), multiple voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and multiple perceptions (Stake, 2005). The text retrospectively turns chronologies of events into stories expressing the "emotions, thoughts, and interpretations" (Chase, 2005, p. 656) of the participants. The meanings of these stories can be seen as keys to the successes and failures of the participants.

3.5.2 Relationship to the writing

As a writer, I had several relationships to consider. First, there was my relationship to the writing process and the content of the text. This was "a process of discovery" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210) as I worked to discover what it was that I wanted to say. As Geertz (2000) notes, "first you write and then you figure out what you are writing about" (p. v). Writing can be a matter of discovering what you know as you write (Pelias, 2011). Such a process is necessarily "iterative" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 360) or "recursive" (Colyar, 2009, p. 434) as one cycles through the phases of data constructing and data analysis, comparing and triangulating in the effort to faithfully represent the experiences of the participants. The process can also be "dialectic" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 127) when the understandings of the researcher and the researched do not coincide. This brings moments of negotiation and explanation that can improve understanding on both sides. The writing process is difficult (Colyar, 2009; Tierney, 2002). Challenging and shaping thinking, it is "a kind of self-making" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 126). Writing enlarged my self-understanding as well as my understanding of the research participants. From the participants, I discovered how they try on an academic identity. From the research experience, I discovered myself as a researcher and found my voice as a writer. At the same time, personal limitations reminded me that I am a situated knower (Richardson, 1994; Christians, 2005), with something to say about one small part of the world of knowledge. Deciding what I want to say has been my challenge in writing this dissertation. I have more clarity now than I had at the start. What I have written says something about what I know now but it does not represent "what [I] may know later" (Colyar, 2009, p. 434). The view of the AEP experience as represented here is necessarily "partial and partisan" (Pelias, 2011, p. 661). I offer my thinking "in humility" (Smythe et al., 2008), knowing that my suggestions are at best tentative.

3.5.3 Relationship to voice

As a writer, I had to consider my relationship to the voices heard in this text. By voice, I mean "the person who is telling the story" (Gullion, 2016, p. 59). In ethnography, voice is how researchers express themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), but qualitative researchers also give voice to participants (Mus, 2012). In doing this, I determined not to be a ventriloquist, putting words in the mouths of participants; rather, I let them speak for themselves. My voice is heard, perhaps not fitting neatly

into any one of Chase's (2005) categories, but sometimes offering an authoritative interpretation, often being supportive, and often being interactive. In the text, our voices are blended (Charmaz, 2005; Abma & Widdershoven, 2011). While my voice must not drown the voices of the participants (Clandinen & Huber, 2010), it must be heard so that readers have adequate guidance and are not confronted with too great a burden of interpretation. The participant voice is not "tokenistic" (Mus, 2012, p. 142) as the participants are heard telling their stories in their own words, sharing their own understanding. I have sought to create an authentic representation of the voices, allowing the participants to sound like themselves (Gullion, 2016). All the voices contributing to the project have been heard and respected (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

3.5.4 Relationship to the reader

Researchers and readers play active roles in making meaning (Mus, 2012), a task that is simplified when there is clarity around genre. As Riessman (2011) observes, "form follows function" (p. 314). My text has several functions, and several genres are displayed, including description, explanation, analysis and storytelling. I aspired to accept Tierney's (2002) challenge to produce a text that might draw readers in; stories have this power (Berry & Patti, 2015), and my participants' stories are compelling. Readers who keep turning the pages (Richardson, 1994) might be encouraged to respond to the issues. To produce writing that persuades readers (Riessman, 2008), I must meet the expectation of "verisimilitude" (Creswell, 2007, p. 45) for critical readers to be convinced. I set out to achieve this using genuine data from credible participants and interpreting their accounts in a carefully reasoned way. My text is intended to broaden the reader's horizons. Readers, of course, will make the ultimate interpretation, which may differ from mine (Creswell, 2013). They will put themselves into the stories in multiple ways as Richardon's (1994) crystallisation metaphor suggests; and from their multiple perspectives, they will judge the credibility and worth of the text (Pepper & Wildy, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2007). My purpose in sharing this narrative account is to promote understanding of the effectiveness of pathway education, especially the second-chance opportunity that alternative pathways give to teenage students.

3.5.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, a criterion used in evaluating qualitative research (Northcote, 2012), has been described as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210). My research journey has made me reflect critically on research processes and on my role as a qualitative researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013), encouraging me to take the steps needed to ensure the quality of the study (De la Cuesta, 2015). One step has been to reflect on my own "values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases" (Mertens, 2010, p. 249) and monitor these throughout the research process. A tool to achieve quality rather than an indicator of quality (De la Cuesta, 2015), reflexivity is an integral part of the research process, not an extra step tacked on at the end. Being a co-creator of the data used to shape and "'restory' the account" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57) required that I be reflective about my own background and how its "situatedness" (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 1391) coloured my understanding and interpretation of the world. Reflexivity also helped me maintain my focus on the "other" (Tierney, 2002, p. 392), the participants, whose narratives of education provided the backbone of the thesis that is developed here. Keeping a reflective journal contributed to this reflexivity (Watt, 2007).

3.6 Data adequacy

All researchers face the challenge of demonstrating that their work is "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290) and safe to act on. Since objective reality cannot be captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005), qualitative researchers can choose to take one of three positions on quality assessment: they can use criteria adapted from quantitative research, develop different criteria, or reject pre-determined criteria (Rolfe, 2006). Adapting quantitative criteria produces qualities like "dependability", "confirmability", "transferability", and "credibility" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 34). I take the view that the assessment of data adequacy must be framed in terms of the assumptions of the chosen research paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). As a constructivist researcher, I expect quality to be expressed in constructivist terms (Guba & Lincoln, 2013). Two kinds of quality check (rigour) were built into this research: methodological quality and interpretive quality (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

3.6.1 Methodological quality

Methodological trustworthiness has been established in this research project through working consistently and reflexively on the challenges of answering the research question, and using the principles of qualitative research identified in this chapter. Inspired by the literature, I developed an emergent methodology that suited the research purpose, used appropriate sampling approaches in selecting the site and the participants, chose effective ways to co-create data with the participants, chose an appropriate method of analysing the data, and wrote the dissertation in a way that honours the stories of the participants and makes respectful use of their voices.

3.6.2 Interpretive quality

Interpretive quality is perhaps the greater challenge for qualitative researchers. I used seven of eight strategies identified by Creswell (2007), including "prolonged engagement and persistent observation" (p. 207), multiple types of data and multiple data-collection points, triangulation, peer checks, multiple participants, acknowledging bias (my passion to see students achieve success) and the subjective nature of the research, member checking, and constructing "rich data" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 33), characterised by "thick descriptions" (Mus, 2012, p. 139).

The study can also be evaluated against seven expectations of an effective narrative study (Creswell, 2007). First, it focuses on a small number of individuals and develops four mini-case studies. Second, the participants provided data that included small stories about their educational experience. Third, chronologies were developed. Fourth, the chronologies were used as a basis for "restorying" (p. 56). Fifth, I sought to make the stories persuasive as stories of "life experience" (Chase, 2011, p. 423). Sixth, the dissertation contains extensive discussion of the major theme, the formation of college student identity (Carter, 2013; Daniels & Brooker, 2014). Seventh, without seeking to shift the focus from the participants, I have reflexively brought myself to the study (Pelias, 2011).

In the analysis, I have been mindful of four criteria identified by Charmaz (2005): "credibility", "originality", "resonance", and "usefulness" (p. 528). There is credibility in my intimate knowledge of the co-constructed mini-cases. For this, I am grateful to the participants for sharing so many details of their stories of education. This is original research, the first in-depth grounded study to focus on the formation

of a college student identity by teenage AEP students. Finally, the study is useful in that it adds to our understanding of the life experience of AEP students.

The study has "plausibility" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 7) because it is characterised by "honesty, sincerity, and truthfulness" (McNiff, 2007, p. 320). The narrative has "communicative adequacy" (p. 325) to the extent that it engages readers, encourages them to reflect, broadens their horizons, and provides moments of recognition. I continue to ask myself how well I know what I think I know as I contemplate the relative truths and partial insights (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) of the findings. As a narrative researcher, I do not claim, 'This is factual'; rather, I make the more modest claim, 'This is how I understand things' (Chase, 2011). I am aware that "the ultimate test of validity" (Riessman (2008) p. 193) is having one's research used by others in their work. How others respond to this research will be the ultimate proof of its worth.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the emergent design of a narrative research study that investigated how four teenagers developed as students during one semester in an AEP. Every aspect of the project evolved, including the purpose and question, my worldview as researcher, the chosen paradigms, the research design, the data constructing tools, and the shape of the mini-case studies. It had been my purpose to write a realistic account. As my understanding of narrative reality developed, I found myself agreeing with Mus (2012) that "qualitative research most directly approximates literary fiction in its form and its function" (p. 147). It does not follow that the dissertation is a work of fiction; rather, it is a work that illuminates, shining light on the processes of college student identity formation among teenage AEP students. The research journey came as a surprise to me, taking me to places I had not planned to visit. The next four chapters present the research findings, showing how the four participants responded to their second-chance opportunity to demonstrate their readiness for higher education.

Chapter 4: The Backstory

4.1 Introduction

To contextualise the experience of AEP students, it is necessary to understand where they come from. Their background helps to explain why so many promising teenage students finish high school unprepared for university—perhaps with no intention of seeking higher education—yet soon find themselves looking for a second chance to matriculate. Their backstory reveals the complexity of their lives, including things like culture, social class, race, and ability (Habel et al., 2016). Social class can be a barrier (Whannell & Whannell, 2015), and it can confer privilege; but it does not determine character (Burger & Walk, 2016), which is a product of individual agency, the key to the success of these students. The backstory contains clues to students' attitudes, especially their attitude to education. The legacy of attitudes formed at home can linger. While primary *habitus* (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017) does not determine how people's lives unfold, its influence is significant and gives shape to the way individuals learn how to adapt and how to exercise agency. Since "student success is a process that begins long before students first enrol in postsecondary education" (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017, p. 22), it is important to understand the background factors that are precursors to student success in an AEP and subsequent undergraduate study. These factors include not just the influence of people, but also institutional practices and larger socio-economic and political considerations. This dissertation focuses on the people from whom AEP students derive support as they learn how to exercise agency in striving to achieve their life goals. Typically, this support comes from family, teachers, mentors, peers and friends (Daniels & Brooker, 2014; Messinis & Sheehan, 2015). There are two stages in the support process. First, there is the support and encouragement students receive before enrolling in an AEP—support that contributes to the decision to enrol. Then, there is the ongoing support students receive after they enrol. This chapter examines the importance of the socio-emotional support that students receive prior to enrolling in an AEP.

4.2 Family *habitus* and parental support

This section begins with brief biographies of the four participants in the study, focusing partly on family *habitus* (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017) and partly on

other key elements of their backstories. A culturally diverse group, they responded to their AEP experience in different ways.

Jodi. Jodi was the only participant with two Australian-born parents. Both had left school after Year 10. Despite their lack of formal education, they supported the educational aspirations of their four children. Jodi remembered being the one in primary school who would put her hand up to answer questions; she also loved demonstrating on the blackboard in front of the class. In high school, however, she developed a tendency to get involved with girls who showed little interest in schoolwork—an attitude that impacted on her. Jodi's mother enrolled in an AEP as Jodi was about to quit school at the end of Year 10. Instead of completing Years 11 and 12, she gained life experience in the world of work. Interestingly, two of her three part-time jobs took her back into the school environment, where she spent two years coaching children's gymnastics. This experience, combined with the influence of the success of her mother and her older sister as undergraduate students in teacher education degree programs, gave her a growing desire to become a teacher herself. Having no ATAR and not having completed senior high school, she needed the second chance offered by an AEP.

Andrew. Andrew had an Australian mother, an Asian biological father, and a Pacifica step-father, the man he had always known as *"dad"*. The family was so strongly supportive of education that they chose to relocate from the city to a regional town so that Andrew could attend a religious high school from Years 7 to 12 and get a *"good education"*. Neither of his parents had attended university, but his mother's side of the family boasted some graduates, including several teachers. Andrew had no interest in adding another teacher to the family. He got on well with most of his school teachers, but thought a few were boring. He sometimes found himself sitting in their classes contemplating what he would do to improve the learning experience for students. For Andrew, however, the most important aspect of his school experience was sport. He was a state representative in touch football and captained his school at the Hunter Region Independent Schools championships, where they became *"18-years champions"*. His first love was rugby league, which he was determined to play at NRL level as soon as he could prepare himself. Completing high school without earning an ATAR, he took an apprenticeship while continuing to prepare for a footballing future. When his apprenticeship fell through,

he did not know what to do next. At this time of crisis, he consulted his parents plus several former teachers that he considered friends. They all gave him the same advice, insisting he *"would be a real good teacher"*. This was a new thought. Unlike Jodi, he had not spent two years teaching gymnastics and developing a desire to become a school teacher. He had just a few weeks in which to get used to the idea of becoming a teacher and make it his own. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that he could help *"kids that struggle"* the way he had struggled academically at school. He, too, needed an AEP so that he could qualify to commence an undergraduate program in teacher education. Like Jodi, Andrew had a parent—his step-father—who had commenced higher education two years earlier. There is no doubt he played a pivotal role in Andrew's decision to enrol in an AEP offered at the institution where he was studying.

Ben. Ben's parents had been born in widely separated parts of the English-speaking world. His father had left school after Year 9, but his mother was a graduate, with a degree in nursing. Ben did all of his schooling, from Years 1 to 12, in church schools. His primary school experience had been blighted by bullying and not helped by a difficult relationship with his father. By the time he started high school, a growth spurt had seen him transition from being a target for bullying to being the protector of his mates, a *"big, tall scary guy"*. Despite being suspended from school several times, he retained the support of his teachers, who seemed keen to help him, especially his biology teacher, who became a principal role model. Under his influence, Ben decided to *"study biology and make some contribution to the great world of science".* While Ben's father did not encourage him to attend university, his mother urged him to get a higher education. Ben's attitude to education and study was formed in this context of conflicting parental advice—advice that had not helped him at school and would not be likely to help him in the AEP that he decided to take, after failing to earn an ATAR that would qualify him to commence undergraduate study.

Gaara. Gaara had Pacifica parents, who generally used their mother tongue, rather than English, at home. A manual labourer, her laid-back father was reluctant to accept leadership roles in the local Pacifica community, despite being urged to do so. In contrast, her mother returned to study as soon as the children were independent enough, commencing work on an arts degree. She completed her degree while Gaara

was in high school. Inspired by an older brother's skill in drawing, Gaara took an interest in art that saw her win art awards at school and in the community. Winning a prize of $500 at one art show seemed to confirm that she could have a future in art. Art, however, was something Gaara did for fun, not for academic purposes. Indeed, life for Gaara was all about fun. In the Pacifica community and at school, she played a lot of sports. Among her peers, she was known as a loud, *"funny joker"*. While some of her friends were keen students, Gaara preferred her non-studious friends.

The variations in the backstories of the four would impact their AEP experience in ways that differed significantly. Jodi and Andrew would continue to live at home with their parents, in proximity to the college where their parents were undergraduates and where they were about to enrol in an AEP. Ben and Gaara, on the other hand, would have to leave home and travel interstate to enrol in the same AEP—a potentially unsettling relocation that could create complications for them. We will now take a closer look at the quality of their primary *habitus*.

4.2.1 What this means

Family *habitus* is the social culture that children are exposed to in the home where they are nurtured. It encourages particular ways of thinking, acting and responding to the environment and is strongly influenced by the ideas and attitudes modelled by parents. Developing this primary *habitus* is a learning experience that depends heavily on parental support. At this stage in a child's development, parents play a large part in helping them become individuals, form a personal and social identity, and develop self-belief. Family *habitus* and parental support lay the groundwork on which individuals build educational and career expectations. While these early experiences do not determine the paths that young lives follow, they play a significant part in pointing the way.

4.2.2 What the literature says

Academic success is a process that begins before college or university (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). It begins in childhood with parents who encourage their children to value education by "providing a … stimulating physical, cognitive and emotional environment in the home" (Dubow et al., 2009, p. 244). The influence of family *habitus* can predispose students to aspire to obtain a higher education. The contribution that parents make to "college-going *habitus*" (Grodsky & Riegle-

Crumb, 2010) may be greater than that of teachers and peers (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Having a parent who is a graduate increases the likelihood that their progeny will complete higher education as it provides them with an insider view (Chesters & Watson, 2013), a "feel of the game" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 14) due to the greater harmony between their family *habitus* and university *habitus* (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). Parents, however, need not be graduates in order to give their children these advantages as college-going *habitus* can be developed by students from disadvantaged backgrounds too (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, 2010). Regardless of their SES, parents can read to their children from an early age and provide enriching cultural experiences such as museum visits (Gaddis, 2013). Children from such backgrounds are more likely to pursue higher education than children from less stimulating home environments. All children have cultural resources, but not all have the kind of resources that are valued at university, nor do all have equal awareness of the rules of the academic game. A complicating feature of Ben's experience of family was the harsh treatment he received from his father as a child, exacerbating the bullying experienced at school. Bullying can have long-lasting consequences (Berger, 2006), including negative academic consequences (Graham, 2016) that can persist through to adulthood and college (Holt et al., 2014). Parental discouragement can be an additional academic barrier (Shah & Whannell, 2017). Ben's story provides evidence that his identity development had been negatively affected by these influences, which undermined his confidence and produced feelings of uncertainty.

4.2.3 What this study shows

Ben. Ben's backstory identified him as the one most likely to succeed at college. He was the only one of the four to enjoy the life-long nurture of a parent who was a graduate, his mother, a qualified nurse. Of the two participants with an ATAR, Ben had the higher ATAR (50.65). And he was one of two who had formed what appeared to be a firm career goal while still at school. A parent who is a graduate can be a role model for the children, reassuring them that theirs is a family with a record of achievement in higher education, a conviction bequeathed to Ben by his mother:

> *My mum was the one really pushing for tertiary* [education].

Counterbalancing her positive influence was his father's negative attitude to higher education. Having been belittled by well-educated members of his own family, Ben's father was inclined to see educated people as *"showing off"*. Against this background, he gave Ben little encouragement to aim high:

> *He wasn't pushing me to do anything further than secondary education.*

With these mixed parental messages, Ben developed an ambiguous attitude to study that had a negative effect on his approach to study in senior high school, including during the period leading up to his HSC final examinations. Explaining this, he said:

> *While I should have been studying during this period, I generally avoided study and that took its toll in my final exams.*

This observation was reinforced in a later reflection on his high school study habits:

> *In high school, I never studied at home* [and] *I spent my time doing what I wanted in school.*

Having a parent with an overtly negative attitude to higher education may have encouraged Ben to put loyalty to the "cultural milieu" (Prodonovich et al., 2014, pp. 178-179) that his father represented ahead of high academic aspirations.

The family shaming experienced by Ben's father helps to explain his negative attitude to education and his need to compensate for the low evaluation his family appeared to place on his intelligence. Ben's data suggested that he may have picked up from his father an urgent need to be considered intelligent. For example, in comparing himself with others, he concluded that he had superior critical thinking. He gave the impression that he believed smart students did not need to study hard. This attitude had an unhelpful impact on his approach to study. Boasting about his school performance, he claimed:

> *I never had trouble with my subjects and I could pass most with ease.*

What he achieved was done without studying. When a disappointing ATAR exposed his limitations at the end of Year 12, he sought to preserve his self-belief and reputation by explaining the reversal as evidence of underachievement. Ben's disappointing results can be explained in part by the poor attitude to study that he

had formed under the influence of his father. Had he been more responsive to his mother's influence, he might have achieved better results in Year 12. This experience of relative failure came as a shock to Ben, leaving him with a palpable fear of failure. His father's influence appeared to have contributed to an unhelpful belief that intelligence is a fixed trait (Usher & Kober, 2012) that does not need to be nurtured and developed through effort. Ben seemed to believe that having to work hard was evidence of a lack of intelligence. This would help to explain the cavalier attitude to study that kept him from developing regular study habits at high school. This would not be a helpful approach for Ben to bring to the AEP.

While the family *habitus* was not academically as helpful as it might have been, Ben's parents were supportive. Instead of sending him to a local public school, they paid for both him and his younger sister to attend a religious school on the other side of the city, from Grade 1 all the way to Year 12. And when his mother continued to encourage him to further his education, his father did not stand in the way. According to Ben, they were unified in approving his decision to travel interstate to take an AEP that would offer a second chance to qualify for undergraduate study. While he came with their blessing, he had a negative attitude to study, a chronic fear of failure, and a great deal of uncertainty as a consequence of his childhood bullying and an awkward relationship with his father.

Gaara. Like Ben, Gaara had an ATAR (42.15). Her mother completed a BA while Gaara was at high school. Having her mother engaged in university study for half of her time at high school appeared to give Gaara a quality of parental role-modelling that might have encouraged her to develop academic aspirations and behaviour, and might also have provided insight into the rules of the academic game. However, Gaara's family *habitus* had components that created other pressures and distractions. There was a general expectation that Gaara and her siblings would do their homework when they came home from school. They might *"get a hiding"* from their parents if schoolwork was not done properly. While a harsh parenting style can be associated with lower academic achievement (Pinquart, 2016), in this case, the hidings seem to have been more a threat than a reality as Gaara was definite about her family being a happy one. In a conversation, Gaara acknowledged that the family influence in relation to study was inconsistent:

Sometimes it's positive. Oh, most of the time it's positive; sometimes it's negative 'cause sometimes they tend to watch television and stuff too much, so I get influenced to watch with them, and then… [changing direction] *But it's a good thing that they told me off to go study, um, or* [watch] *rugby…*

This routine persisted throughout her high school years, including the years when her mother was a tertiary student. Gaara and her siblings would all too often end up watching television with their parents instead of doing homework. Not only were her parents' good intentions not consistently followed through, their sometimes authoritarian and sometimes laissez faire approach may not have encouraged her to develop a sufficiently independent sense of personal responsibility. She appeared to have formed the view that education was something done to her by others—parents and teachers—not something for which she was personally responsible. AEP students whose family *habitus* does not encourage the development of independence and self-discipline may struggle academically as self-discipline predicts academic success (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Kyllonen et al., 2014).

Like Ben, Gaara had a supportive mother, who encouraged her to pursue higher education. Her mother modelled academic motivation and a desire to improve herself through education. While her father had no university education, he was not antagonistic as Ben's father was. Nor was he driven to pursue education. In fact, he appeared to be a rather laid-back individual, inclined to avoid accepting too much responsibility. In a conversation in Week 5, Gaara compared her parents' attitude to her travelling more than 1,000 km to enrol in the AEP:

Oh, well, my dad wasn't too sure if I should come 'cause I… [trailing off] *But my mum wanted me to come 'cause it was the only option. But since I'm here, he's happy that I'm happy.*

Ben's family *habitus* had provided contrasting role models, with a mother who believed in higher education and a father who did not. Gaara's family *habitus* likewise provided contrasting parental role models, with a mother who was driven to pursue higher education and a father who had a more casual approach. The big question to be answered was which parent's example would have the greater influence on Gaara's choices and her use of personal agency. Following the example

of her mother should serve her well as an AEP student, but following her father's example might not.

Andrew. Andrew and Jodi each had a parent partway through a degree when they enrolled in the AEP. The new dimension this brought to the family *habitus* was significant. While they had not enjoyed the life-long benefit of having a graduate parent, their stories show that the influence of their student-parent became favourable to their own academic aspirations. Andrew was starting Year 11 when his father enrolled as a full-time tertiary student in a baccalaureate program. From this point on, Andrew's family life had a stronger focus on higher education. Andrew had always seen his father as his principal role model, and two years after his father commenced higher education, Andrew enrolled in an AEP at the college of higher education attended by his father.

Andrew's family had always taken a keen interest in his education; being religious people, they were keen for him to attend a church school:

> *From a young age my parents wanted me to attend a private school and get a good education, so I started kindy at* [names school]. *In year 3 I left … because my parents found the fees to* [*sic*] *dear, and I attended* [names school] *public school.*

Three years later, with Andrew about to start high school, the family moved to a regional area so that Andrew could return to a church school. His grandparents had played a part in supporting this move by agreeing to pay his school fees. Despite having no higher education, Andrew's parents strongly supported education and wanted to see Andrew do well at school. In his first week in the AEP, Andrew testified to their impact on his life, especially his step-father:

> *My father … holds education highly so he leads by example and does well in educational activities. My mother has a diploma in something to do with massaging and she also leads by example in excelling at educational activities.*

The impact of his step-father added a new dimension when Andrew commenced Year 11 as that was the year he returned to study himself, commencing a 4-year degree program. When his step-father saw him neglecting study and prioritising

sport, he made him reduce his involvement in sport. The following year, when Andrew started Year 12, his father applied a 10.00 p.m. curfew on his weekly visit with his girlfriend. From time to time, he also gave Andrew advice about learning techniques.

After completing Year 12, when Andrew's apprenticeship fell through before it really got started, he found himself with no Plan B. With family help, he examined his options. Not for the first time, his parents urged him to try teaching, insisting that he would make *"a real good teacher"*. Their influence encouraged him to reflect on his school experience and some of the teaching he had encountered:

> *I got taught by teachers, a lot of boring teachers too. I sat there in class and every now and then I got to thinking how I could change class to make it better for those kids that struggle just like I did in high school.*

This was an interesting reflection for someone who had not contemplated becoming a teacher. It came to him as a kind of revelation, one for which he had his parents to thank. The same message was reinforced by the advice he was receiving from three of his favourite teachers. Andrew had enjoyed great support from not just his parents and teachers, but also from his grandparents, who *"pushed"* him to work at his studies. Andrew remembers his father saying to him that if he won in one area of life, he would be a winner in every area. The positive messages Andrew received from his father contrasted with the negative messages Ben had received from his father. Not only did Andrew's parents support his plan to enrol in the AEP, they helped him formulate the plan. For Andrew, family was his *"biggest support system"*. There was no question about the quality of Andrew's family support, but there was a question to ask about his late adoption of this new career goal. Ben and Gaara had long-standing goals that had focused their thinking and planning for years. Only time would tell whose goals would prove most effective.

Jodi. Jodi's family had no history of involvement in higher education, but her situation was similar to Andrew's in that both parents believed in education and encouraged their children to aim high. While they were favourable to education, as Year 10 leavers they were not knowledgeable about education and not well placed to provide practical help or advice, particularly once their children reached the higher

levels. They watched Jodi's school progress and expressed concern when they saw her being negatively influenced by a girl at school, saying:

> *Jodi, you've changed since you've been hanging around her.*

Jodi received this as an expression of concern for her, not a judgmental comment against her. The family had an interest in learning, but also were passionate about *"doing sport and action stuff"*. In the context of her story, this comment led me to see Jodi as an "action girl" with a very supportive family:

> *My family is a close family. We are all there for each other always. They are very important to me.*

When Jodi was bullied at her first high school, the family supported her decision to transfer to a smaller private school, recommended by her older sister. At the new school things went well for Jodi for several years, before she finally lost interest in study and joined the workforce after Year 10 instead of doing Years 11 and 12. Though disappointed, her parents continued to support her.

Around the time Jodi left school, her mother and sister enrolled in an AEP that offered them the opportunity, if successful, to move into an undergraduate program and study for education degrees. From her workplace—the schools in which she was coaching children's gymnastics—Jodi saw them getting on with their lives and improving themselves. Her work experience had made her realise that she could enjoy school teaching. Now she saw two members of her family on a path that might enable them to qualify as teachers. Becoming a little envious, she began to hope that it might be possible for her to follow a similar path, despite her failure to complete senior high school. One day she mentioned how she had been impacted by the decisions of her mother and sister:

> *I saw them and they're, like, getting on with their life, and especially mum. She's a big influence, 'cause she's, like, "I can get in* [and] *do it, why can't you?" So, yeah, I've always been thinking I didn't really know for certain what I wanted to do when I grow up, so when I get a professional career, so she kind of… yeah, I was looking at her, thinking, "well she's in her 40s and she can do it, so… The longer you wait, the less chance you have of like, yeah, getting places, I reckon.*

Following the example of her mother and sister, she applied and was accepted into the AEP. Her family were excited and pleased for her to be back studying. She enjoyed their full support. Again she noted the inspiring example of her mother:

> *If my nearly 50 year old* [*sic*] *mother can do this, then so can I.*

It is evident that interest in education had deepened in Jodi's family. Her older sister had been the first in the family to complete Year 12. Then her mother and her sister had enrolled in an AEP. Both women articulated from the AEP into teacher education degree programs, where they found immediate success. Their example rubbed off on Jodi, who chose to follow the same path. Not having done Year 12 and lacking the maturity of her mother, Jodi knew that she faced bigger struggles than they had, but she looked forward with hope. The family influence had inspired her to pursue higher education. Jodi was the least qualified of the four participants in this study. The coming semesters would reveal whether her preparation had been adequate.

The backstories of the four participants reveal that two of them, Ben and Gaara, had formed career goals at high school while the other two, Andrew and Jodi, had experienced dramatic shifts in their career goals after leaving school (discussed further in Section 5.3.2). Ben and Gaara do not reveal whether their parents had influenced their career goals, but Gaara mentions being influenced by her brother. In contrast, Andrew and Jodi were both significantly influenced by their parents. In Andrew's case, his parents began by helping him formulate a career goal that he had not considered. Jodi's work experience led her to choose a career goal that happened to coincide with the goal her mother had adopted, and she used her mother's example as inspiration.

4.2.4 How this study reflects the literature

Family has a significant influence on people's lives, especially in the formative years (Comer, 2013). Family *habitus* affect attitudes to education (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017), bestowing "family capital" (Gofen, 2009, p. 104) and "cultural wealth" (O'Shea, 2016, p. 60) that predispose individuals to view education in particular ways. While it is advantageous to see education in positive terms that encourage the belief that higher education is achievable, *habitus* does not determine the outcome (Faber, 2017). *Habitus* is not a passive influence that washes over

family members and predetermines their choices. *Habitus* can encourage reflexivity, leaving individuals as free agents to explore their options, before making constructive choices in the overlapping fields they inhabit (Decoteau, 2016). The backstories of the four participants in this study reveal commonalities as well as sharp differences that have implications for their likely success in further education. The family *habitus* of all four gave at least some positive encouragement to their educational aspirations. Ben was the only one of the four with a parent who was a graduate; he was also the only one to form higher education aspirations while attending high school. This reflects what is claimed in the literature about the higher education aspirations of children with a graduate parent. Despite all four having been nurtured by generally supportive parents who believed in basic education, there was variation in the messages they received about higher education. While Ben's mother supported higher education, his father's attitude was dismissive, reflecting what the literature says about parental discouragement being a potential barrier (Shah & Whannell, 2017). Andrew, Jodi and Gaara had a parent begin higher education while they were in high school. There does not appear to be anything in the literature about the influence on teenage students of a parent who is a higher education student when they make their decision to pursue higher education. For these three students, the influence of their student-parent was powerful. Gaara came to college to take the AEP largely at her mother's insistence. Encouraged and inspired by their student-parent, the other two came voluntarily, believing that the AEP could help them further their growing ambitions to become teachers.

4.2.5 What this study adds

This study adds to the literature by focusing specifically on the impact of *habitus* and parental support on the academic aspirations of teenage students who leave school having failed to qualify for undergraduate study. It provides insight into why they underperformed at high school and explains their motivation in returning to study so soon after leaving high school.

4.3 School teachers

A second group contributing to the context in which students grow as individuals before enrolling in an AEP is school teachers.

4.3.1 What this means

Next to parents, teachers are likely to have the greatest impact on the young lives that come under their influence, becoming role models for many and helping to shape their emerging attitudes to education. Teachers can inspire students to have self-belief and high aspirations as they formulate life and career goals. The impact of teachers is a significant component of the backstory of most AEP students.

4.3.2 What the literature says

At the most impressionable stage of their lives, students spend considerable time in school, interacting with teachers. For this reason, "teachers matter" (Wright, 2015, p. 1). Two ways in which they matter include the quality of the teaching and the quality of teacher-student relationships (Coates, 2014). Connecting to teachers improves a student's sense of belonging (Main & Whatman, 2016), and the quality of the teaching helps to improve student learning. Effective teachers are enthusiastic, make subjects interesting, care about student learning, challenge students to think, and make themselves available to students (Zepke et al., 2014). Failing to achieve this can make teachers a barrier to student success (Aird, Miller, van Megen, & Buys, 2010). Poor teaching and poor-quality relationships tend to result in lower student performance (Whannell et al., 2010). The impact of teachers is measurable (Messinis & Sheehan, 2015), showing that they contribute up to 60 per cent of the achievement gains made by their students (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). Teachers who become role models for students can make a lasting impact on their lives by encouraging them to aim high academically and pursue post-secondary education (Rich & Schachter, 2012). In so doing, teachers play a critical role in nurturing their students' identities (La Guardia, 2009). This is accomplished as they become effective role models for students (Rich & Schachter, 2012).

4.3.3 What this study shows

This study shows that the two female participants had mostly positive relationships with teachers while the two males had a mixed experience. All four had felt encouraged by teachers to believe in themselves and to aim high academically. Two of the four had felt especially inspired by teachers to choose particular career paths: Ben and Gaara. These two appeared to have benefited most from the influence of teachers.

Ben. Ben's mixed experience of teachers included an unpleasant clash with a senior teacher, with whom he *"never saw eye to eye"*; but even this experience failed to turn him against teachers. Nor did being disciplined for *"defending his mates"* create resentment against teachers as a Week 1 comment showed:

> *Although the teachers thought what I was doing was right, I still had to be punished.*

In Ben's mind, the teachers secretly believed he had done the honourable thing by his mates. Whether or not they actually thought this way, he continued to enjoy good relations with his teachers, especially his biology teacher, who not only became a mentor, but inspired him to aspire to become a biology teacher:

> *My favourite teacher would have described me as eccentric; in fact* [*sic*] *that's how all the teachers did. Apparently they didn't quite know how to handle me, but my favourite teacher, the biology teacher, treated me different. He was more understanding and more or less encouraged me to continue to be who I was. He is the main reason I took an interest in biology.*

Another teacher who gave Ben valued support at a point of crisis in his young life was his religion teacher:

> *My religion teacher was more than supportive, helping me sort through what I believed.*

Ben's confidence in his former high school teachers remained high even after his gap year and after enrolling in the AEP. Rather than consult the AEP tutors, he planned to email his former high school teachers if he needed help. The encouragement of these high school teachers contributed to Ben's decision to enrol in the AEP, which he planned to use as a stepping stone to a teacher education degree program.

Gaara. Gaara reported only positive experiences with teachers. She reported that her favourite school teacher would have described her as:

> *Too loud and always tends to laugh too much. Humble, but I don't know how. Mostly funny, but sometimes I don't know if the jokes I make on them* [are] *funny*.

There was not a teacher that she did not like. To her, they were all *"cool, laid back"*. As noted in the findings, perhaps this description applied more to Gaara than to her teachers as she had a generally laid-back approach to life. Her art teachers encouraged her desire to become an artist (more on this later), and a maths teacher encouraged her to believe in herself:

> *My maths teacher, he was, like … if you keep studying and doing well, then you would do better* [in other areas]. *Like, he saw that I had, ah, potential but I didn't try.*

Pushed by her mother, who wanted her to continue on to higher education, and encouraged by teachers to believe that she had talent as an artist and the ability to do well if she made the effort, Gaara made plans to take the AEP, hoping that her second chance would end better than the first one had and would enable her to articulate to an arts degree program.

Andrew. Andrew's experience with teachers was mostly positive but included some disappointing moments. From his perspective, most of his teachers believed in him:

> *The majority of them said the same thing: I was a good student but I lacked focus in class.*

While Andrew understood this to mean they believed he had more ability than he showed, he did not receive it as an entirely positive message. It left him feeling a little undervalued. A primary school teacher had a more positive approach, taking an interest in him and helping him develop a changed attitude to learning:

> *A teacher by the name of Mr Williamson saw the potential that I had for school and recommended that I attend his year 6 class. Mr Williamson built me up and changed my attitude. I started to aim high and it showed on my year 6 report.*

Andrew felt that his high school teachers saw him in one of two ways. First there was the positive view:

> *My favourite teacher would have described me as a student that could do anything that he wanted to do. The only thing that lets Andrew down is the*

> *fact that he wants to be the main attraction in class. Having people notice Andrew hurts his education because he focuses more on them than his education.*

And then there was the negative view:

> *My least favourite teacher would tell you that I was a useless student that let down his school by the way he acted. His skills are not up to what they should be and he has a lot to work on before going anywhere in life.*

Similar comments might well be made by the former teachers of many AEP students. What matters is how the messages are interpreted and which message has the greatest influence on the students. Andrew found some of his high school teachers so boring that his mind would be elsewhere in class. Instead of focusing on the lesson, he would be reflecting on how he would use a different approach to make students feel more engaged in their learning:

> *I sat there in class and every now and then I got to thinking how I could change class to make it better for those kids that struggle, just like I did in high school.*

Other teachers he came to see as friends. These were the ones who urged him to become a teacher. His experience of teachers, while somewhat mixed, had not left him feeling negative about teachers or school.

Jodi. Jodi made only a few references to her school teachers, but these were mostly positive. Her least positive comment was a reference to her history teacher failing about a quarter of her Year 10 history class. In primary school, she had been excited about learning, gaining great pleasure from being at the front of the classroom, sharing with classmates by writing on the board:

> *I used to be the one that puts my hand up … wanting to demonstrate on the board and everything.*

Perhaps this was an early indication of Jodi's likely path in life, but it did not occur to her at school that she might become a teacher. Like Andrew, Jodi felt that her teachers had a divided view of the kind of student she was. Some found her energetic in a positive kind of way:

> *My favourite teacher would describe me as fun, loving, caring, definitely energetic, out there, always friendly, very inviting to all new students.*

And others found her energetic in a less desirable way:

> *My least favourite teacher would say I sometimes talk when it's not needed, wouldn't always follow instructions.*

When bullying drove Jodi to change schools, she transferred to another school where she hoped to make a fresh start. At the new school, she *"got along with the teachers very well"* and began to see her teachers as being *"more* [like] *friends"* than teachers. Her maths teacher repeatedly tried to encourage her to believe in herself and recognise that she had leadership potential:

> *He said that I was a very influencing person, but, like, I'm a true leader and I know that I have it in me. I just have to see it … and he'd always say things to me every week, saying about how great a person I am and that I know that I can do it. I just need to see it, though.*

Despite the efforts of her teachers, Jodi lost interest in school and at the end of Year 10 left school, hoping to find a way to join the police force. She had no intention of pursuing higher education.

4.3.4 How this study reflects the literature

The literature underscores the importance of students' relationships with teachers (Coates, 2014). School students respond well when they feel that they are cared for by teachers who have their interests and identities in view, not just their own agenda as teachers (Brown et al., 2014; La Guardia, 2009). At different points in their school experience, the four participants in this study interacted with teachers who made them feel connected (Main & Whatman, 2016). Andrew's response to Mr Williamson reflected this as did Jodi's response to her maths teacher, Gaara's response to her art teachers, and Ben's response to his senior biology teacher, who gave him personal encouragement and became a significant role model:

> *He was more understanding and more or less encouraged me to continue to be who I was. He is the main reason I took an interest in biology.*

Having positive relationships with teachers can lift the motivation and engagement of students as Andrew's relationship with Mr Williamson demonstrated (McGregor & Mills, 2012). By becoming role models, teachers can encourage students to explore their identities (Rich & Schachter, 2012) as was seen in Andrew's experience with three senior teachers who encouraged him to consider a career in teaching. Teachers do matter (Wright, 2015) and they can make a difference in the lives of their students; but despite their efforts, some students are not ready to commit to serious study while under their influence. They may be focused on careers that do not require higher education, and it is only after circumstances force them to reconsider their plans that they reconsider the university option as the cases of Andrew and Jodi show.

4.3.5 What this study adds

This grounded study shows the complexity of the influence of school teachers as role models. As Ben's story shows, students might feel so inspired to be like a favourite teacher that they choose to follow the same career path. As Gaara's story shows, a career decision might be based, not on a desire to copy a particular teacher, but on a love for a particular discipline. Andrew's story shows how the influence of teachers might not appear to be effective until after the student leaves school. Last, Jodi's story shows that there are students who make career decisions that do not appear to be directly influenced by school teachers.

4.4 Peers

A third group that contributes to the backstory of students before they enrol in an AEP is the various groups of peers with which they interact.

4.4.1 What this means

Parents and teachers are the "primary socialising agents "(La Guardia, 2009, p. 95) in children's lives until adolescence when their lives are re-centred around the power of peer groups. For teens, these are comprised of individuals about their own age and come in two types: those that motivate students to aim high and aspire to pursue higher education, and those that discourage academic engagement (Sallee & Tierney, 2007). Hence peer influence is likely to make a significant contribution to a teenager's decision to form a student identity—a major focus of this dissertation.

4.4.2 What the literature says

People learn by observing others (Bandura, 1989). The people around us influence our aspirations, especially role models like parents, peers, and teachers (Marjoribanks, 2005; Prodonovich et al., 2014; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Learning is a collaborative process that includes a range of people, including peers (Durlak et al., 2011). It follows that socially isolated individuals lack some of the resources of their peers (Denham & Brown, 2010). Youths benefit when they enjoy positive relationships with their peers, parents, and teachers as these relationships provide the context in which they develop emotional intelligence and socio-emotional skills—skills that are useful in higher education (Main & Whatman, 2016). Peers are "one of the strongest socialising forces in youths' lives" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 179), one of the most significant influences for early adults in their late teens and early twenties (Arnett, 2007). Peer influence can be both positive and negative (Schwartz, 2016). Of interest to this study is the capacity of peers to affect people's higher education aspirations (Prodonovich et al., 2014). Because of the power of this peer-group influence, it is important that youth have a sense of self that is strong enough to resist negative peer pressure (Rageliene, 2016) and have the confidence to pursue their academic dream even if it means losing contact with former friends. If they did not realise it before, when teenagers become AEP students, they discover that they have two groups of peers to deal with: fellow AEP students, and friends (Albarello, Crocetti & Ruvini, 2018). They need to distinguish between the two groups as the group sharing their AEP journey is more likely to be helpful to them at this stage in their lives than the group not taking the AEP journey.

4.4.3 What this study shows

This study shows that teenage students perceive peers in various ways. They can see them as people with whom to share fun, but they can also see them as people with whom to share learning and self-development—making them sounding boards in the processes of identity formation.

Andrew. Andrew had two groups of friends, those that were sporty and those that were studious. His heavy involvement in sport at high school meant that his main peer group comprised team mates and devotees of the several sports he played. Unfortunately, he committed to a non-ATAR path before he began to take a serious interest in study. While he had not been a dedicated student at school, some of his

mates had been. Most of his best mates ended up going to college to start undergraduate degree programs. Andrew's experience with peers in his final two years of high school increased his awareness of the two types of peers—those that were studious and those that were not. Allowing this awareness to inform his management of peer relations as an AEP student would help him create a favourable learning environment. On the other hand, his devotion to sport might sabotage his success. The outcome would depend on how well he managed these competing roles and the potentially conflicting identities they denoted.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi had been passionate about her school's sport and recreation program. However, her habit of making friends with girls who showed little or no interest in study and were inclined to get into trouble at school and have difficulties with their parents undermined her interest in school and helped contribute to her dropping out of school early (Year 10). Her two years in paid work distanced Jodi from the problems associated with school friends. Nevertheless, she had a wide circle of friends and enjoyed a very active social life. Most of these friends were not higher education students. They were either working, as she was, or unemployed. Her high-school pattern of peer relations would not be helpful to her as an AEP student, nor would the social life she was maintaining when she applied to enrol. The life trajectories of those friends suggested that they did not share her interest in returning to an academic path. She had dropped out of school after she had *"started hanging around with the wrong groups"*. One peer in particular had been *"a really bad influence"*. As an AEP student, Jodi could not afford a reprise of that. She might have to make some adjustments in her social life.

Ben. Right through school, Ben had been socially awkward, an awkwardness exacerbated by the bullying he had experienced in primary school, the sometimes harsh treatment he had received from his father, and his own sometimes violent acts after he grew physically imposing in junior high school. Torn between a degree of satisfaction with being considered an eccentric, mysterious loner on the one hand and a desire for social acceptance on the other, he found himself at the centre of a group of *"misfits"* that became—as reported by him—the main group in his class by Year 12. Ben did not value the group for reasons related to school and learning; rather, he valued these peers for their acceptance and affirmation, which reinforced his sense of personal identity. Earlier life experiences seemed to have stunted his

personal development. The peer challenge for Ben as an AEP student would be to learn to see the potential for academic growth in peer relationships. Peers are not just people with whom to socialise. As part of an academic community, they contribute to shared learning experiences.

Gaara. For Gaara, the main purpose of peer relations at school was to have fun. She enjoyed nothing more than *"chilling"* with her friends. Like Andrew, she became aware that she had two groups of friends—one group that was studious and organised, and another group that was not. She loved both groups, but preferred the latter. Like her, they were loud and knew how to keep themselves amused, often to the expense and discomfort of others. Whether or not her AEP friends were loud, as an AEP student Gaara would benefit from ensuring that some of them were serious about study. Failing to do so might see her repeat the mistakes of the past.

4.4.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study confirms the importance of peers in the backstories of AEP students, by illustrating the contribution of two peer groups—those with an interest in study and higher education, and those whose interests lie elsewhere. Having friends intent on pursuing higher education can reinforce this aspiration.

4.4.5 What this study adds

This study offers insight into the backstories of teenage AEP students, showing that some are not especially focused on academic matters at school, instead pursuing agendas that include socialising, sport, special interests, and identity formation. None of the students in this study showed that at high school they were actively pursuing a student identity.

4.5 Community Mentors

A final group that contributes to the backstory of AEP students is the community members encountered in the milieus they inhabit.

4.5.1 What this means

Community mentors are individuals in one's culture—outside of the family and the school—who contribute to academic engagement. Their influence can be significant when it encourages a teenager to persist with education or aspire to gain a higher education.

4.5.2 What the literature says

The literature shows that community influences matter (Hellmundt & Baker, 2017) as community is a source of a student's cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). Student success begins before students enrol in an AEP, and one of the contributing factors is the community in which their home is located (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). As an antecedent of engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004), community helps to create the environment in which young people are nurtured (Comer, 2001). A powerful source of influence outside of the school, community makes a contribution to student engagement (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Because of this, it is important to include community in discussions about engagement (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Students come from communities and ultimately return to communities—perhaps their own community and perhaps not—to make their contribution to community life.

4.5.3 What this study shows

This study shows the part played by community members in the backstories of the four participants, including members that have been mentioned in the previous sections (teachers and peers) plus church members and, in one case, a former boss.

Andrew. Andrew mentioned feeling encouraged by the interest shown by people at the city church he had attended before the family moved to the country as well as the church in which his father was doing placement ministry prior to Andrew's decision to enrol in the AEP. Andrew made this clear in response to a question that asked which community members had made the biggest impact on his story of education:

> *Definitely it has been people from church that have been there to always ask about me, see how I'm going. I even get phone calls from people from my church in* [names city]. *They prayed a lot about me and keep calling me.*

Ben. Seeing his church as being *"ultra legalistic"*, Ben did not have as positive an experience of church as Andrew. He remembered being called a heretic for daring to ask a critical question one day at church. Ben had enjoyed being challenged by the leader of a youth Bible class, a businessman who appeared to be more broad-minded than most of the other church members. Ben explained how this man had increased his interest in critical thinking:

> *The guy that took my Bible class* [was a progressive thinker]. *He was a…* [changing tack] *he runs his own business, he rebuilds cars, like, he melts down parts and remoulds them. He also works for a lot of the big companies.*

Responding to my question about how he thought the man felt about attending such a conservative church, he explained:

> *I think he enjoyed it because it was kinda like he would sit there and when people would be having an argument or something you could see him chuckling to himself about it. I honestly don't know what his true feeling was but I could see that he enjoyed watching the drama.*

Gaara. Gaara felt that the members of her Pacifica community spent too much time playing sport:

> *Aw, they played volley*[ball] *too much, like, every Wednesday and Monday and Saturday.*

When asked whether any in the community had encouraged her to further her education, her response was emphatic and delivered with feeling: *"Oh, no!"* In contrast, she had felt encouraged by the members and pastors at her church, but her comment on this was brief:

> *They were encouraging, yeah, and they were helpful. Like, the pastors, they were inspiring.*

There is nothing in Gaara's data to suggest that anyone outside of her family had made a significant impact on her decision to pursue higher education.

Jodi. Asked which community individuals had made the biggest impact on her attitude to education, Jodi did not hesitate to mention her boss, a woman in her thirties who ran the coaching business that employed her. Jodi explained her boss's reaction when she told her she was thinking of enrolling in an AEP so that she could access a teacher education degree:

> *Ah, well, my boss! 'Cause I'd mention it to her saying, "I could do this." She's all for it, like, "I reckon you should do it." You'll go to university," and like, she just encouraged me the whole way … She influenced me big time.*

Jodi's boss fully supported her study plan and gave her ongoing encouragement to pursue it. This woman appeared to be the strongest community mentor encountered by any of the four participants.

The mentors mentioned here were not major players in the life drama of the four participants, but to the extent that they were "relational partners" (La Guardia, 2009, p. 90), they made small contributions to their stories of education.

4.5.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study supports the view that community members can make significant contributions to the attitudes of teenage students towards higher education, but the contribution varies. Two of the participants—Jodi and Andrew—appear to have been significantly influenced by community mentors. As mentioned above, Ben's and Gaara's most significant mentors were their mothers plus several school teachers.

4.5.5 What this study adds

This grounded study offers evidence for the salience of the influence of community mentors on the higher education intentions of teenage students.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insight into the backstories of the four participants, showing the significant influence of parents and school teachers on their higher education aspirations. It has shown how Jodi and Andrew were greatly impacted by the influence of their student-parent—Jodi's mother and Andrew's step-father. Parental influence also impacted Ben and Gaara. The influence of Ben's mother finally won out over the influence of his principal role model, his father; at her urging, he decided to enrol in the AEP offered by her alma mater. Whether he would have made this decision without her influence is not clear. What is clear is that his decision had not been as independent as Jodi's and possibly not as independent as Andrew's. Likewise, Gaara's decision to travel interstate to take an AEP owed much to the influence of her mother. See Appendix E for the first-person narratives of the four participants, constructed using the data co-created by the participants and the researcher. The next chapter shows how the four participants responded to the tertiary institution in the orientation period of their AEP.

Chapter 5: The Opening Game

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the experience of the four participants in the orientation phase of the AEP, showing how factors from their backstories contributed to differences in the way they exercised agency in responding to the new academic setting. The transition from high school to higher education involves significant changes and challenges for students due to the different culture of universities and tertiary institutions. Their high school experience is likely to have provided them with ready access to teachers plus quick feedback on their work, including feedback on written drafts (Brinkworth et al., 2009). As first-year students, they are not likely to receive this level of attention from lecturers. They might also have to deal with barriers like poverty and the prevailing myths about tertiary education (Christensen & Evamy, 2011). Despite their awareness that the higher education experience is going to be different, they do not adequately anticipate the nature of the change (Brinkworth et al., 2009). Many students commence higher education ill-prepared for the experience (Lake & Boyd, 2015). To reduce student anxiety, institutions are taking steps to help students adjust to their new learning environment by paying more attention to transition and orientation issues.

Transition has been defined as "the capability to navigate change" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 737). AEPs are programs designed to ensure that students develop this capability. Given that many AEP entrants are non-traditional students, it is important that their course orientation makes them feel supported and reassured about the academic help they can access. There is no clear position on how long orientation takes. It has been claimed that orientation for tertiary students typically involves the first couple of weeks, but in the minds of students it may extend to several semesters (Clerehan, 2003). Others suggest that for AEP students, the orientation phase involves the first six weeks of the program, about half a semester (Levy & Treacey, 2013). In this period students have the opportunity to work out "where the goal posts are" (Wrench, Garrett & King, 2013, p. 730). The challenges encountered could include such transition factors as relocation, academic engagement, finding a sense of community, managing time, and managing competing demands. Another significant challenge is writing the first assignment (Krause, 2001). Having their self-belief confirmed in the orientation period points

AEP students in the right direction and encourages them to be agentive from the start. It can set the tone for the remainder of the course.

In this dissertation, the orientation phase has been taken to be the first three weeks of the semester. In this phase the participants began attending classes, submitted their first short assignment (Week 2), took (or chose not to take) a library orientation tour, chose whether or not to interact with the tutors, began to sense the pressure of their study load, and started writing reflective comments in their journals (Gaara excepted) about the kind of start they felt they had made.

The understanding of personal agency used here is borrowed from Bandura (2001; 2006), who proposed the four organising ideas used in the remainder of the chapter: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. The decisive factor in their student journey is the use they make of personal agency in forming study intentions, converting these intentions into action plans, carrying out the plans, and evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts in order to identify weaknesses and learn from their mistakes. The section begins by examining the participants' use of agency during the orientation phase of their AEP experience, referred to here as the opening game.

5.2 Intentionality

Three components of intentionality are discussed in this section: (1) forming and expressing positive attitudes to the AEP, (2) forming and expressing positive attitudes to the student role, and (3) forming the intention to interact with peers and staff in the educational interface.

5.2.1 What this means

Intentionality refers to the inner processes that guide and motivate individuals as they plan future courses of action (Bandura, 2001). Having done poorly in Year 12, teenage students coming into an AEP need to develop new study intentions; otherwise, they may repeat the mistakes of high school. An AEP gives students opportunity to develop new attitudes to coursework, to the student role, and to interacting with peers and academic staff at the educational interface.

5.2.2 What the literature says

"Intention plays an important role in educational contexts" (Kahn, Qualter & Young, 2012, p. 863). As agents, students have intentions and goals that can lead them to exhibit goal-driven behaviour (Connor, 2009). Socio-emotional supports can play a significant role in helping students sharpen their intentions and formulate plans for the future (Coates, 2014; Reese & Dietrich, 2014; Sica et al., 2016). While not enough is known about the motives of AEP students re-engaging with education (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017), much is known about the factors that contribute to their success. They stand to benefit if their intentions are guided by this knowledge. While our understanding of the course attitudes of younger AEP students is limited, more is known about the attitudes of mature-age students (Debenham & May, 2005). The performance of some younger AEP students in fee-free programs suggests that they lack the intention to study and may have enrolled only to satisfy Centrelink (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017), while others hope to get through with minimal effort (Archer et al., 1996; Cantwell et al., 2001). To be successful, they need an intention to study, supported by commitment and self-regulation (Bandura, 2001). Interacting with faculty is a key component in student persistence and success, improving their academic self-concept (Micari & Pazos, 2012). Important relationships for AEP students to foster include those with peers, teachers, admin staff and support services as these relationships are linked with success (Coates, 2014; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). Students who identify strongly with their peer group tend to have stronger effort intentions (Reese & Dietrich, 2014). And how students identify themselves predicts their intentions (Whannell & Whannell, 2015). Student planning is enhanced if it includes an intentional approach to interacting in the educational interface (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Students who do not plan to collaborate with staff and peers put more pressure on themselves to perform.

5.2.3 What this study shows

The study shows the attitudes of the participants to the AEP, showing why they took it and how they believed it would benefit them. Second, the study reveals their attitudes to the student role. Third, the study uncovers their intentions about interacting with their student peers and the academic staff at the learning interface. The analysis begins with Andrew and Jodi, the two whose plans appeared to show the most maturity and whose behaviour appeared to be the most goal-directed.

Attitude to the AEP

Andrew. Despite having left high school intent on staying *"away from study"*, once Andrew focused on the idea of working towards a teacher education degree, he developed a strong commitment to the plan:

> *I am very passionate towards making sure that students enjoy their schooling as well as understanding* [*sic*] *what they are taught. That is why I am very excited to be commencing my journey as a higher education student.*

His parents had helped him formulate his further education plan, and the relationship he enjoyed with them encouraged in him the desire to make them proud. In return, he would continue to draw on their support:

> *I am very excited to be at college on my new journey as it is making my family proud of me. Knowing that my family is behind me it will push me to succeed and do well in my degree.*

While he did not know *"what to expect from tertiary education"*, Andrew would make adjustments and adapt as he went along. As Bandura (2001) notes, "Initial partial intentions are filled in and adjusted, revised, refined or even reconsidered in the face of new information during execution of an intention" (pp. 6-7).

Having to take an AEP as the first step in his plan did not seem to Andrew to be an imposition; rather, it was a source of encouragement:

> *I feel great doing* [the AEP]. *It is going to set me up for my degree in education.*

Reflecting on his high school experience made him determine not to repeat past mistakes. To avoid losing focus, he would ensure that he did not get too *"comfortable"* this time. There was one area in which he knew he needed to improve:

> *I hope to gain better knowledge in essay writing.*

To help him achieve this, he made two further plans at the beginning of the semester:

> *I am aiming to spend the majority of this semester in the library. I don't want to get too social at college, as it will affect my application towards my attendance and work.*

By studying in the library, Andrew would be close to the tutors and away from the potential distraction of his mates. Andrew's intentions appeared to be closely tied to his goals and suggested that he intended to use agency in following through and gaining victory in the new academic game he would be learning as an AEP student.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi planned to use the AEP as a pathway to a teacher education degree program, noting:

> *This is just a small stepping stone to take me where I want to go.*

Having thought about what this step involved and having seen her mother and sister studying for the previous two years, she had some insight into the workload she was committing to. Her plan, like Andrew's, extended beyond the AEP:

> *I will be working very hard to finish my degree after completing the* [AEP].

This was followed by a reference to her intention to *"study very hard"*, but unlike Andrew, she intended to do most of her study at home. Jodi brought a positive attitude to her AEP preparation and was determined to make the experience enjoyable:

> *You have to have a positive thought about your school and yourself. If you love your school, you will find it so much easier to study and enjoy your course ... It is important to love what you are studying* [and] *have an open mind.*

As she contemplated the new direction her life was taking, Jodi remembered how her planning had evolved over the previous two years, following her early departure from high school at the end of Year 10:

> *This* [getting back into education] *is something I have wanted to do for a very long time but haven't been able to do so as I never completed senior high school.*

Like Andrew, Jodi appeared to be intentional and goal driven, an AEP student who would use agency effectively in pursuit of her goals.

Ben. Ben, too, was planning to use the AEP as a pathway to an undergraduate place in a teacher education degree program, but his reflections on his plan reveal that he had doubts. They also leave room for doubt about his sense of agency. Perhaps it was just an unfortunate choice of words, but he seemed to be implying that the AEP would do for him what he needed to do for himself:

> *I mostly expect this* [AEP] *to get me back into the swing of things after my gap year also I am hoping to get into the bachelor of biology and secondary teaching* [actually a BEd (secondary), majoring in biology].

Ben had not been intentional about study at high school. To be successful at college, he needed to be intentional and to plan strategically. Instead, he was mulling over whether enrolling in the AEP had been a wise decision:

> *That … makes me speculate about this path, wondering if it's the right one or not.*

He seemed not to trust his own planning:

> *During year 12 I had it* [his future career] *planned out,* [but] *that all fell apart when I barely graduated … It made me question if it was the right thing to do to even come here.*

When his Year 12 plans did not work out, he explained his poor results as underachievement. What was missing in his self-analysis was an admission that he had lacked commitment to his plans and failed to demonstrate the self-regulation needed to carry them out.

Ben needed a fresh approach to study as he made a new start in the AEP. As he reflected on what lay ahead, however, he gave little evidence of having developed a fresh approach. He seemed to be looking for an easy path that would not make heavy demands:

> *I've heard it's* [the AEP] *pretty laid back and you can pass with ease if you pay enough attention.*

While planning to pay attention was commendable, Ben needed a more intentional approach to planning. Instead of looking ahead with serious intent, he returned to reflecting on his fear of failure and his uncertainty about being in the AEP. The nearest he got to formulating a plan was to note that in the AEP he hoped to get *"greater understanding of writing"*. Again, the sense of agency was missing. Perhaps he hoped to get this understanding as a gift, not as something he would have to work for. Despite being academically better qualified than Andrew or Jodi, Ben seemed to lack their sense of agency and their goal clarity. If his intention was to try to *"pass with ease"*, he was likely to face challenging times when confronted by the reality of the AEP workload.

Gaara. If Ben had hoped for an easy path in the AEP, Gaara was hoping for a path that would be mostly fun, a continuation of her laid-back high school experience:

> *It* [the AEP] *feels like I'm in high school again … I believe it will be like high school with more assignments … I feel things will turn out different … Being organised and punctual are … things that I feel I need and will be changed. As my new journey starts as a higher education student, I believe it will be a stressing but also fun experience, and will do my best. Hi 5!*

Her self-analysis showed that she recognised at least a couple of her weaknesses as a student. Reflecting on this made her aware that the coming semester would not be pure fun, and might create stress. An agentive approach to planning should have enabled her to minimise the stress. Instead, she continued to depend on her feelings as the semester got underway:

> *I feel confident, and excited about the course as well as overwhelmed. I hope to gain a pass so that it can lead me to the course I want to be in.*

Just contemplating the workload made Gaara feel overwhelmed. When Jodi began to feel overwhelmed in Week 3, she reminded herself that she would be fine once she got her *"head around it"*, and she kept right on working. Gaara was overwhelmed without doing any actual work. Perhaps inadequate planning and a history of not following through on plans requiring work explained this moment of anxiety. Nevertheless, Gaara did have plans:

> *In order to get into the course* [BA (visual art)], *I have to pass the* [AEP]. *So here I am, a higher education student … doing* [the AEP] *to get into the course I desire.* [The college] *has given me an opportunity to learn from my mistakes and to rebuild my study life. I now plan to use all my abilities to the fullest.*

Like the others, Gaara planned to use the AEP as a pathway into a degree program. Her comment about having to pass the AEP contained a hint of reluctance. She appeared to see the AEP as an imposition rather than an opportunity. The AEP was preventing her from being in her desired course from the start. Her vow to make full use of her abilities was admirable if she planned to back it up with goal-driven behaviour, governed by self-regulation and self-discipline. A final component of her planning was a hope that the AEP would provide her with *"good English … learning* [skills] *and good English writing"*. Like Ben, she seemed to be hoping the course or the lecturer would provide these for her, relieving her of the responsibility to acquire them for herself. It seemed likely that things would not *"turn out different"* for Gaara without changed intentions in relation to her AEP experience.

Attitude to the Student Role

The second thing the study shows is the attitude of the participants to the student role. Effective student action is generally preceded by careful thought and planning. Reflecting on their previous experience of education tends to make intentional AEP students aware of their need for a changed approach to study. For teenage AEP students, having this awareness does not necessarily induce them to embrace the student role. Some embrace it, some avoid it, and some are torn between embrace and avoidance as the participants in this study demonstrate.

Andrew. As noted above, Andrew commenced the AEP with a strong desire to improve his writing, an area of weakness in high school. His involvement in sport had taught him the importance of identifying personal weaknesses and turning them into strengths in order to be a winner. In sport, weaknesses are quickly exposed. Starting the new academic game, Andrew understood that success demanded he identify and eliminate weaknesses from his performance. He started the semester committed to learning the rules of the academic game in order to become a successful tertiary student as two early references to being *"really excited about the*

rest of the semester" show. Just how ready he was to embrace the student role is revealed in the following sections and chapters, where we see him engaging from "Day One" (Levy & Earl, 2012, p. 64).

Jodi. Jodi's attitude to the AEP showed that she had prepared herself to accept the student role. With her sister a full-time student and her mother a part-time student—both having taken the same AEP a couple of years earlier—Jodi had an understanding of what the student role entailed, and she felt ready for it. A Year 10 drop-out in catch-up mode, she was eager to *"learn new things"*. Like Andrew, she engaged from Day One—not reluctantly, but with motivated interest. Neither of them was very well organised at the start, but they began addressing this in Week 2. Andrew and Jodi exemplify teenage students who bring positive attitudes to AEP study despite negative past experiences of learning.

Ben. The reason Andrew and Jodi had not embraced the student role in high school was that they had not intended to pursue higher education. In contrast, Ben had been intending for some time to undertake a science degree. He had planned for this by taking an ATAR path, hoping to earn a rank that would enable him to matriculate and earn a university place. His failure to embrace the student role and back his academic intentions with a strategic approach to learning led to underachieving in Year 12 and the need for a second chance to matriculate. As noted in the preceding section, his attitude to the AEP created doubt about his commitment to the student role. He appeared to be seeking an easy passage to academic success rather than an opportunity to earn that success. His cavalier attitude to study was not that of a dedicated student. The following sections show the struggles he had as a result of his ambiguous attitude to the student role.

Gaara. Gaara's expectation that the AEP would be like high school did not augur well. She needed to move on from her high school experience, which had not ended well academically. Reflecting on this, Gaara recognised that her academic potential had been stifled by a lack of self-discipline and a failure to embrace the student role:

> *I knew I had* [ability]*, but I did not try hard enough to show* [my] *full potential … I needed to be dedicated and willing to engage in other studies*

besides art classes. I lacked self-discipline. There were always distractions that prevented me from focusing on the task at hand.

The AEP offered another opportunity to construct a student life. This led her to declare, *"I now plan to use all my abilities to the fullest"*. While this sounded promising, it also sounded rather broad and general. Perhaps she meant it. Perhaps she had in mind academic abilities as well as sporting and socialising abilities, but she had left room for doubt. The unfolding semester would reveal a lack of depth in her commitment to embracing the student role.

Attitude to Peers and Staff

The third thing the study shows is the attitudes of the participants to interacting academically with peers and staff. None of the four showed much enthusiasm for sharing study experiences with peers outside of their classes. Andrew strategically sought help from staff, and Jodi was able to get the help she needed from her mother and her sister. Ben and Gaara showed little inclination to interact with anyone on academic matters as this section shows.

Andrew. Andrew made two important decisions at the start of the semester. First, he would not allow himself to *"get too social"* in the AEP. By studying in the library, he would minimise potentially distracting contact with peers, especially his mates. Second, he would visit the free college tutors regularly for help with writing assignments. Of the four participants, Andrew would prove to be by far the most proactive in visiting the college tutors. He made his first visit in Week 2, and continued to visit them regularly for the remainder of the semester.

Jodi. At first, Jodi did not share Andrew's fear about friends being a potential distraction from study. Naturally sociable, she seemed not to realise that becoming a tertiary student might disrupt her social life. She started the AEP keen to make more friends among her classmates as an anxious comment in her Week 1 journal entry showed: *"Will I make friends" Will I fit in?"* She was excited to discover in the class a girl who had attended her former high school. Like Andrew, Jodi formed the intention to visit the college tutors; but after a couple of visits, she decided that she preferred to consult her mother and her sister, both enrolled as undergraduate students in the teacher education program. Because she had these other supports, her decision to bypass the college tutors did not leave her disadvantaged. Jodi made no

mention of interacting with peers outside of classes, but her thinking in the period was impacted by the self-comparisons she made as she reflected on her progress. By Week 3, she expressed a growing concern:

> *I feel as if I'm not keeping up as well as everyone else in my classes. When they are on task B, I'll still be on task A. When they move to C, I'll just be moving onto task B.*

It was not until after the orientation period that Jodi revealed her growing concern about the non-academic peer group she had been socialising with.

Ben. As noted earlier, Ben had experienced the disadvantages associated with moving away from home when he joined the AEP. Lacking access to family and friends made it important that he find alternative sources of socio-emotional support. Early in the semester, he made two potentially consequential decisions. First, he would not work closely with fellow AEP students. His fear of loafers and of losing control of his academic work robbed him of confidence in group tasks. Second, he would not visit the college tutors:

> *I am always more or less reluctant to go and see them* [tutors]. *The idea of someone who I have no previous connection with looking at my work, especially when it is personal, is very daunting. It feels to me as if everything I write is up to their judgement as if they are peeking into some part of my life I would rather keep to myself.*

Ben preferred to contact a former high school teacher by email if he needed help. Keeping to himself suited Ben's personal style, but it robbed him of opportunities to form valuable relationships with others taking the AEP journey. Either he did not see learning as a partnership (Kahu & Nelson, 2018), or he was determined to make it a solo effort. This could make it a lonely and challenging journey.

Gaara. Like Ben, Gaara experienced the disadvantages associated with moving more than 1,000 km away from home when she enrolled in the AEP, but making new friends would not be a problem. Her naturally extroverted nature would take care of that. Like Ben, but for a different reason (apathy), Gaara chose not to interact with the tutors—a potentially costly decision. The tutors might have helped her stay true to herself, an intention she had articulated in Week 1. By avoiding the

tutors, she would miss an important opportunity to develop a constructive relationship in the educational interface with a mentor who might help her develop and maintain a focus on study. This was another way in which Gaara showed a lack of agency. Her negative decision about tutoring would have more serious consequences than the decisions of Jodi and Ben as she lacked the alternative mentors that Jodi had and the capacity to force herself to keep working that Ben had.

5.2.4 How this study reflects the literature

Attitude to the AEP

While the literature says little about the attitudes of younger students to an AEP, more is known about the attitudes of mature-age students. Andrew and Jodi showed course attitudes more likely to be found among older learners, such as self-motivation, a positive work ethic, and an awareness of the life-changing nature of the AEP journey (Debenham & May, 2005). Ben and Gaara brought to the AEP an immature attitude that is typical of younger students in that they tended to see the AEP as an imposition and hoped to pass with minimal effort (Cantwell et al., 2001).

Attitude to the student role

The study gives partial support to the literature in that two participants, Ben and Gaara, brought to the student role negative attitudes to learning of the sort found among Newstep students (Cantwell et al., 2001; Whitson, 1995) and younger students generally (Whannell & Whannell, 2015). Andrew and Jodi, both aged 18—and more than a year younger than Ben—did not demonstrate attitudes that reflected this general finding. They recognised that mastering the student role would help them achieve their higher education objectives.

Attitude to interacting with peers and staff

There is little comment in the literature on the attitudes of younger AEP students to interacting with peers and staff in the educational interface, but the benefits of such interaction are noted (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Micari & Pazos, 2012; Whannell, 2013). None of the four appeared to start the semester with a clear idea about how to most effectively participate in the educational interface. Their high school experience may have convinced them that there was little academic potential in peer relationships. Two saw value in consulting

tutors, one thought he might consult a former high school teacher should the need arise, and one appeared to have no interest in tutoring.

5.2.5 What this study adds

The study adds to the understanding of the different responses of teenage students to the orientation period of an AEP, showing the significance of the intentionality they form in the backstory. It shows that some teenage AEP students reveal surprisingly mature intentions in the orientation phase of their course while others reveal intentions that are immature and shallow.

5.3 Forethought

AEP students can exercise forethought in three ways that are discussed here: (1) forming well-developed career goals, (2) converting these goals into "proximal sub-goals" (Bandura, 2001, p. 8) in the form of study goals, and (3) anticipating the consequences of failing to operationalise their plans in order to avoid underachieving.

5.3.1 What this means

Forethought is the dimension of human agency that enables us to anticipate outcomes and work towards achieving our life goals. Forethought enables AEP students to plan for academic success, by developing effective study plans and making needed adjustments to approaches that have not served them well in the past.

5.3.2 What the literature says

Using forethought enables people to plan courses of action that produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1989). It includes setting goals, planning for action, adopting courses of action, and anticipating consequences (Bandura, 2001). In social cognitive theory, forethought is one of the core properties of agency (Bandura, 2006). It is a social process because it occurs in human contexts, in the presence of role models; and it is a cognitive process in that an individual's choices mediate their responses to external stimuli. Agents are significantly influenced by environmental and cultural structures, but these external forces need not determine their responses; they can make choices. While these choices might not be absolutely free, they are choices made within existing parameters. The choices people make help to shape their lives and can change the direction of their lives (Burger & Walk, 2016). Forethought includes both goal-setting and being committed to the goals (Burger &

Walk, 2016). The goals people select come from identity formation and the future selves they envision for themselves (Clegg, 2011). A major driver of the process is the career goal they have explored and committed to (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Life visions can be transformative, enabling LSES students to reach levels of achievement beyond what their backstories might have predicted. To exercise agency is to exhibit goal-driven behaviour (Connor, 2009). AEP students who are uncertain about their goals are at risk of contributing to attrition (Hodges et al., 2013). Goal-setting is a key skill; setting high goals and exercising self-discipline in working towards achieving goals contribute to successful outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). The behaviour of many teenage AEP students suggests that they lack the awareness that achieving goals requires strategic action (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

5.3.3 What this study shows

The participants in this study commenced the AEP with career goals, but these goals varied in their cogency and effect. Andrew and Jodi had career goals that provided a strong focus, but they were not the career goals they had formed at high school; those earlier goals had either been abandoned or put on hold. Ben had a career goal that soon began crumbling and did not appear to be well grounded. Gaara had a career goal that she was inclined to believe could be achieved without the benefit of higher education. The four had varying success in converting their career goals into study goals, with Andrew and Jodi being highly successful, Ben modestly successful, and Gaara unsuccessful. Ben and Gaara are discussed first as they were the two whose career goals were formulated while they were still at high school. Andrew and Jodi revised their original career goals after finishing high school.

Career Goal

All four of the participants had formed career goals at high school, but it would become apparent that these goals were not stable. Two changed their goals before enrolling in the AEP. The other two retained their original goals at the start of the AEP and right through the orientation period. In the next chapter, we will see how stable their goals were.

Ben. In his first week in the AEP, in three different documents, Ben made reference to his career goal. The first reference was made in Document 1:

> *I was hoping to go into a bachelor of biology and secondary teaching, but my score* [ATAR of 50.65] *was too low.*

A second reference in another document suggested he had an almost religious fervour about pursuing a career in science:

> *I believed it my calling to study biology and make some contribution to the great world of science.*

The third reference explained the genesis of his chosen goal, linking it to the influence of a favoured teacher:

> *My favourite teacher, the biology teacher … is the main reason I took an interest in biology.*

These three references to biology at the start of the semester suggested that Ben was quite committed to his chosen career, seemingly the most committed of the four and clearly the most qualified in terms of Year 12 results. He was explicit about the influence of his favourite teacher, the senior biology teacher, and his reference to *"the great world of science"* suggested that he had spent some time mulling over what a science education degree might enable him to accomplish.

Gaara. Like Ben, Gaara formed a definite career aspiration while still at school, but the first explicit mention of it did not appear until the second week of the AEP, when she began a reflection by writing:

> *Art is one of the things I am most passionate about … In Year 6, my art teacher encouraged me to enter my drawings in the art show. It was worth entering as I was given second place as well as an award of merit. This event shaped my view of thinking what I would become and I was inspired to study and explore the world of art.*

The document went on to explain her continued art success in high school, suggesting that her talent and interest might lead to a career in some branch of art:

> *In Year 9, I won the "picked '08 Gallery" competition and was awarded $500. I continued to win first prize awards in art show competitions, in addition to earning Certificate I and Certificate II in Vet Fashion Design in*

> *Years 11 and 12. Fashion was also a favourite subject as I saw it as another form of art.*

In contrast to the other three participants, Gaara aspired to become an artist, not a teacher. She recognised her acceptance into the AEP as an opportunity to qualify for an undergraduate place in an arts program:

> *Even though my ATAR score* [42.15] *was low,* [the college] *has given me a chance to study a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) degree … So here I am, a higher education student at* [the college]*, doing* [the AEP] *to get into the course I desire.*

Jodi. In middle high school, Jodi formed the goal of becoming a police woman, a goal she abandoned soon after leaving school at the end of Year 10. Of the four participants, Jodi was the one who had the best opportunity to explore the career that replaced her high school goal and became the focus of her identity formation. Dropping out of school and taking work that took her back into schools to coach gymnastics led to an interest in teaching as a career. She enjoyed the coaching-teaching role, had others verify that it was a good fit (Stets & Burke, 2014), and decided to find a way to further her education so that she might become a qualified primary school teacher. The two years she spent exploring teaching provided a sound basis for committing to teaching as a career goal. Having a professional identity was a long way off when she began the AEP, but her focused career goal would help to keep her motivated throughout the course.

Andrew. Andrew finished school committed to the idea of becoming a professional footballer. Despite leaving school with no intention of pursuing a teaching career, by the time he enrolled in the AEP, he was clearly focused on becoming a teacher as a Week 1 comment revealed:

> *I feel great doing* [the AEP]. *It is going to set me up for my degree in education.*

The following week he expanded on this, by adding a clarifying comment:

> *I want to be a secondary teacher in PDHPE. With my love for sport as well as teaching, I will be able to help students with the same problem that I had as I worked my way through school.*

These were interesting comments, coming from a student who had left school a few months earlier with no intention of pursuing higher education and no thought of becoming a teacher. While his goals had changed radically in a very short time, an interview reflection on *"boring teachers"* suggested that he may have had more interest in teaching than he had realised. He might have considered a career in teaching had he not been so focused on sport. In Week 2, he revealed how his sporting focus had adversely affected his focus on study:

> *I was and am good at sports, so I focused more on sports, even representing NSW in touch football. I gave little thought to my studies and future. It wasn't until year 12 when I realised that my education would get me further than my sporting achievements.*

Even though he left school without forming the goal of becoming a teacher, when his apprenticeship fell through, the encouragement of his parents and several of his teachers brought to the surface memories that sparked an interest in teaching as a possible career. He had not lost his sporting goal but had added to it an academic goal that had the potential to upstage it:

> *I am still actively participating in sports and enjoy it,* [*sic*] *however I want to be a secondary teacher in PDHPE. With my love for sport as well as teaching I will be able to help students with the same problem that I had as I worked my way through school.*

Study Goals

It was not clear that all four began converting their career goal into study goals in the orientation period. While Ben and Gaara appeared to be satisfied with general goals that might not see them meet deadlines consistently, Andrew and Jodi added specificity to their planning.

Ben. Apart from making the observation in Week 1 that he hoped to gain from the AEP *"greater understanding of writing"*, Ben provided little evidence that he had converted his career goal into study goals. Like the other three, he had the

general goal of passing his four AEP units so that he could articulate into a degree program the following semester. In spite of this, he had not developed a study schedule or a strategy for addressing his history of underachieving. Another Week 1 comment revealed more doubt and uncertainty than constructive forethought:

> *Here I am again, wondering if I can make it.*

Unlike Andrew and Jodi, Ben made no mention of planning to graduate with a teaching degree inside four years. Yet, he had an advantage over them in that he was taking three degree units in his first semester while they were only taking two. Uncertainty and fear of failure seemed to rob Ben of the conviction that he would graduate with Andrew and Jodi.

Gaara. While her career goal seemed clear, Gaara gave no evidence of converting it to study goals in the opening period of the AEP. She had insight into where she had gone wrong in Year 12—being disorganised, lacking punctuality and dedication, poor time management, reluctance to engage in all her studies, plus a willingness to yield to multiple distractions. Her study goals should have been designed to address these issues, but she articulated no study goals. Her principal goal seemed to be to have fun.

Jodi. In the orientation period, Jodi began the process of converting her career goal into study goals. A reflective comment made in the second week of the semester illustrated her use of forethought:

> *Since I left school, I can confidently say that I have learnt a lot of life lessons and I have definitely become a lot more mature. I am looking forward to a continuing advance of my maturity as I study.*

Part of this maturing process included developing a personal study schedule in Week 2 and taking a library tour with one of the college librarians.

Andrew. In the orientation period, Andrew successfully converted his career goal into study goals and began to develop strategies for a successful AEP semester. Whereas Ben produced no strategy to deal with his history of underachieving, from the start of the semester, Andrew began to address a problem he had noticed in his high school approach to learning:

> *I always used to start my year at school off really well, then I got comfortable and my attitude changed and I stopped focusing. I didn't want that to happen to me at college. I wanted to have a positive first semester so that it could set the trend for the rest of my four years.*

Like Jodi, Andrew developed a personal study schedule in Week 2 and took a library tour. He also made his first visit to the college tutors.

Consequences

The quality of their forethought in relation to consequences varied. Ben recognised the consequence of failing to immerse himself in study but had no plan for dealing with his tendency to underachieve. Gaara identified some of her weaknesses but did not appear to be too concerned about consequences. Andrew and Jodi believed they would do well once they had a clearer understanding of what was expected of them as higher education students.

Ben. A Week 2 comment showed that Ben recognised the need for careful planning, but he made no definite statement about the strategy he might use. Rather, he left it open ended:

> *I really need to find some way to immerse myself in study or I might just end up falling behind.*

Not only had Ben failed to use the orientation period to convert his career goal into study goals, he had also failed to develop a strategy to avoid repeating the underachievement that had marred his high school performance. Perhaps his concern for consequences would lead to more decided action in the next stage of the semester. He must find a way to immerse himself in study or he would fall behind.

Gaara. It was not clear at the start of the semester whether Gaara's fleeting feeling of being overwhelmed was caused by her fear that the AEP work might prove too hard for her or by her fear that she lacked the self-discipline required to complete it. The answer to this question would surface later. Apart from this brief reflection, Gaara did not appear to be overly concerned about consequences. In Week 2, she again recalled some major weaknesses in her Year 12 approach to learning, saying:

> *I was bad with time management … I did not try hard enough … I needed to be dedicated and willing to engage … I lacked self-discipline.*

This might be seen as a warning to herself about the consequences of bringing a similar approach to the AEP, but it was not worded as a warning; it was just a memory. The reflection ended with a statement of her plan to use *"all* [her] *abilities to the fullest"*.

Jodi. Feeling overwhelmed was a fear Jodi shared with Gaara, and falling behind was a fear she shared with Ben. Jodi's feeling of being overwhelmed arose not in the first week when anticipating the workload, but in the last week of the orientation period when she feared she was struggling to keep up with her peers:

> *I feel as if I'm not keeping up as well as everyone else in my classes. When they are on task B, I'll still be on task A. When they move to C, I'll just be moving onto task B. That puts a little bit of stress and pressure on me as I don't like being behind. I'm feeling a little overwhelmed.*

Ben had not spelled out the consequence of falling behind. He left it hanging. Likewise, Jodi did not spell it out. Instead, she made an assertion that demonstrated her self-belief:

> *I know I will be able to get my head around it but at the moment it just all seems a bit too much at once for me.*

Andrew. Like Jodi, Andrew had the forethought to believe that he would do well, asserting, *"I will do well once I have a clearer idea of what I have to do."* He realised he would be okay once he formed a better understanding of the rules of the academic game. Having completed Years 11 and 12 gave him an advantage over Jodi that helped ward off the temptation to feel overwhelmed in the orientation period. His moment of crisis would come with the first extended essay, due just before the mid-semester break.

5.3.4 How this study reflects the literature

The literature does not have a lot to say about the forethought of teenage AEP students. It has been noted that younger students are likely to put less effort into their study than older students (Archer et al., 1999), perform at a lower level (Cantwell et

al., 2001; Johns et al., 2016; May & Bunn, 2015), and to have a higher attrition rate (Hodges et al., 2013; Whannell, 2013), but little is known about their use of forethought in converting career goals to study goals and anticipating the consequences of their failure to do so. The four participants began making choices in this period that were an early indication of the use they would make of agency. It demonstrated the effect of their career goals on shaping both their study goals and their strategies for avoiding negative consequences.

5.3.5 What this study adds

This study increases our understanding of the planning and self-reflections of teenage students in the orientation period of an AEP. It shows the value of having a career goal that has been adequately explored and firmly committed to. It also demonstrates the importance of converting a career goal to study goals. Having a career goal makes no practical contribution if it is not converted to study goals. The study demonstrates the different approaches to consequences that AEP students exhibit in the orientation period. Students like Andrew and Jodi demonstrate a self-belief that convinces them that by persevering, they will be able to avoid negative consequences. Students like Ben recognise that their approach has weaknesses that need addressing if negative consequences are to be avoided. Contemplating this creates anxiety rather than self-efficacy; nevertheless, their fear of failure drives them to avoid unwanted consequences. Gaara's experience shows that immaturity can cancel out the potential benefits of self-knowledge by undermining a student's capacity to use forethought productively and make plans to avoid taking an attitude to study that is likely to result in negative academic consequences.

5.4 Self-Reactiveness

Five components of self-reactiveness are discussed in this section: (1) putting study plans into action, (2) using skills and study tips gained in the AEP, (3) managing competing roles and commitments, (4) managing peer relations, and (5) managing emotions as learners.

5.4.1 What this means

The self-reactiveness phase follows the planning phase and sees students putting study plans into action as they engage in the educational interface. This is where the learning occurs; where study skills are exercised—including study tips

picked up in the AEP—and study habits are formed; and where competing roles and other commitments like work, sport, and leisure are managed. It is a phase where student emotions make a significant contribution.

5.4 2 What the literature says

The educational interface (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) is the psychological space where students put their plans to work. It is the context in which they interact with the AEP, with their peers, and with the academic staff. The quality of their interaction makes a major contribution to their internalising of academic culture. While academic engagement is not fully understood, it is seen as a shared responsibility. Having this understanding can benefit AEP students by relieving some of the pressure they are likely to experience. Institutions can contribute to student learning by creating a positive institutional climate (Rowe et al., 2015). Competing commitments such as paid work (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) can create pressure and contribute to student attrition, especially for students working in excess of 10 hours per week (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Maher & Macallister, 2013; Whannell, 2013). Making a good start early in the semester can be the beginning of a pattern that encourages AEP students to continue engaging and sets them on the path to success.

5.4.3 What this study shows

The study shows how the participants put their study plans into action, used their study skills and study tips picked up in the course, managed competing roles and commitments, managed peer relations, and managed their emotions as learners. Their effectiveness in meeting these challenges would contribute significantly to their success in the AEP. This section starts with Andrew and Jodi, the two who engaged most effectively from the beginning.

Putting study plans into action

Whereas Andrew and Jodi developed definite study plans at the start of the semester, Ben took longer to get himself organised. Gaara, on the other hand, began to demonstrate that she lacked skill in organising herself and was committed to being a *"laid-back"* learner.

Andrew. As already noted, Andrew showed that he was serious about study "from Day One" (Levy & Earl, 2012, p. 64), attending classes, commencing

assignments early, and spending time out of class completing coursework as a self-report on his first weekend of study showed:

> *I finished my first narrative* [Folio 1] *and started a reflection,* [did some work on] *the outline for my 1200 word essay, and worked on an oral* [presentation] *due on Tuesday. I was happy with what I achieved but 350 words in three hours isn't really that good.*

Not completely satisfied with what he had accomplished, he consoled himself with the thought that his output would improve as he gained confidence. Keen to ensure that his work was of acceptable standard, Andrew followed up his first weekend of assignment writing by visiting the tutors in Week 2 for help with editing Folio 1, the first piece of assigned work:

> *I wrote out my narrative and took* [it] *to the tutors. As it was my first folio piece at college it wasn't going to be perfect. I had many mistakes … to fix up. I took* [it] *to the tutors four times before I handed it in.*

He was confident he had made a good start to the semester, noting:

> *I started … my assignments early and I finished … the easier/smaller assignments* [early].

Jodi. Likewise, Jodi set to work straight away. She wrote her first journal entry on the first day of classes. Like Andrew, she had made an immediate start on the coursework:

> *I have been working on my personal narrative* [Folio 1] *tonight. I spent a couple of hours writing my narrative and looking over some notes I had been given in class. I am pretty confident in what I have written but I will still be taking it to* [the tutors] *like we have all been advised to do.*

Despite not having done Year 12, Jodi sounded more confident about what she had written than Andrew did. She did not feel the need to make four visits to the tutors as Andrew had done. After her single visit, she wrote:

> *Today I spent time with Larry working on my personal narrative. We spent about 15 minutes going over my paper. There were a few little mistakes that*

he pointed out and also some things that he thought may not be necessary to add in.

Jodi continued to give evidence of being actively engaged with the academic program. She did not see a class-free day as a day to relax and have fun, thereby demonstrating that she was developing the habit of keeping herself busy both in and out of class:

Today was one of my days off college. I caught up on a fair bit of study for all of my subjects. I went over plenty of notes that I had taken in all of my classes. It's all starting to make sense but there are still little things I don't quite understand.

A Week 2 self-report showed that Jodi was aware she had wasted no time in getting started on assignment writing:

I got this assignment [Folio 1] *and finished it on the first day of receiving it.*

Andrew and Jodi both laid the groundwork for a successful semester by demonstrating a willingness to engage in the educational interface; they were starting academic tasks early, seeking help from the free college tutoring service, and having assignments ready to submit on time. They were also demonstrating a willingness to learn and a desire for self-improvement.

Ben. Ben, too, attended his classes and made the effort to get assignments written. Not having a clear study plan did not help, nor did his reluctance to consult the tutors, who might have assisted him with not just his organisation, but also with his study motivation. He appeared to lack the enthusiasm of Andrew and Jodi:

It takes me hours to find motivation to even begin my study… The 350-word assignment for GSEN15000 [Folio 1] *was not too bad* [and] *I managed to finish it in half an hour.*

It was not a difficult assignment, just an ice-breaker, a straightforward piece of reflective writing. The hard part for Ben was getting started. Inertia was the problem. At high school he had not developed study habits or learned to enjoy writing. His personal *habitus* seemed to lack congruence with the *habitus* of higher education. His tendency to follow his inclinations needed to be replaced by a more disciplined

approach to study. Ben's faltering career goal appeared to be having a cascade effect. He did not appear to have put in place clear study goals, he had not developed a study schedule, he had doubts about his capacity to maintain a high level of interest in coursework, and he had not developed a strategy to avoid a repeat of his high school underachievement.

Gaara. The orientation period produced little data about Gaara's academic engagement. The only clue was the fact that she submitted Folio 1 on time at the end of Week 2. The apparent willingness of her lecturers to share the responsibility of helping her through the AEP boosted her confidence, but she soon revealed a tendency to surrender too much responsibility to others and accept too little responsibility herself. In Week 2, she claimed to be studying outside of class, but her data suggested she may have over-claimed. Her estimate of the amount of time she spent studying on her first weekend as an AEP student (8-9 hr) was considerably higher than the more realistic figures reported by the other participants, not to mention other classmates. She admitted that she had not made a study plan, not visited the tutors, and not signed up for a library tour. This looked like evidence in support of her Week 1 admission that she lacked skill in organising herself. Despite making no mention of working on it, she submitted her first written assignment on time at the end of the second week and earned equal top mark in the class. It was a reflective piece, requiring no research and minimal higher-level thinking. Clearly, Gaara would not struggle with easy tasks. An admission made later in the semester helped to contextualise the start she had made in the orientation period:

> *My study methods are usually studying when the time best fits me. I have no schedule and like to leave my assignments to the last minute. I tend to be a laid back learner and wait for information to be given to me.*

This would not be a helpful approach for Gaara to bring to weightier writing tasks requiring research and more use of higher-level thinking skills.

Using skills and study tips gained in the AEP

Andrew and Jodi demonstrated a willingness to learn about academic processes and apply what they learned to their AEP journey whereas Ben and Gaara did not.

Andrew. In the GSEN16700 generic study skills class, AEP students were given what may have seemed to them a bemusing amount of advice. Andrew was a class member who took this advice seriously. Used to accepting guidance from his football coach, he had no problem accepting advice from his AEP lecturers. At their suggestion, he took a library tour with one of the librarians, prepared a semester study plan, and made four visits to the tutors for help with Folio 1 as noted above. Anxiety over his writing skill drove him to seek help with written work. This was in line with his future focus and his strategy of turning weaknesses into strengths:

> *I have strengthened in a lot of my weaker areas and have focused on my future.*

In the weeks ahead, Andrew would provide further evidence of his commitment to turning weaknesses into strengths, a strategy he used as a sportsman. Using the same strategy in the academic arena would become a defining feature of his AEP semester.

Jodi. Finding motivation by reflecting on the academic performance of her *"nearly 50 year old mother"*, Jodi commenced her first assignment on her first day of classes:

> *I have been working on my personal narrative tonight. I spent a couple of hours writing my narrative and looking over some notes I had been given in class. I am pretty confident in what I have written but I will still be taking it to* [the tutors] *like we have all been advised to do.*

Jodi had taken to heart the advice she had received in class that to delay getting started was the beginning of procrastination. She had also accepted the advice to consult the free college tutors for help with all aspects of the course, especially writing. Whereas Andrew had made four visits with his assignment, Jodi made just one 15-minute visit. It appeared she needed less help with writing than Andrew did as a later comment suggested:

> *I got this assignment and finished it on the first day of receiving it.*

Jodi's level of engagement showed that she recognised the value to be gained from spending time on academic tasks, another principle she had picked up in the study skills class:

> *Today was one of my days off college. I caught up on a fair bit of study for all of my subjects. I went over plenty of notes that I had taken in all of my classes.*

Jodi and Andrew made a point of attending all their classes so that they would not miss anything important shared in class. This, too, was in line with advice received in the study skills class. They did not want to miss anything that might make their task easier or help to improve their academic focus.

Ben. Ben's early data contain few clues to his use of tips or skills picked up in class. It should be noted that he was not taking the study skills unit the other three were taking. The one generic skills unit he was taking was a college writing unit. He did not seek help from the tutors with Folio 1, but this decision was not explained until Week 4. The early evidence suggested that Ben was determined to take the AEP journey largely unassisted—which was likely to put unnecessary pressure on him; being on the outskirts of college life increases the likelihood of dropping out (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

Gaara. In the orientation period, Gaara did not show herself to be responsive to study tips or focused on developing learning skills. Given an opportunity to write a comment about how she thought she could improve her approach to study, she had nothing to say. She appeared unconcerned about her lack of a study plan. Her decision not to visit the tutors with Folio 1 had not cost her as revealed by the high mark she earned. It remained to be seen whether she would consult the tutors on more challenging assignments. Like Ben, Gaara seemed to be determined to take the AEP journey largely unassisted and appeared disinclined to accept the study advice offered by her lecturers.

Managing competing roles and commitments

While Andrew and Jodi both carried a heavy load of competing commitments, Ben and Gaara had to manage little more than their personal and social lives in addition to their study commitments.

Andrew. Study was one of three major commitments for Andrew as he commenced the AEP. His other commitments included work and football. He was

being paid to train twice a week and play every Sunday for a semi-professional rugby league team in the local area:

> *My sports* [*sic*] *is very important to me (rugby league) … I have the dream to make Newcastle Knights* [professional NRL team] *one day, so I really do enjoy playing footy.*

In addition to his football commitment, Andrew had two paid jobs that involved 33 hours of work per week. Combined with football, this meant he was doing 39 hours of paid work—well in excess of the 10-hour threshold at which work can start to be a problem (Whannell, 2013). There was no evidence in the orientation period of these extra commitments interfering with Andrew's study. He made no mention of his work. It was much later in the semester that he revealed the extent of his paid work commitments. He needed the money to pay his tuition fees. As his father was a full-time student at the time, it was not possible for him to pay Andrew's fees as well as his own.

Jodi. Since leaving school at the end of Year 10, Jodi had managed three part-time jobs. After enrolling in the AEP, she continued to be as heavily engaged in paid work as Andrew, retaining the three jobs she had taken on after Year 10:

> *Since then* [leaving school 2yr earlier]*, I have been working three casual jobs. Two of them involve coaching gymnastics to children aged 18 months old to 18 years old.*

While her workload was demanding, the orientation period provided no evidence of work interfering with her study. As was the case for Andrew, work was just something she did to sustain her lifestyle and pay her tuition fees.

Jodi made no mention of her social life competing for her time in the AEP, but her backstory revealed that social distractions had been a significant problem at school:

> *In year 10, I got a job making pizzas and another new friend came along. We became very close, but that was no good for me because she had a negative influence on me. My attitude changed and once again my mind was off track and I was no longer interested in study.*

This admission followed an earlier comment on how *"hanging around with the wrong groups"* had contributed to her decision early in high school that *"schoolwork wasn't* [her] *top priority"*. It seemed likely that at some point, Jodi could re-encounter the problem of socialising interfering with study and be forced to deal with it. In the meantime, she appeared to be coping well.

Ben. While Ben was not in paid employment and did not play competitive sport, he enjoyed playing games in the residence hall:

> *I've found that my preferred way of avoiding study is to go to the foyer to play pool, though I do play the occasional video game. Just the other day I spent a good 3 hours playing pool with T and J, I was surprised at how good I have become. Anyway I am finding distractions everywhere.*

Andrew and Jodi had made no references to competing commitments interfering with their study. Ben's involvement in games had become a problem by Week 3. It was a problem in that he was using games as a way of avoiding study. While his game of pool was improving, his approach to study was not. As noted above, he was having difficulty finding the motivation to get started on assignment writing. Addictive distractions can work against academic engagement (Markwell, 2007). This problem needed to be addressed if Ben was to avoid a semester-long battle to prioritise study over leisure.

Gaara. Like Jodi, Gaara made no reference to competing commitments in the orientation period. And like Ben, she had no paid work commitments to compete for her time. Other leisure commitments that she later acknowledged as distractions that kept her from study did not begin to appear in her data until the middle of the semester. These later admissions suggested that she had probably been distracted throughout the semester. On the surface, it seemed that Gaara had started the AEP well enough.

Managing peer relations

At high school, the participants had established their preferred levels of social involvement, but none of them appeared to have found academic value in peer relationships. Peers were valued most in the contexts of socialising, having fun, and playing sport. From the start of the AEP, Andrew recognised this as a potential

problem and made a plan to prevent it from becoming a problem. The other three did not. In time, Jodi and Ben would see the need for a better balance between socialising and study, but this issue would not become a priority for Gaara.

Andrew. While students can benefit from interacting with peers in the educational interface, Andrew was wary. At the start of the AEP, he took a strong position on peer relations. In his first reflective journal entry he wrote:

> *I don't want to get too social at college as it will affect my application towards my attendance and work.*

To help avoid the potential distraction of friends, he planned to spend most of the semester in the college library, studying and writing assignments. He would socialise at work and at football training. Otherwise, his main focus was the AEP and using it to gain access to an undergraduate program in teacher education. Towards the end of the orientation period, he reiterated this intention:

> *I was focused on what I was going to do and I wasn't going to get distracted by my peers.*

Jodi. Social life was important to Jodi, and making new friends in a new academic environment like the AEP was an exciting prospect. Before the commencement of the AEP semester, she wrote about how she expected to *"meet new people and have new friends".* Her first reflective journal entry in Week 1 showed that her anticipation of the AEP was influenced by both social and academic concerns:

> *Will I make friends? Will I fit in? Will I be able to keep up with the work?*

When she had changed schools in Year 8 of high school, one of her major sources of satisfaction had been finding *"a great new group of friends"*. Friends, however, had become a problem for her at the new school. It would be important for her to monitor her social relationships—especially those with non-academic peers—to ensure that friends did not negatively impact her progress in the AEP.

Ben. As he had done in high school, Ben preferred to spend time with a small group of friends, pursuing leisure activities rather than spending time on study and assignments. As noted above, early in the AEP he was spending hours every day

playing games with his new friends in the residence hall. By Week 3, he recognised that this was becoming a problem and knew that he had to find ways to immerse himself in study. The only change to emerge at this point was his recognition of the problem, but he would eventually do something about it when the stress became unbearable.

Gaara. Gaara's early data revealed little about her approach to peer relations. Her backstory showed that at high school she had not found a good balance between social life and learning. Apart from the effort she devoted to art, her main focus had been *"chilling"* with her friends and having fun at every opportunity. In Week 1 of the AEP, she acknowledged that her approach to study needed to change, but she made no comment about peer relations. Managing peer relationships did not seem to concern her, yet her recent history suggested that this was an area she needed to target strategically. Gaara did not seem to be adopting an approach that would be academically beneficial.

Managing emotions as learners

Students need to be emotionally aroused for learning to be effective, and tend to benefit most when their emotional state is predominantly positive. Consistently positive emotional states were maintained by Andrew and Jodi while Ben and Gaara experienced the semester as an emotional roller-coaster ride.

Andrew. Of the four participants, Andrew appeared to make the most positive start based on a count of the emotions expressed in his data. Thirteen of 16 items (81%) coded for emotion involved positive emotions, including enthusiasm, pride, satisfaction, hope, and joy. Despite initial nerves, he had been excited to start the AEP, a feeling that persisted:

> *After a week of college I am feeling really excited about the rest of the semester*.

As noted above (5.3.1), his excitement was related to his recent decision to pursue a teaching career. Non-traditional students like Andrew tend to bring a pragmatic approach to study (Thunborg et al., 2012). Rather than being driven primarily by a love of study, they are motivated by their dream career and desire to identify with it

(Whannell & Whannell, 2015). From the start, Andrew took satisfaction in the AEP and was encouraged when he found the first assignment not too difficult:

> *In Week 2 my first folio piece was due, the 350-word personal narrative. I found this piece easy to write as it was about me and I didn't have to do any research.*

He experienced joy over the mark he earned for the assignment:

> *I was really happy with my mark for this assignment, it was the start to college that I was hoping for.*

Only two negative emotions surfaced in this period. Two separate data sources recorded the anxiety he remembered feeling at the start of the AEP, a feeling that quickly dissipated. And in his first journal entry he mentioned his determination to avoid getting *"too social at college"*. Anxiety is a fear that has the potential to promote learning (Postareff et al., 2017) as it did for Andrew. He experienced no chronic emotional negativity in this opening period. On the contrary, his predominantly positive affective state produced mostly feelings of satisfaction and competence. By Week 3, he felt confident enough to boast about the promising start he had made:

> *It was the start to college that I was hoping for. I was focused on what I was going to do and I wasn't going to get distracted by … anything … that college* [the AEP] *threw at me.*

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi made a positive start, exhibiting the emotions of pride, hope, enthusiasm, satisfaction, and competence. She was proud to be starting the AEP. It was the beginning of a journey to restore the sense of hope she had lost when she dropped out of high school after Year 10. She was *"excited"* about being accepted into the AEP and loved the institutional climate (Rowe et al., 2015):

> *Everyone is so friendly around* [the college]. *I have received so many smiles and greetings from people that I have never met before until now. It has a great vibe and I love the atmosphere.*

Like Andrew, she had a pragmatic approach to study, seeing it as a step towards achieving her career goal. She had scarcely commenced the AEP, yet she could already see herself with a teaching degree:

> *As I sat through the first two lectures I pictured myself in the future with a professional job. I know I'm going to love it here at* [college].

Apart from her first-day nerves, the only negative emotion she experienced in the opening weeks of the AEP was worry. Having been out of school while her AEP classmates were completing Years 11 and 12, she felt anxious about her ability to cope with the academic demands of the course. As noted above (5.3.2), she feared she was not keeping up as well as others in the class. At the same stage of the semester, Andrew had boasted about having made a dream start. Jodi had made a hopeful start but appeared to be in danger of going under. Had she lacked self-belief, she might have given up in despair at this point; but her sense of competence enabled her to persevere, believing she would come out on top:

> *I'm feeling a little overwhelmed with all of the assessments given out at once. I know I will be able to get my head around it but at the moment it just all seems a bit too much at once for me.*

Helping to boost her confidence and maintain a positive emotional state through this period was the support of her parents:

> *My parents are supporting me a lot with my work. They are trying their very hardest to keep my confidence up.*

This was the darkest moment of Jodi's semester. From this point on, her emotions trended in a positive direction. Perseverance is a significant factor in the success of AEP students (Whannell, 2013).

Gaara. Gaara began the AEP almost as positively as Jodi had, displaying mostly positive emotions (67%), including enthusiasm, satisfaction, hope, interest and pride. A brief allusion to stress was not dwelt upon in her first written reflection:

> *Starting my journey as a higher education student feels exciting as well as comfortable … It feels like a family … I feel things will turn out different* [cf. high school] *… As my new journey starts as a higher education student, I*

believe it will be a stressing but also fun experience, and [I] *will do my best. Hi 5!*

Hope that arises from self-belief can predict successful outcomes (Haigh et al., 2007). It was not clear how solidly Gaara's hope was based on her self-beliefs. It almost suggested wishful thinking:

I feel things will turn out different and in a way, change my lifestyle by learning from the mistakes when I was a high school student and making sure not to do it again.

Gaara's negative emotions were not the same as Andrew's and Jodi's. Like Jodi, she described having felt overwhelmed, but unlike Jodi, the feeling arose in Week 1 before the work had started. In other words, Gaara was feeling overwhelmed by the anticipation of academic work. Jodi did not begin to feel overwhelmed until Week 3, when the semester was well underway and the pressure of work was being experienced. Besides, Jodi qualified her emotion, saying she was feeling *"a little overwhelmed"*, not a lot. Anticipating the workload led Gaara to mention that she expected the AEP to be a *"stressing"* experience. Her anxiety was driven by her fear that the AEP study load might prove to be *"hard"*.

Gaara experienced two other emotions that did not appear in either Jodi's or Andrew's data as they had not formed higher education aspirations at high school. First, there was regret about her high school performance:

Despite graduating as a completed Year 12 student, I failed to gain the ATAR score I was seeking. Obviously no universities accepted me. I knew I had the knowledge, but I did not try hard enough to show the full potential of what I was capable. I needed to be dedicated and willing to engage in other studies besides art classes. I lacked self-discipline. There were always distractions that prevented me from focusing on the task at hand.

This comment contained a clue about what might have been driving Gaara's other negative emotions. Lacking confidence in her ability to discipline herself to study, she feared the workload, anticipating that it would create stress and spoil the *"fun"* she planned to have. Another negative emotion was one of mild frustration about having to pass the AEP before she could join an undergraduate program:

> *But in order to get into the* [Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts)] *course, I have to pass the* [AEP].

Negative emotions like anxiety and shame (Postareff et al., 2017) can be used as motivation, but most other negative emotions must be let go if they are not to become a hindrance to student progress.

Ben. The one whose data contained the most negative emotion in the orientation phase of the AEP was Ben. His negative emotions (57%), including uncertainty, fear, loneliness, dissatisfaction and non-commitment, outweighed his positive emotions (43%), which included contentment, satisfaction and surprise—most of which did not arise from the academic program. Some of his positive emotions threatened to have a negative impact, for example his contentment with the course, which he had heard was *"pretty laid back"*. This attitude could encourage him to devalue the course and under-rate the effort required to pass. Likewise, his positive comment that the AEP *"feels good"* might prove to be ethereal if not supported by strategic engagement in the learning interface. Three other positive comments also had limited value. First, he had been surprised to be accepted into the AEP. He should not have been surprised as he was the only one of the four participants with a qualifying ATAR. Automatic entry is available for applicants with a rank of 45 or better, and his rank was over 50. Week 3 brought two more surprises. First, he was surprised at how quickly time was passing, and second, he was surprised at *"how good"* he had become at playing pool. He made just one positive comment that had academic salience, but it followed a negative comment about *"finding distractions everywhere"*. It was attached to a statement of doubt and followed by a fearful projection:

> *Although the 350-word assignment for GSEN was not too bad where I managed to finish it in half an hour, but I doubt I can keep that up. I really need to find some way to immerse myself in my study or I might just end up falling behind.*

In summary, Ben's emotional state was predominantly negative, and much of his positive affect related to non-academic aspects of his AEP experience. He needed to find a way to relate more positively to the academic program and the experience of learning.

5.4.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study shows the importance for AEP students of engaging with study from the first day (Levy & Earl, 2012) as Andrew and Jodi did. It demonstrates the importance of non-cognitive skills like perseverance; Jodi and Ben could have given up by Week 3, but by persevering they avoided contributing to the attrition rate. The study shows that AEP students can successfully carry a heavy load of paid work in addition to their study load and need not fear having to exceed 10 hours per week. While the literature encourages students to interact with peers in the educational interface, the participants in this study appeared to spend limited time out of class engaged with peers on matters relating to the AEP. The study supports the claim that students benefit from maintaining a predominantly positive emotional state. It also supports the claims that some negative emotions can contribute to academic progress and some positive emotions can impede progress.

5.4.5 What this study adds

This study adds to our understanding of how organised and motivated teenage AEP students can juggle study with long hours of paid work as seen in the punishing workloads borne by Andrew and Jodi. The study also adds to our understanding of how some students manage peer relationships. Not trusting themselves to maintain an academic focus, some students take pro-active steps to largely cut themselves off from contact with peers while studying. It is a strategy that teenage AEP students might consider. Finally, the study provides valuable insight into the emotional aspects of the AEP journey, showing the benefits that accrue from being organised for study, engaging willingly, and having access to effective sources of socio-emotional and academic support.

5.5 Self-Reflectiveness

Two components of self-reflectiveness are discussed in this section: (1) monitoring performance and building self-efficacy, and (2) adjusting approach, which includes identifying weaknesses and learning from mistakes.

5.5.1 What this means

Self-reflection refers to the processes of metacognition, including self-examination, self-evaluation, and self-correction. By monitoring their AEP

performance, students can learn from their mistakes, identify weaknesses, and adjust their approach to learning. In this way, they build self-efficacy and exercise agency.

5.5.2 What the literature says

Self-reflectiveness is a fourth core property of human agency (Bandura, 2001). As agents, students can examine the adequacy of their academic engagement, their motivation, and their values. They can address role conflicts, judge the outcome of their efforts, and exercise control to achieve desired outcomes and avoid unwanted outcomes. In the process, they empower themselves and build self-efficacy. They are motivated to further action, they are encouraged to persevere in the face of difficulties, and they build resiliency. Developing agency is an interactive process, driven by the interplay between personal reflection and social relationships (Koppelmen, 2017). Critical reflection can result in self-transformation (Willans & Seary, 2007); but self-reflection is hard work, making some students reluctant to confront their chosen ways of relating to academia (Sheridan, 2013). Personal identity emerges from the interaction between self-reflection and social forces (Archer, 2000). Doing effective self-evaluation enables students to learn from their mistakes and become more effective learners (Levy & Earl, 2012). Failing to engage in critical self-reflection can result in repeating the mistakes of the past.

5.5.3 What this study shows

This study reveals considerable variation in the way AEP students monitor their academic performance and adjust to the requirements of the course as they go along. Some show themselves to be adaptive, while others become inflexible and irresolute (Archer et al., 1996).

Monitoring performance and building self-efficacy

While Andrew and Jodi consulted the college tutors to help them monitor their performance, Ben and Gaara chose not to. These decisions had implications for their self-efficacy development.

Andrew. To help monitor his performance, Andrew visited the college tutors in Week 2 for help with his first written assignment. As a sportsman, he knew the value of coaching and enlisted the tutors as writing coaches; he did not see them as a threat. Having written a draft of the assignment over the weekend, he was critical of his output:

> *I was happy* [with what I achieved] *but 350 words in 3hr isn't really that good.*

Keen to learn and keen to earn good grades, Andrew made repeated visits to the tutors:

> *I took my 350-word narrative to the tutors four times before I handed it in. I was really happy with my mark* [70%] *for this assignment.*

Reflecting on the level of difficulty of Folio 1, Andrew recognised that he had found it *"easy to write"*. Even so, he took satisfaction in his mark.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi decided to seek help from the tutors with her first writing task. Despite showing less enthusiasm for the tutors than Andrew had, she picked up several valuable writing hints. She may have been more willing to visit a female tutor, but at the time the college had no female tutors. Instead of being glad to have the first assignment out of the way and pleased with her mark (80%), Jodi began to worry about her general progress. Noticing that others in the class always seemed to be a step ahead of her, she recognised she had some catching up to do. Her self-belief and resilience made her determined to persevere. Her self-efficacy was not where she wanted it to be, but she believed that it would be in time. She would not let her early exit from high school and two years less schooling than her peers derail her AEP experience.

Ben. Ben's attitude to tutorial help contrasted with the attitudes of Andrew and Jodi. Ben needed help with writing as much as they did. While Andrew welcomed the help of the tutors and Jodi was willing to accept it, Ben was reluctant to visit them, seeing it as *"very daunting"* to have a stranger *"peeking into"* his life. Thinking about this made him feel so uncomfortable that he decided not to visit the tutors. It took him hours to find the motivation to begin writing, but only half an hour to finish the task. As Andrew had noted, it was an easy task. By avoiding the tutors, Ben had forfeited a double benefit. First, he missed out on their feedback on his writing. Second, he missed out on the extra motivation that tutorial visits can provide. He was satisfied with his achievement on this assignment, but despite earning the same grade as Andrew (70%), he was not filled with hope for the future. On the contrary, he lapsed into a gloomy reflection on the possibility that he might

start falling behind if he did not find a way to immerse himself in study more effectively and efficiently.

Gaara. Like Ben, Gaara was a long way from home (more than 1,000 km) and would almost certainly have benefited from finding a mentor to help her monitor her performance and stay focused on the coursework. The college tutors could have filled this role. They could have helped her achieve her stated intention (Week 1) of being *"faithful"* to who she was. She claimed to have visited the tutors once, but they had no record of the visit. One tutor suggested she may have accompanied a small group of students to the door of the tutoring room on one of their visits, but that was as close as she got to meeting him—almost, but not quite. Like Ben, she wrote the first assignment without the assistance of the tutors. She and Ben would make no use of the tutors throughout the AEP. Despite earning equal top mark (90%) for this short assignment, Gaara made no mention of either the writing process or her mark. Had she chosen to keep a reflective journal, she may well have mentioned it there as the other three did. Gaara concluded her first assignment with the claim that she intended to use her abilities *"to the fullest"*. This intention would soon be put to the test. For now, her high mark for this first assignment looked like evidence that she was on the road to success.

Adjusting approach

Andrew and Jodi both benefited from the flexible approaches they brought to their AEP experience. Ben and Gaara were less flexible. Gaara, in particular, showed worrying signs of being either unwilling or unable to make needed adjustments in her approach to learning.

Andrew. The first adjustment Andrew made was his decision to distance himself from his peers while studying. He would not let socialising interfere with his AEP progress the way it had interfered with his progress at high school. The next adjustment he made was to prepare a study plan in response to a Week 2 in-class survey. As he would later confess, academic planning had not been a personal strength. Visiting the tutors would help him monitor his academic progress. The tutors identified many errors in his first draft. Determined to learn from his mistakes, he got on with the tasks of editing and submitting. When the marked paper was returned three days later, as a person with strong performance goals (Archer et al.,

1996), he was very happy with his grade. It was more than a successful piece of writing as he noted: *"It was the start to* [the AEP] *that I was hoping for"*. It confirmed for him the value of the tutors as academic partners. It was the start of an enduring relationship that saw him work closely with the tutors throughout the AEP.

Jodi. Unlike Andrew, Jodi did not seize control of her social life in the orientation period as she had not yet identified her social life as a problem. That realisation would dawn a couple of weeks later. Like Andrew, she made an adjustment in Week 2 by preparing a study plan. From the tutors, she picked up valuable writing tips that would improve the focus of her writing. In a Week 2 journal entry, she wrote:

> *There were a few little mistakes that he* [the tutor] *pointed out and also some things that he thought may not be necessary to add in. I need to keep reminding myself that the whole paragraph needs to be on the same topic as the first sentence.*

In Week 3, feeling pressured by the workload and anxious about being behind most of her peers, she checked this self-reflection and reminded herself that she would eventually *"get* [her] *head around"* the course material. AEP students who have not completed high school might relate to Jodi's insecurity about her academic knowledge and skills. She would tell them to believe in themselves and not give up on the task of self-reconstruction.

Ben. As noted above, Ben was dissatisfied with his approach to study, but perhaps not dissatisfied enough. He knew he could not continue to waste hours before getting started on study and assignments:

> *I really need to find some way immerse myself in my study or I might just end up falling behind.*

It did not appear to have occurred to Ben that his attitude to the course needed changing. The same journal entry that mentioned his fear of falling behind began with the comment that nothing in the course *"really require*[d] *a 100% effort"*. This cavalier attitude might help to explain his high school underachievement. AEP students who bring such an attitude to their second attempt to matriculate risk repeating past mistakes. Andrew and Jodi did not have this attitude; and while

Gaara's attitude was carefree and fun-loving, it was not conceited or arrogant. On the contrary, she feared the work was too hard.

Gaara. In the orientation period, there was little evidence that Gaara closely monitored her performance or sought to make adjustments. She appeared to be more intent on having fun than studying. Her performance on the first assignment (90%) suggested that she had things under control. In response to an in-class survey in Week 2, Andrew and Jodi had taken steps to improve their organisation by developing a study plan. Despite having admitted in Week 1 that she was not well organised, Gaara made no mention of preparing a study plan. When invited to indicate how she thought she might improve her approach to study, she had no suggestion to offer. She knew she had made *"mistakes"* at high school, knew she was not *"organised and punctual"*, knew she was *"bad with time management"*, acknowledged she *"needed to be dedicated and willing to engage"*, admitted she yielded too readily to *"distractions* [instead of] *focusing on the task at hand"*, and—with reference to her Year 12 performance—confessed, *"I lacked self-discipline"*. She did not bring a "deep and organised" (Herrmann, Bager-Elsborg & McCune, 2017, p. 397) approach to study. She recognised that changes were needed, but did not seem to appreciate that she must be the agent of change. Her intentions for the AEP were always stated in general terms as these comments illustrate: *"I feel things will turn out different"*, *"*[I] *will do my best"*, *"I hope to gain a pass"*, *"I have to pass the* [AEP]*"*, *"I now plan to use all my abilities to the fullest"*. This point is well illustrated in a fractured comment she wrote in her first piece of reflective writing in Week 1:

> *Being organised and punctual are one of things that I feel I needs and will be changed.*

She sensed a need that would somehow be met. At this point she might have said "I am determined to make these changes". It is significant that she did not. Reflecting on the AEP made her aware that it would require work, and this made her feel *"overwhelmed"*. Her self-reflections failed to produce the needed corrective action in the orientation phase.

5.5.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study supports the claim of social cognitive theory that reflectiveness is a core property of human agency (Bandura, 2001). Andrew's interactions with the college tutors show how personal reflection and his relationships with the tutors contributed to his sense of agency (Koppelmen, 2017). Andrew and Jodi, both on paths of self-transformation, illustrate how a metacognitive approach can change an individual's attitude to themselves as learners (Willans & Seary, 2007). Ben and Gaara, in varying degrees, both showed that critical reflection can be hard work (Sheridan, 2013). Self-regulation is linked with metacognition (Archer et al., 1996; Cantwell, 2004). Andrew and Jodi exemplify AEP students who develop these capacities, Ben found the challenge more difficult, and there were early clues that Gaara might struggle to develop self-regulation. The experience of the four participants supports the research finding that positive emotions in education enhance metacognition (Rowe et al., 2015). Students like Andrew and Jodi show that being self-aware is associated with being willing to learn from mistakes (Levy & Earl, 2012).

5.5.5 What this study adds

This study highlights the importance for teenage AEP students of responding to their self-evaluations by being willing to learn from their past mistakes, identify their areas of weakness as students, and adjust their approach to learning. The study also shows how academic tutors (support personnel) can help AEP students develop skill in self-examining and self-correcting and improve their sense of agency and their self-efficacy.

5.6 Conclusion

Built around Bandura's (2001; 2006) four organising principles—intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness—this chapter has shown how the four participants experienced the orientation phase of their AEP semester. It has shown Andrew and Jodi engaging from Day One, focused by a deep commitment to their career goal of becoming a teacher, and finding time for study despite their heavy paid-work commitments. It has also shown the negative impacts of Ben's fading career goal and the resultant uncertainty as he struggled with negative emotions and negative attitudes to study. And it has shown how Gaara's laid-back attitude began to sabotage her AEP experience from the start. The next

chapter examines how the four participants built on these starts. It shows the two who began well consolidating and continuing on an upward trajectory and the other two struggling to stay in the game.

Chapter 6: The Middle Game

6.1 Introduction

Personal agency is "the power to originate actions for given purposes" (Bandura, 2001, p. 6). Students demonstrate agency through academic engagement, which shows how effectively they have converted their distal goals into proximal sub-goals and organised themselves to meet these goals. Strategic students bring a motivated interest to their study and seek to understand the course content. By systematically following their course of study, they develop the skills required by higher education students. The middle game refers to the middle part of the semester, the second month, from around Week 4 to Week 8. For teenage AEP students, this can be a period of consolidation or of dissolution. They are likely to face a series of battles and may endure a roller-coaster emotional ride as they engage with the student role and attempt to form a student identity. This chapter looks at these three issues: engagement battles, emotions in learning, and emerging student identity.

6.2 Engagement Battles

In the middle game, teenage AEP students either consolidate after having made a good start, re-assess and recalibrate after having made an indifferent start, or drop further behind as old habits reassert themselves and they begin to lose the battle to become effective students.

6.2.1 What this means

Students taking an AEP may face any of the challenges that typically confront non-traditional students, including financial strains, the pressure of paid work, the sometimes alienating culture of academia, and a lack of academic preparation (Munro, 2011). There is the constant pressure of assessments, perhaps the need to move away from home and learn how to live independently for the first time, plus learning how to engage with academic staff, peers, and a perhaps intimidating higher education institution. Students who are first-in-family to pursue higher education, those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) (Gilligan & Outram, 2012), those from LSES backgrounds, and those from other disadvantaged groups may face additional challenges. There may also be internal challenges, such as a lack of self-belief, immaturity, and low motivation (Shah & Whannell, 2017). To some students, the AEP experience might seem like a repeat of

their “dreary experience of high school academics” (Wolf et al., 2016, p. 12). The middle-game is where the battles created by pressures such as these are largely won or lost; this is the stage where students either consolidate or begin to unravel.

6.2.2 What the literature says

It has been noted that many students find study a “battle” (Krause, 2005, p. 4), a “joyless slog” (Bryson & Hand, 2007, p. 356), a “struggle” (Elsom et al., 2017, p. 255), “drudgery” (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013, pp. 320-321), or a “grind” (Kuh, Hu & Vesper, 2000, p. 238). They may feel threatened by the academic load and the pressure of “learning the rules” (Debenham & May, 2005, p. 89). Age seems to amplify the battles, with younger students more likely to adopt a shallow approach to learning, skip classes or come to class unprepared (Krause, 2005), exhibit immaturity (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017), and attempt to pass with minimal effort (Archer et al., 1996; Cantwell, 2001; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002). Factors most likely to contribute to the battle for younger students include competing roles, multiple commitments, and disadvantages, for example, paid work, sport, commuting (Levy & Earl, 2012), lack of preparedness (O’Shea & Vincent, 2011), lack of relevant cultural capital (Devlin, 2013), lack of interest (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017), and lack of certainty (James, 2016). Students may exhibit behaviour that does not match their aspirations (Bandura, 2001; Oyserman, 2013). Many appear not to be in full control of their lives (Wrench et al., 2013); for example, obtaining regular sleep might be a problem (Diamond & O’Brien-Malone, 2018). Students might lack basic skills like time management (Carpenter et al., 2015) and study motivation (Hall, 2015). Social distractions might be a problem (Kuh et al., 2000). They might struggle to balance study and leisure (Grund, Brassler & Fries, 2014). There can be issues with the curriculum (Baker & Irwin, 2016) and with essay writing (Levy & Earl, 2012). Those who fail to convert their career goal into proximal study goals (Bandura, 2001) are likely to struggle. By learning to exercise agency, AEP students can begin to engage more effectively in the educational interface (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) and improve their chance of winning the academic battles that previously they lost. Determination and perseverance are valuable personal attitudes that contribute to this victory (Whannell, 2013).

6.2.3 What this study shows

This study illustrates the battles that teenage AEP students can face in their return to study. The battles have many causes, including negatives personal attitudes, uncertainty about goals, personal fears, and skill deficits. The study shows how the four participants responded to the battles they faced. Two successfully met every challenge; one was almost as successful, despite struggling with negative emotions and a chronically negative attitude to study; and one continued to be so laid back that she gave little evidence of being in a battle for her academic future.

Attitude to the AEP and the student role

Maintaining a positive attitude to the AEP and the student role benefits participants, by creating conditions that are favourable to academic engagement. All four of the participants continued to have at least some positive attitudes in the middle part of the semester. In Week 5, Andrew was *"loving it … really enjoying it"*. He saw the AEP as *"an awesome way to get into tertiary education"*. Continuing to embrace the student role, he was intent on pushing himself to do well. Jodi was happy with the AEP and loved the friendliness of the people, young and old. She knew that the AEP represented a *"big step"* in her life and was happy with where it was taking her. When socialising became a threat (see below), she decided that study was more important and took steps to rein it in. For Ben, the AEP continued to be *"fun"*. He claimed he was enjoying biology, but he did not appear to be enjoying the student role; rather, he was finding it *"painful and gruelling"*. Late in this part of the semester, he noted that he continued to have an attitude of *"apathy"* towards study. Gaara continued to enjoy her time in the AEP, seeing it as an opportunity *"to redo"* past mistakes. What she meant to say was *redress* past mistakes. This Freudian slip would prove to be an accurate self-evaluation. In a Week 5 interview, she revealed the kind of student she aspired to be, saying, *"I wanna be laid back"*. In her view, the course required *"too much work"*, and this put pressure on her desire to be laid back. She no longer appeared to be intent on using her abilities *"to the fullest"*—her stated intention during orientation. Instead of maturing, Gaara's attitude was regressing.

Career and study goals

Andrew. AEP students exercising agency continue to plan for the future by keeping their career goals and study goals firmly in view. Two of the participants

brought positive approaches to thinking ahead. As a Week 5 conversation showed, Andrew remembered several former high school teachers encouraging him to consider a teaching career. He continued to be proactive about planning his future semesters at college so that he could complete a BEd (PDHPE) with his direct-entry mates and graduate inside four years. In Week 8, explaining why he had come to college, he made no mention of the AEP:

> *I came to* [the college] *to start my four-year course in education.*

Ordinarily, it would take four and a half years to do what he planned to do. First, he would have to pass the AEP to earn entry to an undergraduate teacher education program. Then he would spend another four years completing the degree, but Andrew had a different plan:

> *Staying at* [the college] *longer than four years is not an option.*

To ensure that he finished inside four years, he planned to overload, picking up two extra units in ensuing semesters. Andrew's planning was not restricted to the AEP; it covered the four years he had budgeted to spend at college.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi continued to be focused on her career goal. In a Week 5 interview, she remembered how in her coaching job she would reflect on becoming a full-time teacher:

> *Hanging around the kids coaching, I thought, well, I enjoy just the 45-minute classes that I did. So I thought, I can do this all day and that's been ... Well, I don't know. I like kids. I like coaching kids. I like making them enjoy what they do.*

This was the goal that was driving her. She also recalled her boss's encouragement to follow her dream.

Ben. The other two participants continued to be less driven by their goals and to have less clarity about their future. As early as Week 5, Ben was expressing doubt about pursuing a teaching career:

> *The teaching thing, I know I want to do it, but I'm not sure how much at the moment so that's the one thing that I am a little bit concerned about.*

When pressed about this, he admitted he was not sure about teaching. His Week 5 journal entry expressed even greater uncertainty:

> *Sometimes I feel a little lost as to where I am heading. I wish it were simpler, a light or signal that showed me that I am going the right direction, and not hopelessly wandering through this semester without a clue. I guess I am losing sight of what I want.*

This comment was not just a rhetorical flourish. Losing sight of his goals was a source of anxiety for Ben. He needed to re-evaluate not just his approach to study, but the direction in which it would take him. In this troubled frame of mind, he could have given up; but that would mean adding another failure to his academic record, something he was determined to avoid. Showing foresight, he chose not to yield to the apathy that threatened to overwhelm him. Somehow he would find the stamina to ensure that his semester ended well.

Gaara. Gaara's goals appeared to be fading too. In a Week 5 interview, she sounded vaguer about her life goal than she had a month earlier. She thought she might *"get to visual arts or something".* She appeared to lack the career certainty of Jodi and Andrew:

> *I don't know if it's* [art] *good for a career, but I think it's a good career. I dunno.*

She lacked conviction about her proximal study goals, too. When asked how much study she was doing, she responded, *"Ah* [giggle]*, not that much."* How well would she do at the end of the semester?—*"Well enough so that I can pass* [laughing]*."* Like a lot of younger AEP students, Gaara hoped to do just enough work to pass (Archer et al., 1999). She seemed unconcerned about the gamble she was taking. By miscalculating, she could end up failing.

Anticipating consequences

AEP students demonstrate a strategic approach by anticipating the consequences of their actions. This requires examining past performances, identifying weaknesses, learning from the mistakes, and making adjustments intended to forestall further underachieving. Three of the participants in the study were motivated by contemplating the consequences of their actions, but one was not.

Andrew. We have already seen (Wk2) Andrew's twin decisions to avoid getting too *"comfortable"* and avoid over-socialising as an AEP student. Early in this middle phase, he mentioned his changed approach to time management:

> *I used to leave everything to the last minute last year at high school. It* [being in the AEP] *has been a big change for my time management skills.*

Knowing that failing grades would extend his course, Andrew was agentive and made decisions designed to produce academic success. Nearing the halfway mark in the semester, he recognised that he had made a good start and would finish the semester well if he persevered with the study regime he was following as a Week 6 journal entry shows:

> *I have surprised myself and spent a lot of time studying and doing my assignments. Whenever I am free at college I find myself camped in the library doing work. This enables me to focus and not get distracted by others. I have found that at college I am more comfortable now. I have gotten used to being a tertiary education student and I am handling it well.*

At high school, being comfortable had been associated with losing his academic focus. In the AEP, his increased understanding of academic culture had removed much of his anxiety, freeing him to feel comfortable with the way he was now performing the student role. One other consequence of failing to make acceptable academic progress was financial, and he was using this as motivation too:

> *Seeing that I am responsible for paying my school fees I have to learn to use my time responsibly. Staying at* [the College] *longer than four years is not an option.*

Jodi. Jodi shared Andrew's determination to pass the AEP. Like Andrew, she was working to pay her way through college and was strongly motivated to pass all of her units so that her course would not be extended:

> *I'm paying a lot of money to study* [AEP tuition], *so it would be a waste if I didn't put my effort in and pass all of my units the first time.*

The mid-semester break she saw not as an opportunity to take a break and catch up with friends, but as time to use for academic reading and working on assignments

that would soon be due. By working instead of relaxing, she would avoid negative consequences:

> *It's the start of the mid semester break and I'm hoping that in this week off I get all of my assessments up to date. I have an assignment due the first week back for EDUC15600. I'm going to be working mainly on that essay over the week break.*

Ben. With Andrew and Jodi, Ben shared a concern for consequences. As noted above, he saw the need to deal with his uncertainty and seemingly non-existent time management. Preparing for the long drive home for the mid-semester break, he recognised his need of a better balance between leisure and study:

> *I suppose I have to change this habit* [prioritising leisure over study]*, it will be difficult but it will benefit me.*

Making the changes would not be easy, but it was necessary if his academic journey was to continue heading *"in the right direction"*—a reference to passing the course as his life goals continued to be uncertain. Ben still did not have the answer to his underachieving: *"It's something I've always done,"* he admitted in an interview. He did not appear to recognise that he needed to abandon his casual, seemingly helpless, attitude to underachieving. To be successful in the AEP and in subsequent undergraduate study, he would have to become the agent of his own achievement.

Gaara. By the middle of the semester, Gaara was anticipating negative consequences. In Week 8, she acknowledged she was *"going further down the path of failing"*. Even then, it was not too late to salvage something from the semester. Three weeks earlier, she had recounted some of her failings as a student: studying when she felt like it, not having a time schedule, leaving things to the last minute, waiting to be told what to do, being distracted in classes, having trouble concentrating, lacking the motivation to study, forgetting things, and more. By deciding to address these issues, she could yet take steps to avoid the worst of the consequences she saw looming. She could make a fresh start, with a more strategic approach under the guidance of a lecturer who had offered to help. Gaara was wavering between the need *"to keep striving for* [her] *goal and not turn back to* [her] *mistakes"*, and the possibility of having to repeat. Many teenage AEP students reach

the point Gaara had reached. They see two paths beckoning: a path promising renewal, and a familiar old path going in another direction. Gaara had a big decision to make, but in the semester to date she had shown little inclination to use personal agency effectively in the pursuit of her life goals. It was not clear where she would find the will power and self-control to rouse herself from her lethargy and suddenly start studying seriously. She did not accept the lecturer's proffered help.

Essay writing

Literacy should be part of the core work of an AEP (Baker & Irwin, 2016), especially essay writing, a key literacy skill in higher education. As the four participants battled a range of challenges, there were three that they shared in common, starting with essay writing (the other two were procrastination and controlling their social lives). Smaller writing tasks, especially reflective writing, they found not too challenging, not even the first assignment, a 350-word personal reflection. As noted above, Ben's battle was not with the writing, but with the time spent procrastinating while building up to the task. His apparent inability to engage willingly seems to have been caused by his deep fear of failure plus, perhaps, lack of interest. Andrew and Jodi both found this first assignment a valuable learning experience, thanks to the help received from visits to the tutors. For Gaara, this assignment was a high point that saw her earn equal top mark in the class despite making no visits to the tutors. However, writing tasks that required reading research and more extensive use of higher-level thinking skills would be more challenging.

Jodi. Jodi's struggle with the essay is documented across four weeks of journal entries. Finding helpful sources was her main challenge. A journal entry written in the break revealed that her mother and her sister had been helping her with essay writing. Having done Jodi's units themselves, they knew what was required. This family bonus spared Jodi a lot of stress and removed the need to use the college tutors. There can be little doubt that being the third member of her family to take the AEP benefited Jodi considerably.

Andrew. Andrew's experience with essay writing had been more stressful than Jodi's. In an understated way, he noted in his journal that the essay had been *"a bit of a struggle"* that had awakened fresh memories of his negative high school experiences with essay writing. After making a start in Week 3, he left it for two

weeks and did not return to it until the week it was due. This put him under pressure and created considerable stress. His family *"copped"* this stress as he battled to finish and submit the essay before they left for an Easter camp. The task had been a real challenge—the crisis point in his semester—but by persevering he won the battle. The essay was finished and submitted on time. This highlights the importance of determination and perseverance. AEP students should not be too ready to quit.

Ben. Neither Ben nor Gaara had their essays ready to submit on time. Like Andrew, both had procrastinated. Leading up to the due date, Ben made no references to the essay. The day before it was due, he emailed the lecturer to request an extension:

> *I am just wondering if it is at all possible to get an extension till mid next week. I understand that there will be some marks taken off for this.*

It was the week after the break before Ben's essay was submitted. A journal entry revealed how he had struggled with the essay:

> *The 1200-word essay was a pain. I knew what I wanted to write and how to write it but it never flowed. I could never get what I thought out onto the paper, so in the end I left it for a couple of days and finished it in a night or two.*

The final comment here reflected the same nonchalant attitude that accompanied his completion of Folio 1 after a long struggle to get started on the task—*"I managed to finish it in half an hour"* (Journal, Wk3). Given that Ben's essay showed a better quality of writing than Jodi's and Andrew's, it was unclear why he had taken more than a week longer to submit. Several possible explanations included his less efficient approach to study, his lack of socio-emotional support, and his generally negative academic attitude. Jodi and Andrew both had family support to draw from. Ben and Gaara's lack of family support was exacerbated by their failure to seek alternative support from the college tutors or from their peers. Nevertheless, Ben finished the essay.

Gaara. In contrast to the other three—and despite her good intentions—Gaara did not complete the essay. In the first week back from the break she had promised:

> *"I'll complete it … I'll make time and just stay in my room with no distractions"*.

A problem with this plan was that there were so many distractions in her room. However, the main problem was herself and her lack of agency. Failing to submit the essay guaranteed a failing grade for the unit. Gaara's semester was slipping away, with little to suggest she had the resolve to rescue it. Gaara represents teenage AEP students who, despite showing that they have ability, fail to follow through and complete tasks they could have completed. Their behaviour does not match their aspirations (Oyserman, 2013). They lack self-regulation (Bandura, 2001) and are not in full control of their lives (Wrench et al., 2013). Aiming to pass with minimal effort can degenerate into attempting to pass with no effort. Gaara knew what the problem was, finally admitting in Week 7, *"I'm too lazy"*.

Time management

Time management is a misnomer. Time cannot be managed. The clock keeps ticking whether or not we notice. What we manage—or mismanage—is our life. Better life management is the main issue in the literature on time management, a skill that all students need for success (Carpenter et al., 2015). Students develop the skill by learning to use time effectively in the pursuit of their goals. When students say they have a problem with time management, what they usually mean is that they prefer to use their time for activities other than study. All four of the participants in this study preferred sport and socialising to study. Their challenge was to devote regular time to study so that study became something they valued as adding meaning to their lives and moving them closer to achieving their life goals, especially their career goal. The experiences of the participants show that each of them battled with time management.

Andrew. Even the well-organised Andrew admitted in a Week 5 journal entry that he still struggled with time management:

> *I feel as though I can do better in my assignments as I struggle with my time management.*

It was not a despairing admission as it was located in the context of a string of positive comments about being *"very happy"* with his progress, having his goals still

in place, maintaining a high sense of hope, continuing to receive *"awesome help"* from the tutors, and earning good grades, including a distinction for his most recent assignment. In spite of these positive developments, he had been procrastinating over a 1200-word essay. At the time he was studying consistently, averaging four to five hours a day, around twice as much as the average first-year college student (Kuh & McCarthy, 2006). In Week 5 he claimed, *"I don't like to waste time"*. There was little evidence that Andrew had a problem with time management. The real issue was his fear of essay writing. Procrastinating over threatening tasks can be a problem even for diligent students like Andrew.

Jodi. Having so many commitments to fit into a busy schedule was Jodi's time challenge, a problem compounded when study was added into the mix. After a month in the AEP, she was struggling with time management:

> *Keeping time is a main concern as I usually leave things till a later date to complete and time just seems to go so quickly.*

Her procrastination was explained by poor prioritising:

> *I still have not got to the stage where I have got my priorities right. Study should be my top priority, but sometimes I let other things come before it when I know I shouldn't.*

She knew she must address the problem. Paid work had to be retained as she needed the money. The solution must be found elsewhere, and she found it in curbing her social life, improving her sleep pattern, and using the *"10-minute study burst"* (all discussed below). Implementing these changes improved the quality of her study time, including her capacity to concentrate in lectures. In Week 8 she wrote that the AEP had taught her *"that it's extremely important to study every day"*. This was not just an ideal; it became her reality. That same week, she did eight hours of study on the weekend and reported having read 80 pages the previous week. For someone who had done little reading at school and hated sitting down for any length of time, this was a culture change.

Ben. As the semester progressed, rather than studying more, Ben found himself procrastinating more as he battled to establish a study routine, acknowledging, *"My time management skills seem to be non-existent"*. He preferred

to spend his time *"playing games"* rather than *"grinding on assessments"*. As noted above, it took him hours to get around to beginning writing tasks, even simple ones that could be completed in 30 minutes. Starting his 1200-word essay took even longer, resulting in late submission. It also took time for Ben to get around to creating a study schedule. And once he developed a schedule, he struggled to implement it. In a Week 7 journal entry, he wrote:

> *The amount of procrastination from the start of the semester till now has increased dramatically.*

Managing time continued to be a challenge right through this phase of the semester, as his final journal entry for the period revealed:

> *There is still room for plenty of improvement and I will have to focus more on managing my study time better to become more efficient.*

Despite his problem with procrastination and finding study a grind (Kuh et al., 2000), he was managing to get the work done.

Gaara. Gaara, however, was not getting the work done. Her high school record of poor time management was being reprised in the AEP. There were numerous references to poor time management in her data. When asked in Week 5 whether her time management was improving, she gave a three-word response that she repeated twice: *"I think so, I think so."* Yet, in the same week she wrote an analysis of her personal learning style that included the admission that time management was one of her *"main weaknesses"*. The repetition in the interview response suggested doubt and an attempt to convince not just the interviewer, but herself. Three weeks later, she was still not managing her time well. Too much time spent on *"other things"* was robbing her of time needed to complete assignments. She diagnosed the problem succinctly, confessing, *"I'm too lazy."* Five times in three data sources—not including casual conversations—she applied the word lazy to herself. Unlike the other three participants, she lacked the self-discipline to turn away from the distractions that took her attention. Being a higher education student was *"hard"*, but not because of the work. The hard part for Gaara was finding the time to get around to doing the work. She earned good marks for the work she did. In Week 8, with time beginning to run out, she made one last vow to focus on her study

and keep striving for her goal in order to avoid failing. The outcome of the semester depended on her success or failure in fulfilling this vow.

Study tips can ease the battle

The contest over the curriculum content of an AEP may see skills and disciplinary content jostling for primacy (Baker & Irwin, 2016). While it is important for the content to appeal to students (May & Bunn, 2015), engaging approaches can be used to teach the key skills needed by teenage students. It should not be assumed that students will automatically absorb the literacies that they need. In time, they might, but having a study skills component in the AEP curriculum has the potential to save students a lot of time.

Andrew. Andrew and Jodi benefited from study tips picked up in the AEP. Their decision to consult the college tutors has already been noted. They also accepted the challenge of seeking ways to make learning enjoyable. Andrew's first reference to enjoying study arose in Week 1 in a reflection on his desire to become a teacher so that he could help students *"enjoy their schooling"*. In Week 5, after discussing the need to improve his planning, he wrote:

> *I also need to find a way to enjoy studying and be able to help myself learn faster.*

Enjoying learning continued to exercise his mind as a Week 6 journal entry showed:

> *What I most enjoy doing with my time is two things: study and training for football.*

Andrew was making progress. There had been a time when he would not have put study alongside football as something to be enjoyed. He was enjoying expanding his academic skills, earning good marks, and being on the way to fulfilling his life goals.

Jodi. Being a Year 10 leaver made Jodi potentially the neediest of the four and made her aware that she had a lot of learning to do in order to catch up with her peers. This made her particularly receptive to study tips offered in class. She picked up two tips that none of the others mentioned. In a study skills lecture, she heard about the *"10-minute study burst"*, a study method recommended for reluctant learners. She decided to try it:

> *I tried the ten minute study burst and two hours later I was still there studying. I think it's making it a lot easier for me to study.*

She continued to use this method for the rest of the semester. In a lecture on student health, Jodi heard the claim that getting regular, adequate sleep improved thinking and creativity. In the habit of going to bed after midnight, she decided to test out this advice:

> *I have realised that sleep is very important in everyone's life. I understand and take in a lot more information if I've had a good night sleep the night before. I tested it out and realised that when I go to bed after 11:30PM, the next day I'll be very tired and not focused in class, especially the 8:00AM classes. If I go to bed earlier than 11:00PM, I wake up feeling fresh and ready to learn.*

The result of her experiment convinced her to change her sleeping pattern for the remainder of the semester. While a skills-deficit approach to preparing and delivering the curriculum in programs like an AEP might be obsolete (Clerehan, 2003), teenage students may experience skills deficits that a well-designed AEP can address.

Ben. It is not easy to help students like Ben and Gaara, who decide to do things their own way and ignore or reject much of the advice they are offered. As Ben was not enrolled in the study skills unit—the only one of the four participants not taking the unit—he did not benefit from its content. Even so, he would have encountered some of the ideas in his writing class, taught by a lecturer who was in the habit of drawing the attention of AEP students to useful study tips. Seeming to take the view that seeking help was evidence of personal inadequacy, Ben decided to prove he was not inadequate by completing the course using only his own resources plus class notes. He would not visit the tutors, he would not work with peers, he did not find ways to make learning enjoyable, he was slow to develop a study plan, and his efforts to spend regular time on study tasks became drudgery. His journal revealed that by Week 7 he had developed a loose study plan:

> *I tend to split up what I have to do with what I want to do, such as 1 hour or so on an assignment with 15 minutes of what I want to do. I have found that it*

> *gradually changed to 30 minutes each but it is working somewhat but I have found an unstable balance.*

For Ben's semester to end well, it would help if he could find a better balance between study and recreation.

Gaara. The 10-minute study burst was a method that might have helped Gaara, but she was such a reluctant learner that sitting down for even 10 minutes with a *"hard"* task may have been more than she could bear. Another tip that might have helped Gaara related to sleep, one of many factors that affect academic performance (Diamond & O'Brien-Malone, 2018). Her poor organising skill often interfered with her sleep pattern:

> *Because of my weak organisational skills I tend to leave things until the last minute. This means I get tired, causing me to sleep in and fail to attend my lectures.*

The problem surfaced again in a Week 8 reflection that mentioned her failure to manage sleep *"efficiently"*. The same week, she emailed an assignment to her study skills lecturer at 3:45 a.m. When she was not in class the following day, her friends volunteered that she had been "up all night playing on Facebook". The reality of her chaotic sleep pattern was confirmed in the final week of the semester, when she revealed that her typical bedtime during the semester had been between midnight and 3:00 a.m. She then added, *"Sometimes I don't go to sleep at all."*

Social distractions

Andrew. As noted above, AEP students can benefit by distinguishing between two groups of peers: those who are sharing the academic journey and those who are not. AEP students may need to discriminate in their interactions with these groups. Andrew's recognition of this made him adopt his library strategy, whereby the library became his principal study place, enabling him to avoid most of his peers through the academic day. In several different data sources, he mentioned being *"camped in the library"* to avoid being *"distracted by others"*. The ease with which he wrote the words disguised the battle this involved. In Week 8, having repeatedly demonstrated success as an AEP student, including success with his 1200-word essay, he could still write in his journal:

> *I am easily distracted and when people are around I struggle to keep my focus on what I have to do*.

His success owed much to his strategy of studying in a quiet spot in the library where he could minimise social contact and maintain his focus on study.

Jodi. Jodi made less use of the library than Andrew, and took longer to deal with the problem of social distractions. Even though she had begun the AEP well, she continued to struggle with her social life and battled to get her priorities right. In two separate documents in Week 5, she made similar comments about the importance of her social life:

> *I love my social life. I have plenty of friends outside of college that I enjoy spending time with and do it fairly often.*

This included going out to lunch or watching movies. It would happen at times when she felt she should be studying, but she would go anyway, feeling that it seemed like *"the better option".* She could have let this continue for the remainder of her time in the AEP as she was completing the assignments and earning good marks, but she became dissatisfied with this approach. Feeling driven to do something about her poor prioritising, she devoted almost half of one journal entry to the issue, concluding:

> *I'm hoping that I can and will get stronger at saying no to going out over college* [AEP] *work.*

Her use of two auxiliary verbs in making this point should be noted: can and will. Not content to reflect on possibilities, she was determined to make changes. This marks a difference between her thinking and Gaara's. Gaara identified most of the mistakes she was making as an AEP student but lacked the will to make changes.

Jodi finally seized control of her social life around mid-semester. In her first journal entry after the break, she triumphantly declared:

> *I can now say that I have learnt how to say no to my friends.*

This was a major victory. She had made the decision after realising that it was *"definitely more important to study"* and after reminding herself again of the cost of

the AEP. It had taken her longer to resolve the social issue than it had taken Andrew, but it had not involved a significant academic cost. Somehow, she had managed to keep up with the work despite the pressures on her time.

Ben. Ben appeared to struggle with socialising and games for most of the semester. By Week 5, study was starting to *"take second place"* behind having fun with his friends. His Week 6 journal entry included the admission *"I probably am spending too much time on games."* Three weeks later, he again reflected on his preferred distractions: Ultimate Frisbee, swimming, and rock climbing—no mention of pool this time. With satisfaction, he noted how easily he had managed to make friends at college. A quiet loner by nature, he had previously been in the habit sticking to a few close friends and not seeking to add more. Feeling empowered by his expanded circle of friends, Ben did not intend to cut back on his social life as Andrew and Jodi had. Besides, most of his new friends were students in the undergraduate program that he hoped to commence after the AEP. While his social life was a distraction, it was not a complete distraction. Apart from being late submitting one essay, he was winning the battle to keep up with the coursework even if he did not find it enjoyable.

Gaara. Unlike Andrew, Gaara had no strategy for controlling her social life. Unlike Jodi, she did not reach the point of saying no to friends so that she could focus on her coursework. And unlike Ben, she did not force herself to complete assignments. Among the friends she had made at college, she had become *"comfortable"* in a way that was not helpful. She had become a socialiser and a "recreator" (Kuh et al., 2000, p. 237), a pretender who did not follow through on her study intentions. She appeared to be losing the battle between study and leisure (Grund et al., 2014). Maybe she could become a successful artist without achieving academic success.

Other battles

Andrew. In addition to these three common battles of AEP students—essay writing, time management, and social distractions—students may struggle with a range of other issues as did the participants in this study. Initially, Andrew battled to focus on study and feared he had *"a lower than normal interest"* in staying focused on what he should have been doing in study periods. When he studied at home, every

five to ten minutes he would find himself cleaning his room, re-arranging his closet, *"and doing everything else other than study"*. His response was to begin strategically working to turn this weakness into a strength, by looking for ways to enjoy study and ways to improve his planning skill.

Jodi. One of Jodi's major battles was with the self-doubt she felt as a consequence of having missed the last two years of high school. This fear first surfaced in the orientation phase of the semester (Wk3). By Week 5, it had not gone away, resurfacing in both an interview and this journal entry:

> *I'm starting to wish that I did finish school and go through to senior high school. I'm realising that in most of my lectures everyone else knows a fair bit more than me as they went through to Year 12 and learnt the more advanced things than I did.*

If only she had finished senior high school! The stress created by feeling so underprepared might have caused her to give up. Instead, she responded to her perceived weaknesses as Andrew had: by working on them in order to improve herself. Something else she shared with Andrew was a reluctance to engage with tasks that did not interest her. He struggled to focus on them, and she was not motivated by them. Both resolved the issue by looking for ways to enjoy learning.

Ben. While Andrew and Jodi battled to engage with tasks that did not instantly engender a sense of interest, Ben battled with study generally, finding it an unrelenting grind, *"painful and gruelling"*. This might have been linked to the main battle he seemed to be fighting, an identity battle that involved uncertainties about who he was, how he was doing in the AEP, the effectiveness of his time management (discussed above), and whether he really wanted to become a teacher. Andrew and Jodi were both anchored by their firm commitment to their career goals. Feeling his career goal slipping away left Ben feeling a sense of loss.

Gaara. The one essential battle for Gaara was the battle to manage a chaotic lifestyle, which she identified as flowing from her lazy, laid-back approach to life, her dedication to fun, and her lack of self-discipline. She had come to college with a goal—and with goals for the AEP—but her low study motivation (Hall, 2015) provided evidence that having a goal "does not necessarily result in relevant

behaviour" (Oyserman, 2013, p. 179). Her time management problem has been noted. Despite living on campus (no travel time) and having no paid employment (no work time), she was unable to find time to complete the coursework. Gaara was not in control of her life (Wrench et al., 2013). Knowing this to be the case, she seemed unable to make the necessary changes. Artists tend to be in the bottom half of tertiary students in terms of the effort they expend on study (Kuh et al., 2000). Gaara's efforts confirmed this. A comment she wrote in Week 8 indicated that she was aware of the importance of self-discipline: *"It is the student's responsibility to be disciplined."* Despite this awareness, she had not accepted this responsibility. Maturity matters for AEP students (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017). The younger they are, the more likely they are to be time-wasters, yet Gaara was not the youngest of the four. That distinction fell to Andrew, who was several months younger than Gaara. She knew she needed self-discipline but appeared to be addicted to her chaotic lifestyle.

Metacognition

AEP students demonstrate self-awareness by monitoring their academic progress and developing strategic approaches to learning. Five student profiles have been described (Archer et al., 1996). First, there are deep learners, driven by a mastery goal. Second, there are learners who are driven by a desire for good grades. Third, there are learners who combine mastery and achievement goals. Fourth, there are irresolute learners who lack resourcefulness and an understanding of how to be the agents of their own success. And fifth, there are alienated learners, hoping to get through the course with minimal effort. The four participants in this study illustrate several of these learner profiles.

Andrew. The approaches of Andrew and Jodi matched the third profile, in which mastery and achievement goals coexist. In six different data sources, Andrew mentioned the marks he was earning. High marks were, to him, a source of satisfaction and evidence of academic success. In Week 8, he mentioned his aim for high essay grades:

> *My goal by the time I finish college is to get a high distinction in five of my essays that I write at college.*

A major part of the battle for Andrew was his effort to improve his planning and endurance and turn his weaknesses into strengths. By the middle of the semester, he was working on this:

> *I know that I have weaknesses that hold me back from being a productive learner, and these include a lack of planning and an inability to work for long periods. I have never been able to plan properly for any project that I've had in my life. I have always jumped into my project head first without doing any proper research… If I can make planning a strength then this will allow me to reduce my working time and make my study a lot less stressful.*

Efficiency was not his only concern. Recognising that he had a *"lower than normal interest"* in study, he was determined to turn this around too. He was monitoring his progress, evaluating it, and looking for ways to improve—honing his metacognitive skills. By Week 8, he had seen himself *"step up* [his] *game"* and knew that he was on the way to being a successful tertiary student.

Jodi. While Jodi's data contains almost as many references to marks as Andrew's, she had a different understanding of her approach to learning. While she shared a tendency to be impatient to get things done as well as a desire to work to eliminate weaknesses, she saw herself as being creative and inclined to ask a lot of why questions. This interest in asking questions bespoke incipient critical thinking, a capacity she revisited at the end of the semester. She demonstrated self-understanding in recognising problems in her social life, noting how bored she became with tasks that seemed irrelevant or unchallenging, and acknowledging several unwelcome tendencies, including a tendency to lose focus in lectures, to procrastinate over writing tasks, to be indecisive, and to stress over *"the small stuff"*. We have seen how she sorted out her priorities and her social life. She worked on the other issues too. Before the mid-semester break, she would sometimes allow her mind to wander in class. After the break she boasted, *"I usually pay close attention … in class."* Her lecturers supported this claim. Jodi's self-efficacy rose as she worked to become a more effective AEP student through the middle weeks of the semester.

Ben. In contrast to Andrew and Jodi, Ben made just one reference to the marks he was earning or hoping to earn and gave little indication that he was

motivated to earn good grades. His principal driver seems to have been his fear of failure. In two early documents, he mentioned being an underachiever, and when this came up again in a Week 5 interview, he explained it using a present perfect verb tense: *"It's something I have always done."* More than a third of the way through the AEP, he still saw himself as an underachiever. He was having difficulty leaving the label behind. Having the attitude of Andrew or Jodi might have driven him to be more decisive, address his weaknesses as a student, and turn his semester around. Instead, he chose to grind on, hobbled by his old mindset of self-doubt and uncertainty. He appeared determined to chart his own course and achieve what he could without any support from his peers or the academic support staff. Had he been prepared to be more flexible, he could have made a connection with at least one of the tutors. Like Andrew, the other male participant, he might have found the tutors a great source of support. By Week 8, Andrew and Jodi were making big strides towards turning their weaknesses into strengths. Ben could only suppose that he had improved his effectiveness as a student. In fact, he had made one major change in his approach to study. At high school, he *"never studied at home"*. Now he was doing some *"real study"*—an hour on a good night, followed by *"another two or three hours of light study".* He was studying, but not as regularly as he might. By making more definite decisions and taking firmer steps, he might have put himself on a stronger upward trajectory. Instead, he was muddling along, allowing the pressures of student life to keep *"flustering"* him. He supposed he should make changes, but seemed uncertain about where to start. Ben appeared to be an irresolute learner.

Gaara. There are three references to marks in Gaara's data, only one of which was initiated by her. Relatively unconcerned about marks and uncommitted to study, she nevertheless hoped to earn a minimal pass in the AEP. She admitted as much in a Week 5 interview when asked how well she expected to do in the AEP: *"Well enough that I can pass* [laughing]*,"* was her response. Three weeks later in a short written report she noted she was hoping to get grades of *"just over 50 … sort of"*. In the first month of the semester, Gaara was so busy having fun that she had little time for reflection. By Week 5, she was starting to fall behind. In Week 5, she wrote an insightful analysis of her personal learning style, which might have helped to re-boot her semester. The analysis was filled with descriptors like *"no schedule"*, *"laid-back learner"*, *"distracted easily"*, *"gets fidgety"*, *"a passive learner"*, and

"daydreams a lot". She knew that she needed to learn to concentrate, motivate herself, manage her time, become organised, avoid distractions, be punctual, and not leave things to the last minute. She nominated two key areas where she felt the improvements should begin: organisation and punctuality. Showing that she recognised the importance of these changes, she linked them to her career goal of becoming an artist; but she gave no indication she planned to implement any of the changes. *"I should make time for my assignments,"* she wrote; but with no plan to arrest the slide, she realised she was *"going further down the path of failing"*. At the start of the semester, she had hoped she would not repeat the mistakes of high school in the AEP. Just over halfway through the semester, she knew she had *"fallen into the same pattern"* of procrastination and underachievement. There could be little doubt about Gaara's profile as a student. The data identified her as an alienated learner. Her AEP semester did not look like ending well. Until she was willing to become an agent of change, she would make little progress in her studies.

6.2.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study offers grounded evidence about the battles faced by teenage AEP students. The participants revealed the nature of their struggles and how they dealt with these. All four had a history of bringing a shallow approach to study, but in the AEP Andrew and Jodi showed their determination to engage deeply, improve their skills, and become high achievers. Success proved a transformative experience for them. While Ben persevered, he continued to struggle with negative attitudes, fading goals, lack of certainty, and low study motivation (Hall, 2015). He struggled to present an authentic self, continuing to be overly concerned about achievement while downplaying the need for effort (La Guardia, 2009). Gaara illustrated the truth of the claim that "maturity matters" (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017, p. 68). Her behaviour in the AEP did not match her stated aspirations and suggested that she was not in full control of her life (Wrench et al., 2013). While all four struggled to balance study and leisure (Grund et al., 2014), Andrew and Jodi used strategic approaches that brought early success. Through continuing to struggle, Ben also gained a measure of control. Gaara, on the other hand, appeared to be losing the battle due to her unreadiness to make an emotional commitment to study (Whannell & Whannell, 2015).

6.2.5 What this study adds

The study adds to our understanding of the factors that drive students to re-engage with education (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017), revealing some of the strategies used by successful students like Andrew, Jodi and Ben. It underlines the importance to teenage AEP students of having a strong career goal that they convert to proximal study goals. There is also the interesting finding that self-funded teenage students in a fee-paying AEP can find extra study motivation in their desire to gain maximum benefit from their tuition fees (Andrew & Jodi). Despite doing long hours of paid work, they can keep up with a busy study load and flourish.

6.3 Emotions in Learning

In the past not a lot of attention has been devoted in the literature to the relationship between the affective states of tertiary students and their academic performance. Research is now showing significant linkage between emotions engendered by academic processes and students' academic performance.

6.3.1 What this means

An AEP journey involves a consequential affective component. The emotions engendered in teenage students play a real part in their success, especially if they are able to maintain a predominantly positive affective state. Finding satisfaction in learning motivates them to engage and put effort into learning processes and be persistent when challenges arise and the level of difficulty increases. The experience of those who maintain predominantly positive emotions is in contrast with that of students whose emotional state is less buoyant. Negativity can release a downward spiral of falling interest, falling engagement, and falling grades that contribute to the high attrition rates among younger students in AEPs.

6.3.2 What the literature says

Increasing attention is being given to the impact of emotions on learning (Rowe et al., 2015). For students transitioning to higher education, "emotions have a central role" (Postareff et al., 2017, p. 451). Students need to be emotionally aroused in order to learn (Gilmore & Anderson, 2016). Arguably, emotion plays a significant part at every stage of the experience of AEP students as this dissertation suggests. Students are likely to experience both positive and negative emotions; both can be helpful in promoting learning, and both can be unhelpful. There is an association

between positive emotions and deep learning (Postareff et al., 2017). Positive emotions promote engagement, persistence, and the pursuit of goals (Rowe et al., 2015). The non-cognitive skills of social and emotional learning may be as important to academic success as cognitive skills (Jones & Doolittle, 2017), perhaps more important, and they are skills that can be learned (Levin, 2012). Positive course experiences encourage persistence (Kelly et al., 2012) as does family support (Shah & Whannell, 2017), but students are primarily responsible for their emotional states. By choosing to regard emotion as a component of agency in their engagement with the world, they can learn to manage their emotions (Slaby & Wüschner, 2014). Younger students may lack the maturity to manage their emotions effectively, and this can adversely impact their academic achievement (Denham & Brown, 2010).

6.3.3 What this study shows

The emotional experience of the four participants in this study has been analysed using codes borrowed from Postareff et al. (2017), including nine positive emotions and 12 negative emotions. The data from two of the participants suggest their student experience was associated with mostly positive emotions while the student experience of the other two was associated with a higher incidence of negative emotions. This section will describe these differences and identify student practices that contribute to a healthy emotional state.

Shared emotions

The four participants commenced the AEP registering dissatisfaction with the academic record they brought from high school.

Andrew. Of Andrew's many references to high school the only positive ones were memories of his sporting achievements. Study was not for him:

> *Coming straight out of high school I wanted to stay away from study as much as I was able to.*

The academic references relating to high school spoke of struggle and frustration—leaving things to the last minute, struggling to write essays only to earn low marks, *"living off the teachers"* instead of being a proactive learner, being *"scared about failing"*, and doing very little reading. High school had been an experience of failure:

> *I had pretty much failed at high school for so many years I just was, like … I don't want to waste any time* [in the AEP].

Regretting his unproductive high school experience, Andrew was determined to bring a different approach to the AEP.

Jodi. With a sense of disappointment and regret, Jodi announced at the beginning of the AEP:

> *I never completed senior high school … I lost a lot of hope for my future when I pulled out of Year 10.*

At high school, she *"never really understood the point of studying* [and] *rarely studied"* because she *"didn't think it was very important"*. However, she had not always had this attitude:

> *As a child in primary school, I loved attending every day. However, after the first semester in high school, my attitude towards school started to change. I started hanging around with the wrong groups and doing the wrong things and most significantly, I decided that school work wasn't my top priority.*

Choice was important to Jodi, and she did not see her freedom to choose being respected at high school:

> *Where students at high school are there learning because they have to be there by law, tertiary students are there studying because they want to be.*

After starting the AEP, Jodi regretted her failure to complete high school as it seemed to her that she had less knowledge than her same-age peers in the AEP:

> *I'm starting to wish that I did finish school and go through to senior high school.*

Jodi now saw that high school had been a lost opportunity for her.

Ben. Ben made fewer references to high school than Andrew or Jodi, and not many of them related to his academic performance. His failure to learn how to study at high school cost him in his Year 12 final exams:

> *While I should have been studying during this period, I generally avoided study and that took its toll in my final exams … I was an underachiever.*

His modest Year 12 results came as a shock. With his life plans in disarray, he had to reassess:

> *During year 12 I had it planned out, that all fell apart when I barely graduated, yes there were other aspects that helped contribute but it was clearly still my fault.*

Ben's world had fallen apart. As he cast about for an explanation of what had gone wrong, he concluded that he was to blame. He had not been studying and never studied at home. Explaining this attitude, he said: *"I just don't enjoy it. I find it painful and gruelling."* He regretted his Year 12 results and his low ATAR, rather than his low study motivation and lack of effort. Having labelled himself an underachiever, he lacked a strategy for becoming an achiever. Underachieving was not just something he had done: it was part of his identity. In his mind, he was an underachiever. His use of present tense verbs showed that he still did not enjoy study and was likely to continue to find study painful and gruelling as an AEP student.

Gaara. Like Ben, Gaara made fewer references to high school than Andrew and Jodi did. Three of her comments revealed an acceptance that she had made *"mistakes"* at high school, including this comment from Week 1:

> *I feel things will turn out different and in a way, change my lifestyle by learning from the mistakes when I was a high school student and making sure not to do it again.*

She knew her mistakes had kept her from *"achieving the ATAR* [she] *wanted"*. While this was a source of disappointment, there was little suggestion of regret and no sense of agency. She appeared to be hoping that things would turn out differently in the AEP without much effort on her part. Knowing her lifestyle needed changing, she did not assert that she intended to change it, that she intended to learn from her mistakes, or that she intended to make sure she did not repeat the errors she had made at high school. When queried about this in a Week 5 interview, she began to formulate a response, and then stopped, admitting: *"I don't make sense* [laughing]*"*. Gaara demonstrated a disposition to laugh most things off. While she did not lack

insight into her past failings, she tried not to dwell on them. This left her in danger of repeating them as she appeared to be doing midway through the AEP.

The initial anxiety of the four participants was soon replaced by more positive emotions as they became comfortable about the place, the course, the lecturers, and their peers. As the semester unfolded, all four experienced dissatisfaction with their time management and anxiety over their procrastination. Aside from these commonalities, their emotional paths began to diverge.

Predominant emotional states

Three of the four participants had begun the AEP with predominantly positive emotions—Andrew, Jodi and Gaara. Only Ben expressed more negative than positive emotion. The middle part of the semester shows the four participants divided into two groups. Andrew and Jodi maintained their predominantly positive emotional state, with their data revealing three times as much positive as negative emotion. In contrast, the data for Ben and Gaara revealed predominantly negative emotion (c. 60:40).

Andrew. Andrew's positive emotions included happiness, joy, satisfaction, enthusiasm, hope, competence, surprise, enjoyment, and relief. These emotions were spread across the period, becoming more predominant as the weeks passed. Eight of the last 10 emotions identified were positive, including satisfaction with the quantity and quality of his study, which he considered *"very exceptional";* satisfaction that the tutors were finding fewer errors in his writing; joy over his *"new attitude"* to study and his improving writing skill; surprise that he had adapted so well to life as an AEP student; and satisfaction at the way he had *"step*[ped] *up* [his] *game"*, *"knuckle*[d] *down"*, and put his best effort into study. He expressed continued enthusiasm for the AEP, asserting, *"I'm loving it"*, adding, *"*[The AEP] *is an awesome way to get into tertiary education"*. Pushing himself to keep going, he was *"expecting to do really well"*. He was still playing football. Along with study, it was one of the two things he most enjoyed doing with his time. He continued to be enthusiastic and self-motivated as this comment from Week 5 showed:

> *This semester, I'm expecting to do really well because I've started off strong and I don't want to give up. I want to keep going. I just want to keep pushing myself so I expect to do well.*

At high school, he had not pushed himself, something he had come to regret. As an AEP student, he was leaving this behind.

Andrew's negative emotions included anxiety, dissatisfaction, worry, and frustration. The most negative of these was his dissatisfaction about having procrastinated with his 1200-word essay, a mistake that had caused him a lot of stress:

> *The only thing that has let me down this semester has been my 1200-word essay that I left to the last minute.*

Most of his negative emotions, he was able to use as motivation. Worrying that his *"lower than normal interest"* in study was a weakness made him determine to make it a strength. Continuing to feel nervous about working with others kept him studying in the library where he would be less likely to be distracted by his mates, and his frustration at being easily distracted drove him to exercise agency:

> *I found that I study best when I am alone and I have nothing that will distract me from doing what I have to do. I am easily distracted and when people are around I struggle to keep my focus on what I have to do.*

Andrew was a model of appropriate emotion management. At his lowest point, while struggling with his first major essay, he benefited from his parents' encouragement. And throughout the semester, he continued to consult the tutors, whose feedback helped him improve his writing skill and earn good marks. This became a positive feedback loop that made his AEP experience increasingly positive.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi maintained the predominantly positive emotional state with which she commenced her AEP journey. Her most frequently occurring emotion was enthusiasm, along with joy, hope, happiness, competence, surprise, satisfaction, pride, and relief. She was happy with the AEP and loved the warmth of the people around her at the college. As a learner, she was *"extremely motivated"*, finding *"most things interesting"*. The further into the semester she went, the more intentional she became. She had less of a battle with the essay than Andrew had. In Week 6, she wrote, *"I'm confident I'm going to get it handed in on time."*

All of her negative emotion emerged in Week 5, when she admitted to feeling *"a bit overwhelmed"* with study. With regret she reflected on her failure to complete Years 11 and 12. It left her feeling insecure about her knowledge and incompetent in comparison with her AEP peers. She admitted to being impatient with *"the lead-ups"* to activities. This could be a significant personality trait as impatience to get on with life may have contributed to her decision to leave school after Year 10. In Week 5, she was still concerned about her priorities, especially in relation to socialising:

> *I still haven't got to the stage where I have got my priorities right with college. That should be my top priority, but sometimes I still let other little things come before it where I know it shouldn't. For example, I love my social life.*

This was about to change. By Week 7 she had won a battle that turned her semester around. With satisfaction, she wrote:

> *I can now say that I have learnt how to say no to my friends because it's definitely more important to study.*

Andrew had seized control of his social life at the start of the AEP. At the halfway point, Jodi finally gained control of her social life. No more negative emotion is registered for Jodi through this middle period. She was *"very proud of* [herself] *with the amount of study"* she was doing and very pleased she had brought other aspects of her life under better control, in particular her sleeping pattern:

> *If I go to bed earlier than 11:00PM, I wake up feeling fresh and ready to learn. I'll be more energetic while I'm in class and I'll usually take a lot more in compared to when I'm tired. Getting my body into this habit has been one of the best things for me. Not only for my hope to become more successful at college, but also for my body. It makes me feel so much happier about myself. My habits have changed and I like it this way.*

Jodi's increased self-discipline stood in marked contrast to Gaara's apparent inability to bring her life under control as we will see shortly.

Ben. In contrast to the mostly positive emotions displayed by Andrew and Jodi, Ben appeared to be constantly conflicted. The middle of his semester—like the

start—was dominated by negative emotions, including a chronically negative attitude to study, which he found *"painful and gruelling"*. Grinding away on assignments brought him no pleasure. Returning to study had been a shock, but rather than kick-starting his semester, it produced *"apathy"*. Other negative emotions displayed in this period included anxiety, non-commitment, confusion, frustration, dissatisfaction, and loneliness. Still uncertain about his decision to take the AEP, he had developed uncertainty about some of the units he was studying. He was also questioning his goal of becoming a teacher. At times, he experienced considerable confusion as noted earlier in his comment about *"hopelessly wandering through* [the] *semester without a clue"*. He was worried about his procrastinating and his poor time management. *"Getting back into the swing of studying* [he had] *found difficult."* He was dissatisfied with his *"apathy"*, and, as he noted in Week 8, *"There is still all this stress."* Part of Ben's problem appeared to be his inability to exploit negative emotions. Whereas, negative emotions drove Andrew and Jodi to find positive solutions, they mostly made Ben feel bad about himself. As Ben's career goal faded in the early weeks of the AEP, his one remaining motivation was his intense desire not to fail. Failure would have a devastating impact on his fragile sense of self. His predominant study emotions were as negative as his study motivation was.

Gaara. For nearly half of the semester, Gaara continued to enjoy a mostly positive affective state. At the start of the period, she was still satisfied with the institution and the locality, she felt good about the teachers, she was finding the transition to college life *"exciting"*, she was feeling *"happy"* with the AEP, and she still wanted a college degree, insisting, *"I want it really bad"*. She had little to say about study but expressed satisfaction that the AEP was giving her *"stuff that* [she] *didn't really know"*. She mentioned a study strategy that comforted her and brought moments of relief:

> *When I believe I have put effort into my studies, I feel the need to congratulate myself with lollies or doing things that I enjoy such as playing sports, console games and watching* [object omitted]…

There was little to suggest Gaara put very much effort into study. This was one of the last of her positive comments for the semester. Perhaps the explanation for

this was her awareness of the poor quality of her effort as this Week 6 reflection suggested:

> *For me, trying to concentrate and motivating myself to study can be difficult. Time management, being organised and distractions are my main weaknesses. I have trouble starting a task or project, leave assignments by doing other things and forget items and never keeping track on when the due date is. Being punctual is also my weakness. Because of my weak organisational skills I tend to leave things until the last minute. This means I get tired, causing me to sleep in and fail to attend my lectures. I tend to be indecisive and may have difficulty making decisions leading to overdue assignments. I am worst at taking notes during lectures, struggle writing research papers and tend to daydream a lot.*

This rehearsal of her weaknesses was fairly dispassionate on the surface, but may have disguised a growing fear that she was not journeying towards academic success.

The following week, she made the hopeful, but overly optimistic, claim, *"I am likely to pass all of my units this semester."* This claim was contradicted by a following admission that she was not up to date with the assigned coursework. More contradictions followed as seen in this acknowledgement:

> *I spend too much time on other things but I try to make time for my assignments. I'm too lazy but willing to pass even if the grades I get is just over 50, sort of. I hope to pass just above 60.*

Gaara seemed to be confused. Perhaps she did not appreciate the likely outcome of her non-commitment to study. By the following week, she was beginning to face a sterner reality:

> *Even though this college has been comfortable, it is too comfortable. Since living on campus, the thought of being close to class* [made me believe] *I did not have to worry about time. During this semester I realised I am going further down the path of failing.*

It had taken just over a month for her positive affective state to be replaced by predominantly negative emotions, including confusion, non-commitment, dissatisfaction, frustration, and regret. Her emotional state had been dragged down by her failure to exercise agency and complete the coursework.

Responding to their emotional states

The emotional states experienced by AEP students do not determine outcomes. How students respond to these emotional challenges is what really matters.

Andrew and Jodi. Andrew and Jodi showed their resilience by meeting their emotional challenges head-on. Both revealed their emerging maturity in their responses to their fear of socialising too much. Andrew had responded to this during the orientation period by deciding to study in the college library, where he could minimise social distractions. Jodi was a little slower to gain control of her social life, achieving this around mid-semester. They both gained additional motivation from the realisation that as worker-students, they were *"paying a lot of money to learn"* (Jodi, Week 7 journal entry). They told themselves they could not afford to fail a unit and extend their course. Jodi faced a fear that the other three did not face: the fear that her peers had more knowledge than she had due to her missing Years 11 and 12. While this fear played on her mind for the first half of the semester, she did not let it destroy her self-belief. Instead, she worked to build up her knowledge by focusing on the AEP coursework.

Their enthusiastic, optimistic, goal-driven, achieving approach saw Andrew and Jodi organise themselves to be effective learners. They had study schedules, study places, and socio-emotional supports—family plus the tutors for Andrew, and family for Jodi, including a mother and a sister who had taken the same AEP journey. By completing work consistently and earning good grades, Andrew and Jodi boosted their self-belief and reinforced their generally positive emotional states. Reflecting on their self-improvement sustained their positive affective states. Jodi's data includes no negative emotions after Week 5. Andrew made just two negative references after this time. The first was a memory of the stress he had experienced with the Week 6 essay. The second referenced his frustration at his focus being disrupted while studying surrounded by people. His fear of excessive socialising

threatening his study progress was an example of a negative emotion contributing to a positive outcome.

Ben. Ben struggled with the dissatisfaction of not enjoying study and with the chronic confusion caused by uncertainty about his direction in life. In spite of this, his study plan kept him grinding away on the coursework. Objectivity made him acknowledge that he did not follow this plan as effectively as he should. Even so, he was putting in an acceptable amount of effort and keeping up with the work. A Week 5 reference to *"getting decent marks"* provided a brief glimpse of positive emotion. Ben's conflicted affective state appeared to be driven by the uncertainty and confusion that assailed him for most of his time in the AEP. He arrived uncertain he was doing the right thing, uncertain he was in the right place, uncertain about the likely academic outcome, and fearful of failure. Then, his uncertainty increased as he began to have doubts about his goal of becoming a biology teacher. Perhaps uncertainty about his goal was the main driver of his other doubts. Equally plausible is the possibility that his doubts were related to the lingering effects of childhood bullying (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Holt et al., 2014). Perhaps he was still struggling to work out who he was as a person, not just the kind of student he might become.

Gaara. As noted above, from around the middle of the semester, Gaara's affective state became increasingly negative as she saw herself *"falling into the same pattern that kept* [her] *from achieving … in senior high school"*. She responded by making empty promises to her academic advisor:

> *I'll complete it* [outstanding work] *before semester ends. Sorry, sir, I'll make time and just stay in my room with no distractions.*

Despite this intention, she found it difficult to follow through as she acknowledged the following week:

> *Being a higher education student has been hard. I could not make time to begin my assignments because of the many distractions that I had surrendered to.*

Gaara needed to be motivated, not by her academic advisor's disappointment, but by her own goals and emotional states. One of her last comments in this period captured a moment of resolve:

> *At the moment, I am trying my best to catch up on all the homework that needs to be done. With little time* [remaining], *I will focus on studying and prevent myself from failing. If repeating is my option, it is better than giving up. I just have to keep striving for my goal and not turn back to my mistakes.*

It was apparent that her resolve was flawed. Her lack of commitment was evident in the "if" clause. Her failure to engage agency left her contemplating academic failure. At this point, she should have said "I will keep striving for my goal", not "I have to keep striving", which seemed to imply an external source of impetus. Her resolve was too general: it failed to specify the proximal study goals that should have been driving her forward at this important stage of the semester. So far, she had failed to articulate any specific study goals. She had not even instituted a study schedule. When things started looking bad for Ben, his fear of failure drove him to greater effort. When things started looking bad for Gaara, she appeared to be too laid-back and disorganised to care enough to take appropriate action.

Emotions and academic performance

Andrew and Jodi. Andrew and Jodi had managed to convert their strong career goal into effective study goals. As noted above, working to achieve these goals led to good outcomes associated with positive emotions and academic success. Simply stated, they worked hard, earned good grades, and felt good about themselves and their progress towards achieving their goals. They maintained predominantly positive emotions and used negative emotions strategically as they worked to turn perceived weaknesses into strengths. They got themselves into "the flow" (Sharma & Baumik, 2013) of a positive feedback loop.

Ben. Despite his fading career goal, Ben managed to force himself to study because of the negative affect produced by his fear of failure. Being desperate to succeed kept him toiling away at study when games were more to his liking. Games produced the positive emotions that eluded him when he studied. Study is work that requires discipline. To engage willingly in academic work, students need a clear vision of its contribution to their life and their future. Whereas Andrew and Jodi had such a vision, after two months in the AEP Ben's vision was fading, leaving him feeling uncertain about his future and academically vulnerable.

Gaara. Unable to translate her career goal into study goals or find any motivation to study in either her positive or her negative emotions, Gaara chose to pursue leisure and social activities while largely neglecting study. She was driven by neither fear of failure, nor feeling good about completing work and earning good grades, nor the lure of a career in art. The one thing that seemed to drive her was her addiction to fun. Study was not fun; study was work, *"hard work"*, and Gaara was not yet ready for it.

6.3.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study shows that emotion plays a significant part at every stage of the experience of AEP students, including the application period, the AEP orientation period (the opening weeks), the consolidation period (the middle weeks), and the concluding period (the final weeks) as the next chapter shows.

The study shows that the non-cognitive skills of social and emotional learning appear to be as important to academic success as cognitive skills (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). The most successful of the four participants were the two who benefited from constructive relationships with family and/or tutors and maintained a predominantly positive emotional state that was sustained by their successful engagement and good grades.

The study shows that both positive and negative emotions can contribute to academic success (Postareff et al., 2017). A positive emotion like enjoyment of learning is likely to be academically helpful as the narratives of Andrew and Jodi showed, but positive emotions like relaxation and relief are not necessarily helpful as Gaara's laid-back approach showed. Each of the participants experienced the negative emotion of anxiety at the start of the AEP, with three responding to their anxiety by engaging in study. Ben's fear of failure contributed to his persistence. Andrew and Jodi appeared to respond to all of their negative emotions in strategic ways that contributed to beneficial outcomes.

Through the experiences of Andrew and Jodi, especially, the study supports the claim that there is a link between positive emotions and deep learning (Hailikari et al., 2016). While Ben persevered with study, his predominantly negative emotional state did not seem to produce a deep approach to learning. His data reveal that he was aware of this. Gaara's failure to adopt a deep approach to learning

contributed to the predominantly negative emotional state that she developed as the semester progressed.

The study supports the finding that positive course experiences encourage persistence (Kelly et al., 2012). The two participants who had the most positive course experiences—Andrew and Jodi—were most enthusiastic in their persistence. Ben, whose course experience appeared to be less positive, persisted in spite of his negative attitude to study. Even so, he also enjoyed positive course experiences, including mostly satisfactory grades and good relationships with three of his four lecturers. Gaara's lack of positive course experiences appeared to sap her study resolve.

The study shows that family support encourages persistence (Shah & Whannell, 2017). There is a marked contrast between the experience of Andrew and Jodi (living at home) and that of Ben and Gaara (more than 1000km from home). The former received regular socio-emotional support from their parents while the latter had little family contact. While the persistence of Andrew and Jodi appeared not to be seriously threatened at any stage, for the other two, it was under constant threat, with Gaara giving up on the coursework long before the end of the semester.

The study supports the idea that students are responsible for their emotional state. They choose how to respond to developments that induce emotional responses. They can choose to regard emotion as a component of agency in their engagement with the world (Slaby & Wüschner, 2014). While two of the participants in the study responded strategically to emotional triggers and one battled through, Gaara failed to be agentive in managing her emotions.

The study shows that some younger students lack the maturity to manage emotions well (Denham & Brown, 2010). Two of the participants were managing their academic emotions very well, one was managing them acceptably well, but one did not appear to be managing her emotions well, nor was she keeping up academically.

6.3.5 What this study adds

This study adds to the existing literature a grounded perspective on the emotional journey of teenage AEP students. While other studies mention student

emotions, none appear to examine the emotional journeys of a group of participants across the course of an AEP. The study shows that it is possible for teenage AEP students to maintain a predominantly positive emotional state despite experiencing personal disadvantages. A significant factor in their success is their capacity to convert a distal career goal into proximal academic goals and maintain their passion for these goals as they exercise agency in controlling potential distractions like love of sport and socialising. Lastly, the study shows that while academic success tends to be associated with predominantly positive emotional states, negative emotional states can also produce positive academic outcomes for those who make effective use of personal agency.

6.4 Emerging Student Identity

In this middle part of the semester, the participants were revealing emerging student identities, but their success in the endeavour varied widely.

6.4.1 What this means

This is a study of the emergence of student identity in teenage AEP students. The focus is on how the participants developed as learners in the "psychosocial space" (Kahu et al., 2017, p. 63) that facilitated their engagement with the institution, the course, lecturers, tutors, and peers in the processes of learning. Effective engagement enables a new student identity to emerge naturally. Students can be aware of their personal transformation and take satisfaction from it.

6.4.2 What the literature says

Forming a student identity demands focus and concentration (Levy & Earl, 2012; Nonis & Hudson, 2010). Teenage AEP students begin not with a love of study, but with a desire to achieve a personal goal like a career goal. Matriculating through a second chance AEP can enable them to access an undergraduate program that will qualify them for their dream job, but first they must master the student role and learn to identify as students (Whannell & Whannell, 2015). Students taking AEPs tend to have career goals, which they have explored and committed to (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Committing without adequate exploration can result in foreclosure, by committing to a less than optimal goal. Their career goal needs to be a good fit. If students are to be successful academically, they need to convert their career goal to "proximal sub-goals" (Bandura, 2001, p. 8) in the form of study goals. Losing sight

of their goals, some AEP students fail to follow through on their study intentions (Bandura, 2001) and do not produce the desired study behaviour (Oyserman, 2013). Schools and colleges are places where students can pursue study goals and develop a student identity (Brown et al., 2014). In these educational interfaces (Kahu et al., 2017), they find opportunity to engage with learning processes and course curricula through interacting with lecturers, tutors, and peers. As noted above, they are also likely to encounter potential distractions and experience many battles as they struggle with focus and study engagement (Hall, 2015; Krause, 2005; Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013). Forming an identity "is not a simple undertaking" (Daniels & Brooker, 2014, p. 73). It is a difficult process (Cote & Levine, 2002) that often involves conflict (Moje & Luke, 2009). The variations in the personal battles confronting students and the contexts in which these occur help to explain the considerable variation in the success of AEP students as revealed in their high attrition rates (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Crawford, 2014; Hodges et al., 2013), which are likely to be highest among younger students (Cantwell et al., 2001; Whannell & Whannell, 2014). While identity formation usually happens slowly (Burke, 2006; Marcia, 1980; Whannell & Whannell, 2015), the self-efficacy of AEP students can be significantly increased in as little as one month (Habel, 2012), putting them on track to develop a student identity during the first semester of an AEP.

6.4.3 What this study shows

Throughout this middle part of the AEP semester, two of the participants embraced the student role, one resisted the student role but forced himself to complete the assignments, and one largely ignored the student role by choosing not to complete the assigned work and becoming careless about punctuality and class attendance.

Andrew. Andrew surprised even himself with the way he embraced the student role in the AEP. He engaged in study from Day One, working mostly in the library and consulting the lecturers and tutors regularly for extra help. A month into the course, he was *"very happy"* with his progress. At times, he struggled, especially with time management, but he pursued his goals with a high sense of hope and boosted his confidence by earning good marks. He was aware that he was mastering

the student role. By Week 5, he recognised that he was deeply engaged in the academic program, saying:

I study my butt off … I'm loving it [the AEP]. *I'm really enjoying it.*

Keeping his goals in view, he continued to think and plan ahead. By overloading, he would catch up with his former high school mates already in the undergraduate program. This plan added to his willingness to embrace the student role. His confidence that he was on track to achieve his goals provided further motivation. He continued, *"I'm expecting to do really well because I've started off strong and I don't want to give up"*. He had surprised himself with his new-found dedication to study, noting, *"I have gotten used to being a tertiary education student and I am handling it well."* He had become strategic about learning and continued to work on turning his weaknesses into strengths. This meant improving his planning skill and finding ways to make study more enjoyable. He was putting time and effort into the AEP workload, doing more study than the 18 hours a week of the average Australian first-year tertiary student (Baik, Naylor & Arkoudis, 2015). He brought an achieving approach to learning that was deep, not shallow (Alauddin & Ashman, 2014).

At the start of the AEP, he had seen writing as his biggest challenge, a weakness to be overcome. By Week 8, he was really happy with his writing improvement. His success was due, in large part, to his recognition that in higher education, it is up to individual students to motivate themselves about classes and study. Andrew recognised that he had adapted well to college, noting in Week 8, *"I have kept a regular positive attitude towards my workload."* His engagement with the AEP demonstrated how effectively he had embraced the student role. His grades confirmed this as did his growing self-efficacy (Habel, 2012). He was kept on track by the power of his career goal, which he had converted into study goals; these related not just to his AEP semester, but to the four years he intended to spend at the institution completing a Bachelor of Education. His performance through the middle part of the semester showed that he had continued on strongly from the productive start he had made at the beginning. His positive progress provided evidence of an emerging student identity.

Jodi. Jodi's progress through the middle weeks of the AEP also gave evidence of an emerging student identity. The changes between Weeks 4 and 8 saw her shed the fear that she knew less than her peers and gain better control of her social and personal life. Despite feeling *"a bit overwhelmed"* just before mid-semester break, she continued to work willingly, hoping to do well. The journey was not always smooth as she continued to struggle to prioritise study and avoid procrastination. Like Andrew, she was motivated by her career goal and saw the AEP as a *"big step"* in her life. She determined not to make it a misstep through earning failing grades. Like Andrew, she exercised agency by maintaining a positive attitude and engaging constructively so that she could submit her assignments on time and earn good marks. Self-monitoring contributed to her success, enabling her to feel happy with the amount of work she was doing, both at college and at home. Her decision to spend the mid-semester break studying provided further evidence of her exercise of agency and commitment to study. With satisfaction, she reflected on the progress she had made:

> *College has taught me that it's extremely important to study every day. I am very proud of myself with the amount of study I have been doing. The 10 minute study burst is really helping my motivation to study on the days that I'm not so motivated. The information is now getting a lot clearer in my head when I read and listen to lecturers.*

Immediately after the break, she announced that she had *"learnt how to say no"* to her friends and prioritise study over socialising. This was a big achievement as socialising had been her downfall in the past, especially at high school. As noted, she had shed her fear that she lacked basic knowledge. Changing her sleep pattern further improved the effectiveness of her study. Jodi had made significant progress on a number of fronts since the start of the AEP and shown that she was serious about study and was coping well with a tertiary study load. The evidence of an emerging student identity was as clear for her as it was for Andrew. Motivated by their career goals, both demonstrated effective use of agency as AEP students.

Ben. Care must be taken in interpreting Ben's data because of an apparent tendency to overstate, understate, and make seemingly contradictory statements. One thing was clear: he was not enjoying study. Despite finding studying alone gruelling,

he chose not to work with peers or tutors. He brought a superficial and inefficient approach to tasks he did not enjoy. Five weeks into the AEP, he insisted he was enjoying the course, especially biology, but was unsure about his education units and unsure about becoming a teacher. Losing his career goal would be a serious loss as he would have to find a new purpose and a new focus. He was now unsure whether he should be attempting higher education. With study taking second place, Ben was feeling lost. The pressure to keep going was flustering him, his time management was non-existent, and he was spending too much time playing games. He knew there would be benefits in making changes, but he foresaw mainly the difficulties. His first comment after the mid-semester break concerned not victories gained, but increasing procrastination:

> *The amount of procrastination from the start of the semester till now has increased dramatically.*

While looking for any excuse to avoid study, Ben continued to battle with essay writing and to struggle to get into a regular study pattern. He feared he was becoming apathetic, yet he realised he was studying more effectively than he had in high school where he had done virtually no study. As an AEP student, he studied more or less regularly, yet he was a reluctant student and struggled to stick to a study schedule. While not relishing the student role the way Andrew and Jodi did, he was managing to force himself to exercise agency to the extent that he was completing the coursework. Fear of failure was both driving and limiting him. Perhaps with a larger understanding of intelligence as not a fixed attribute but something to be developed through positive academic engagement, he might reverse his tendency to avoid academic challenge. In the meantime, he continued to fear damaging his sense of self by doing poorly in the AEP. He had been struggling with identify formation for a long time and appeared not to be gaining increased clarity through his AEP experience. His goal of becoming a biology teacher was retreating, exacerbating his general uncertainty and providing an added distraction as he attempted to form a student identity. Ben was a "stairway" (Elsom et al., 2017, p. 255) student—one who focused on the difficulty of the climb and was driven largely by external motivation. He was not enjoying the journey and was in danger of losing sight of the destination.

Gaara. Gaara's AEP experience was increasingly characterised by neglect. Aware of her many weaknesses—a poor ability to concentrate on academic tasks, motivate herself to study, manage her time well, get herself organised, deal with distractions, meet academic deadlines, and manage her personal life—she made no strategic effort to institute changes. She showed herself to be indecisive and seemingly incapable of arresting her slide even when it became apparent to her that she was going *"further down the path of failing"*. Whereas Ben was managing to force himself to do the work, Gaara was not. In her own words, she was *"too comfortable"*, too *"laid back"*, *"too lazy"*. Surrendering daily to many distractions prevented her from completing the coursework. With more than a month of the semester remaining, she reflected that it was still possible to rescue the situation, noting, *"I just have to keep striving for my goal and not turn back to my mistakes."* Despite recognising the problem and seeming to see a solution, she had not translated her analysis into a strategic plan. She had not been striving for her goal; she had been coasting along, committed to having fun.

To become goal-directed at this late stage would require a radical transformation. The other three participants had been working on changing their approaches to study for the past two months, and in this time Andrew and Jodi had achieved remarkable transformations. Ben, too, had made progress. However, Gaara's goals lacked the power to motivate her to action. *"I should make time for my assignments,"* she noted regretfully. Despite this, she continued to follow a course of inaction, and her reluctance to become the agent of change in her academic journey was hastening her slide towards failure. Fear of failure was motivating Ben to do the work, but it had no effect on Gaara, who was neither embracing the student role nor giving evidence of an emerging student identity. Questions must be asked about what becoming an artist meant to Gaara. In the AEP, having fun seemed to be her primary commitment. She had been attracted to art because she enjoyed painting, drawing and designing. It may not have occurred to her that pursuing art academically would require her to expand her understanding of fun to include an element of discipline.

6.4.4 How this study reflects the literature

The cases of Andrew and Jodi show that a career goal can be a powerful motivator for an AEP student when it has been carefully explored and committed to.

Ben's case shows the confusion that can result from foreclosing on a goal without adequate exploration (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Gaara's case suggests that she may not have adequately explored her chosen career. She reflected the finding that arts students are in the bottom half for effort (Kuh et al., 2000), and provided evidence to support the claim that some younger AEP students are "time wasters" (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017, pp. 68-69). The study shows that the self-efficacy of teenage AEP students can be increased in as little as a month (Habel, 2012), and it confirms that an AEP can be a stairway experience (as it was for Ben and Gaara), a doorway experience (focused on gaining undergraduate entry rather than the difficulty of the climb), or a hallway experience (valuing the AEP journey as a life-changing opportunity) (Elsom et al., 2017), depending on the attitudes brought by the students.

6.4.5 What this study adds

This study demonstrates that it is possible for teenage AEP students to find personal transformation in an AEP and quickly begin to form a student identity. It highlights the importance of career goals in helping teenage AEP students develop proximal study goals that focus them on study. And it shows how variability in the willingness of teenage AEP students to interact in the educational interface affects their embrace of the student role and their incipient student identity formation.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the four participants built on the start they made to the AEP by focusing on their experience through the middle weeks of the semester. It has shown two participants exercising agency in fighting their battles, including the battle to maintain a predominantly positive emotional state. Through building up their knowledge and skills, they proved to themselves that they could handle the demands of higher education and gave evidence of emerging student identities. The study has also shown how two other participants struggled to be agentive and failed to maintain a predominantly positive emotional state. One battled to force himself to complete the work, but the other one abandoned the struggle and began to anticipate failure. Neither of them appeared to be forming a strong student identity. The next chapter will show how the four participants ended their AEP semester, finishing with a brief postscript on how they fared in subsequent undergraduate study.

Chapter 7: The End Game

7.1 Introduction

While it is important for AEP students to start their course well, what matters most is how they end it. They might have a low ATAR or no ATAR. They might not have completed senior high school. In previous education attempts, they might have failed to exercise agency in pursuit of academic goals. From such backgrounds, students—especially teenage students—may begin an AEP with self-doubt, no clear idea of what they hope to achieve, and no firm career goal; but if they can start filling these gaps, they improve the likelihood of having a successful AEP. Even after making a tentative start, they can end strongly. The endgame—the final weeks of the course—will reveal the status of their emerging student identity. As we have seen, the four participants in this study brought different approaches to their goal-attainment in the earlier phases of the AEP. Andrew and Jodi managed their academic engagement strategically and were buoyed by their mostly positive emotions and encouraging grades. Ben, driven by fragile self-belief and a palpable fear of failure, willed himself to stay the course despite growing doubts about his chosen career. And Gaara, rather than taking the stairway to success, appeared to be sliding towards academic failure. Even so, she might yet take something positive from the semester by passing some of her units. The strength of her determination and desire would be tested in the endgame. By exercising personal agency in the final stage of the course, AEP students increase their likelihood of being successful. The endgame is not the time to start coasting towards the finish line. From their sporting experience, Andrew and Jodi knew this. To be a winner, one must strive all the way to the end. This chapter shows how the four participants ended their AEP semester and discusses the factors that contributed to their varying achievements.

7.2 Academic Attitudes

The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is complex and controversial (Chaiklin, 2011; Pajares, 1992). Attitudes cannot be directly observed, but have to be inferred from their attributes—cognition, affect and behaviour (Altmann, 2008). The attitudes discussed here include the beliefs, feelings, and conation of students in relation to study. Academic attitudes influence, and are influenced by, academic behaviour. By the last third of the AEP semester, this process has been evolving for a couple of months. Students have consolidated their

academic attitudes and behaviours and formed academic habits that contribute to the outcome of their AEP semester. The more positive their attitudes are, the more likely students are to achieve successful outcomes without undue stress.

7.2.1 What this means

The chosen attitudes of AEP students affect the decisions they make about study. The academic attitudes covered here include attitudes formed or honed during the AEP journey, including their attitude to themselves, to the AEP, to the student role, and to interacting academically with lecturers, tutors and peers.

7.2.1 What the literature says

An AEP gives students opportunity to explore their attitudes and values (Miller & Schulz, 2014). Insight into students' attitudes can be gained by studying students' self-reports and their study behaviour (Altmann, 2008). Student attitudes matter because they contribute to academic success (Comer, 2001). The attitudes of students generate a range of possible study goals, including a mastery goal, an achievement goal, or a mix of the two; those lacking mastery and achievement goals may be either irresolute or alienated (Archer et al., 1996). Students with a mastery orientation tend to have more positive attitudes (Was et al., 2009). Age is the strongest predictor of students' attitudes to study (Ballantyne et al., 2009) and is a factor that tends to work against younger AEP students (Archer et al., 1999; Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Johns et al., 2016). Having a positive attitude to study includes being open-minded, disciplined, responsible, independent, and serious about study from the start (Levy & Earl, 2012). Personal attitudes such as determination and perseverance contribute to academic success (Whannel, 2013), especially in the latter stage of the semester when many are tempted to give up. Students' aspirations can be greatly affected by the attitudes of their peers (Prodonovich et al., 2014; Sica et al., 2016). Conflicting attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that students may encounter can create cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Variations in students' attitudes towards self and others help to explain variations in their academic success (Durlak et al., 2011). Attitudes can be controlled (Kim et al., 2010), and new attitudes can be learned (Kyllonen et al., 2014). Understanding this can be a source of encouragement for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with attitudes that may have been misshapen by early experiences (Gaddis, 2013).

7.2.3 What this study shows

Attitude to self

Andrew. Andrew began the semester knowing he was a winner in the sporting arena and intent on becoming a winner in the academic arena of the AEP as this comment in the last week of the semester showed:

> *I wanted to engage early and smash this semester of subjects out and feel like a winner.*

He ended the semester believing he had been successful:

> *I have learnt that I am an achiever, I can do well when I put my mind to my goal.*

He felt that he had proved to himself that he was *"able to succeed in anything"* that he set himself to attempt. He explained how his self-belief had:

> *taken a massive leap* [and] … *gone from beneath ground level … at high school and … just jumped through the roof.*

Andrew ended the semester with a clear lead over the other three participants in self-belief.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi had experienced a dramatic increase in her self-belief. She knew she had *"learned a lot of new skills"* and gained *"a lot more knowledge"*. Comparing the person she had been at high school with the person she had become since leaving school just over two years earlier, she wrote:

> *I have switched from being the girl in high school that barely listened, to a young lady in higher education acting a lot more mature than the average person her age. This semester, I think that I have become a more critical thinker … I'm feeling very successful.*

Jodi's self-belief at the beginning of the semester had been assailed by the fear that not having done Years 11 and 12 disadvantaged her compared with her classmates. By the end of the semester, she had shed this fear and was developing a strong sense of self-efficacy.

Ben. Compared with Andrew and Jodi, Ben was not finishing the AEP with greatly enhanced self-belief. Asked in the final week of the semester what had happened to his self-belief in the AEP, he paused before replying:

> *A few of the times, I find myself, um, not really…* [rephrasing] *I feel like I'm not strong enough.*

He went on to explain his struggle to keep up with the work in the latter stage of the course. Continuing to struggle with uncertainty, he identified his unresolved issues in this way:

> *It's still more or less how I view myself and what I should be doing versus what I can do.*

Struggling with the issue of personal identity, Ben remained confused about what he should be doing with his life. In relation to study, he found that he got *"overloaded really easily"*. Unlike Andrew, he made no comment about being a winner or expecting to do well academically. And unlike both Andrew and Jodi, he said nothing about feeling especially successful.

Gaara. Of the four participants, Gaara appeared to be the one ending the semester with the least amount of belief in her capacity as a student. In response to a question about what had happened to her self-belief, she replied:

> *Ah, I dunno. I think, like, I'm always saying that I can't do it* [hesitating], *but I want to.*

Had she convinced herself that she could do it?

> *Not really* [quietly]. *But, um, I just say I'll try my best.*

Had she tried her best?—*"Nope."* She knew she was ending the semester with many weaknesses in her approach to study:

> *This semester showed me the strengths I developed as well as the weaknesses I still need to fix that will help me change my approach towards study next semester.*

This comment assumed she would be permitted to continue in the course for another semester if she performed poorly. She made no attempt to identify the strengths she believed she had developed, but the comment showed she had not entirely lost her self-belief. The challenge, as she saw it, was to change her approach to study.

Attitude to the AEP

Andrew. As has been noted above, Andrew demonstrated an agentive approach from Day One. He had a positive attitude to the AEP and did not see it as an additional, imposed step, delaying his entry to an undergraduate program. At the end, Andrew looked back on the AEP as *"a great experience"* that had set him up for his next seven semesters of undergraduate study. Even though he had yet to finish the AEP, he was confident of a successful outcome that would see him articulate to a degree program. In what he described as the *"mature environment"* of the AEP, he had developed a deep approach to study. Reflecting on the course, he noted, *"It's been a real blessing for me."*

Jodi. Excited to be in the AEP, Jodi shared Andrew's positive view of the course. She believed the course had helped her significantly, especially with critical writing:

> *I think that this unit* [a writing unit] *has helped me a lot, especially with critique writing. I didn't know what it* [critique writing] *even was before I began this unit.*

It had also transformed her attitude to study and helped her shed the fear that she lacked knowledge:

> *I think that this semester I have learned a lot of new skills of being an academic … I have a lot more knowledge of things in general. My attitude towards studying has picked up tremendously.*

Andrew and Jodi had started the AEP expecting it to be a pathway that would enable them to flourish academically and hoping to redeem their disappointing high school performances. They ended the semester with positive attitudes to the AEP and high hopes for their ensuing undergraduate study.

Ben. In contrast to Andrew and Jodi, Ben and Gaara had begun the semester with the mindset that the AEP was something they had to do before they could get to where they really wanted to be. Nonetheless, Ben ended the semester insisting he had really enjoyed the *"culture of education"* that he had been introduced to in the AEP. He had found it *"interesting to say the least"*. The last four words contained a hint that it had been *"one of the most challenging things"* he had ever done. While the AEP provided a good academic environment, he had found some aspects of college life *"very distracting"*. Perhaps the real source of his joy in his final weeks was the fact that the course was almost over and he was about to be released from the grind of study. He said nothing about being transformed as a student or consolidating skills he would use as an undergraduate student, but he did comment on his improved self-knowledge:

> *I feel as though I have matured throughout my first semester here and I believe that I gained a greater knowledge of myself and the direction in life I want to get … This semester I found out a lot about myself, especially how I feel about studying in a tertiary institution.*

These journal reflections were vague. They added no detail explaining how he now felt about studying, or identifying the direction in life that he now wanted to take. As we will see later in this section, his final comments were filled with the same uncertainty with which he had begun the semester.

Gaara. Despite her many struggles, Gaara ended the semester with a positive attitude to the course, asserting:

> [The AEP] *is cool. It's awesome. I liked it. It helped me get better at English, I think. Yep, it's good.*

The qualification, *"I think"*, introduced an element of doubt. Perhaps, like Ben, she was glad the semester was nearly over and she was about to be released from the responsibility of being a student. Like her father, she preferred to avoid too much responsibility. She had enjoyed being in the AEP, but the joy had not come from the academic challenges as these had seemed too much like *"hard work"*. Many teenage AEP students would be likely to share Gaara's attitude to the second-chance experience and her reluctance to embrace the idea of hard work.

Attitude to the student role

Andrew. Andrew embraced the student role enthusiastically, convinced it would help him achieve his life goals. After commencing at what he described in Week 9 as *"the shallow end"* as a learner, Andrew ended up *"in the deep end"*, with a study attitude that increasingly embraced higher-level thinking. In Week 10, he noted:

> *I have seen myself mature through thinking critically and independently. Thinking critically allows me to ask questions about everything and not just accept life for what it is.*

He realised that success in the AEP would qualify him to commence a teacher education program that could enable him to start a teaching career, an objective that had not occurred to him in Year 12. The way his attitude to learning had changed so completely and so quickly since the end of the previous year came as a surprise to him. Four times through the semester, Andrew mentioned his surprise at his changed attitude to study, twice in the middle phase (Wk 6 & 8) and twice in this end phase (Wk 10 & 11), including this final instance:

> *This semester has been a real eye opener for me. I have surprised myself by how I have embraced academic culture.*

He recognised that embracing academic culture and the student role was taking him in the direction he wanted to go:

> *An understanding of academic culture is very important to life and my future because it sets me up for my future job.*

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi was *"on top of* [her] *work"* and her attitude to study had *"picked up tremendously"* in the AEP as she learned how to prioritise and how to maintain the right attitude to academic work—one of sustained, motivated interest. She had worked on developing that motivated interest:

> *Once I started enjoying what I was studying, I started to pay more attention and* [take] *in a lot more information.*

Her Week 9 comment on enjoying study was reiterated in a Week 10 generalisation:

You can make it easy by enjoying yourself and what you are learning.

Needing to feel good about what she was doing with her life, Jodi had found ways to make study enjoyable. After a slightly slower start than Andrew, she ended up embracing the student role with similar enthusiasm.

Ben. Ben was inclined at the start to be dismissive of the AEP workload, feeling that some of it looked too easy, little more than *"common sense"*. This cavalier attitude did not make a positive contribution to his study motivation. His attitude to study late in the semester remained somewhat shallow. He would read up on topics that intrigued him and casually skim through things he found *"rather dull"*. He realised this was *"not the best way to do things"* but struggled to force himself to take a deeper interest. A few days later he swung in the other direction, asserting that he was starting to see more reason to study. His attitude to the student role was, like his affective state, characterised by ups and downs. By the end of the semester, negative attitudes continued to hold him back from embracing the student role wholeheartedly. While Andrew and Jodi could write about how they had found ways to enjoy study, Ben's Week 10 self-assessment was more muted:

> *I suppose the culture of education here has also rubbed off on me … and I have to say I am enjoying it.*

This final comment about enjoying study did not ring true in the way the claims of Andrew and Jodi did as it was out of harmony with other comments he made about procrastinating and being easily overloaded. Ben's attitude to the student role remained ambiguous throughout the semester.

Gaara. Taking an AEP presents students with academic challenges that not all teenage students relish, notably students like Gaara. Just thinking about study was enough to induce stress. At the end of the semester, she remembered how keen she had been at the start, before she got *"lazy"*. This had been her pattern at high school. She would be *"pumped up"* at the start of term before her enthusiasm would wane and she would *"get comfortable"* and finally quit. She had hoped that the AEP might turn this around for her, but contemplating the workload induced the feeling that it was too hard. While Ben's experience of being a student was a series of peaks and troughs, Gaara's was mostly troughs. She appeared to like the idea of being a student

more than the reality, and her initial enthusiasm for the AEP was quickly overwhelmed by inertia. *"I started getting lazy,"* she admitted in an interview at the end of the semester. It was not the first time she had used the word lazy, nor would it be the last. In contrast to the other three participants, Gaara continued to show little interest in the student role at the end of the semester. She found taking a deep interest in study even more challenging than Ben did. The work seemed *"too hard"*, and when she realised at one point that she had more assignments to do, her despairing response was, *"Ah, kill me!"*

Attitude to sharing with peers and staff

Andrew. Relationships matter in student learning (Comer, 2001; Guerin, 2014), and AEP students can benefit by forming relationships with peers and academic staff. Andrew found the lecturers and tutors to be a great help and made a point of visiting them regularly as his final journal entry revealed:

> *I have stepped up and done all of my assignments this semester with maximum help from lecturers and tutors.*

He had achieved this by remaining wary throughout the semester of spending too much time with peers during study sessions as he knew that he got things done when he stayed away from socialising. His strategy of generally studying alone in the library was still in place in Week 12 as a comment from a final interview revealed:

> *If I'm at college and I've got large chunks of time, I just sit myself in the library.*

Jodi. Jodi had not depended on the tutors the way Andrew had. Perhaps she would have visited a female tutor, but there were no females on the tutoring team at the time. The only regret she expressed in the second half of the semester concerned her attitude to the tutors:

> *I am disappointed in myself for not going to the tutors enough … I know that I should see them more often, but I just haven't.*

Given the quality of help she received from her mother and sister—both tertiary students at the time—avoiding the tutors did not especially disadvantage her. As noted above, from around the middle of the semester, Jodi cut back on her social

involvement with peers, seeing it as a threat to her academic progress. For both Jodi and Andrew, peers were so closely linked with socialising that they feared the potentially negative consequences for their study of too much peer interaction. Jodi's data contain no references to sharing academically with peers outside of class.

Ben. Ben's attitude to sharing with peers and tutors in the learning interface remained unchanged. Throughout the semester he avoided both. A somewhat supercilious comment near the end of his journal on the ignorance of others perhaps applied more to peers than to lecturers and tutors:

> *It never ceases to amaze me how people cannot know the most basic of things.*

While he did not work with peers on academic tasks, he did spend a lot of time with them socially and credited them with helping him find answers to the personal questions with which he had been grappling, including questions about his own story and identity as well as the direction in life he should take next. He seemed to find dialoguing with peers almost as therapeutic as playing games—his preferred way of avoiding study in the opening phase of the semester.

Gaara. Studying with groups of peers can add motivation and have a significant impact on student development (Rageliene, 2016). Gaara's peer involvement, like Ben's, was restricted largely to the social domain. Apart from sitting with peers in lectures, she gave little evidence of interacting with them academically outside of class. By not seeking course-related involvement with their peers in the learning space, Ben and Gaara disadvantaged themselves. Ben may have found completing assignments less of a grind. Gaara may have found the motivation to embrace the student role and complete the coursework. Working with a partner may have helped her develop the self-discipline that she knew she needed. It seems likely that her reluctance to commit to the student role made her reluctant to join a group or find a study partner. In a final interview, Gaara admitted that a few visits to the tutors may have made a difference to the outcome of her AEP semester. At the end of the semester, she made a reference to the beneficial influence of peers:

> *As a higher education student, the strategies that help me engage with studies is* [*sic*] *seeing the motivation through my friends. When they study, it gives me*

the eagerness to study. Being forced by them to study was beneficial as well. Although some were studious, there were those that gave most of their time doing other things.

She might have benefited by identifying more with her studious friends. Instead, by following the lead of the group *"doing other things"*, she failed to complete the coursework. This comment has the appearance of an afterthought, indicating an awareness of the existence of studious peers, but she had given no evidence of having identified closely with them. Back in Week 2, recalling her Year 12 attitude to being a student, Gaara admitted, *"I needed self-discipline."* And lack of discipline continued to be a problem, as she admitted in Week 13: *"I need* [article omitted] *discipline."*

7.2.4 How this study reflects the literature

Age liability

This study provides some support for the claim in the literature that age is a liability for younger AEP students. A lack of self-discipline associated with immature attitudes seemed to explain Gaara's failure to embrace academic culture. While immature attitudes contributed to Ben's difficulties, he showed enough maturity to stay with the course. The mature approaches of Andrew and Jodi belied their youth.

Study goal and attitude to study

This study supports the claim that students with high academic goals are more self-disciplined, better organised, achieve higher grades, are more self-aware and more likely to persevere. This described Andrew and Jodi, whose mastery goals and achievement orientation produced the positive attitudes they maintained throughout the semester. Ben gave little evidence of having a deep desire to master new material. His orientation to study was extrinsic and utilitarian and he harboured many negative attitudes. Yet, despite being an irresolute learner, he persevered with the academic work until it was completed. Becoming alienated, Gaara illustrated what can happen to an AEP student's attitude when study goals fade and competing commitments are pursued instead. Ben and Gaara experienced significant cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) through their attempts to balance conflicting roles.

Attitude to self

The study supports the claim that AEPs can boost the self-efficacy of students. Andrew and Jodi both ended the semester with significantly increased belief in their capacity to handle higher education. Ben was not fully convinced that his academic efforts would bring success. Gaara showed what happens to the self-beliefs of student who start an AEP with unrealistic attitudes and make no serious attempt to adjust their approach as they go along.

Attitudes can be controlled and new attitudes learned

This study shows that while it is possible for attitudes to be controlled and new attitudes learned, this does not happen automatically. Having not been effective students at high school, Andrew and Jodi brought to the AEP a determination to develop new attitudes to study, and both were successful. Ben struggled with a negative attitude to study all semester, enduring it rather than learning to enjoy it. Gaara represented students who begin with the unrealistic attitude of hoping to do well despite their indifference towards study. Immaturity and inflexibility make them unwilling to learn new attitudes.

Attitude to peers

This study does not give strong support to the claim that AEP students can gain significant encouragement from their peers. The three successful participants largely avoided interacting academically with their AEP peers. Gaara acknowledged at the end of the semester that interacting with academically oriented peers had increased her enthusiasm for study, but as this had not been her predominant orientation, she had gained little benefit from it.

Effects of variations in attitude

The study demonstrates that the varying attitudes of teenage AEP students to themselves and to others contribute to varying academic outcomes. Areas in which their attitudes can vary include their attitudes to themselves, to their personal goals, to the institution and the AEP, to the coursework and study, to interacting with peers, and to seeking help from lecturers and tutors. The more positive their attitudes, the more likely they are to achieve academic success. The two participants with the most positive attitudes appeared to be the most likely to succeed [confirmed by their

results]. Gaara's many negative attitudes were associated with poor academic outcomes.

7.2.5 What this study adds

This study adds qualitative narrative data on the importance of the academic attitudes of teenage AEP students, showing that positive attitudes contribute to positive academic outcomes. Having some negative attitudes need not be a significant detriment, for example, being reluctant to interact academically with peers. As negative attitudes multiply, the academic challenge increases, and students are likely to have increasing difficulty managing their AEP study load.

7.3 Academic Engagement

It is axiomatic that people develop skills in the areas they work on. This applies also to students. Their academic outcomes depend on the quality of time devoted to their academic endeavours as they engage with the ideas introduced in the coursework. Engagement is recognised as an essential component of academic success.

7.3.1 What this means

While engagement is not fully understood, it is believed to involve the interplay of personal and institutional factors, making it a "shared responsibility" (Zepke, Leach & Butler, 2014, p. 395). The part that students can control is the part they play in using agency to make decisions about how to proceed with their study. The dimensions of the process include at least three strands: the behavioural, the psychological, and the socio-cultural (Kahu, 2013). The arena in which academic engagement occurs has been styled the educational interface (Kahu et al., 2017), the psychosocial space where students interact with the course, the lecturers and tutors, and their peers.

7.3.2 What the literature says

Behavioural engagement is the observable aspect that focuses on what students do, including such things as participating in lectures and tutorials, making use of the library and other facilities of the institution, completing the coursework, and submitting assignments—in short, being actively involved in educational processes (Trowler, 2010). Students spending less than the average amount of time each week on private study (9hr) are likely to earn lower grades, have difficulty with

motivation and interest, be less well organised, be less likely to be working consistently, and be at greater risk of withdrawing (Baik et al., 2015). The psychological and emotional aspects of engagement concern students' affective responses. Students can develop a feeling of belonging (Lawson & Laws, 2013), but some find study a "battle" (Krause, 2005, p. 4), even "drudgery" (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013, p. 321) as they are "torn between study and leisure" (Grund et al., 2014, p. 242). Students may persist despite feelings of alienation, irrelevance and drudgery, but their grades may suffer and their anxiety may increase. The socio-cultural aspects of engagement relate to the broader social context, dominant social groups, the political nature of the world, barriers due to *habitus* and institutional culture, and the disengagement of non-traditional groups (Kahu, 2013). Engagement contributes to student success, which is measured principally—but not solely—in terms of course progression and knowledge acquisition (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017). Among the factors contributing to this success are the backstories of students, especially family influence (Meuleman et al., 2015) and family *habitus* (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). Those from non-traditional groups tend to be at greater risk than others. Institutional factors that contribute to student success include institutional commitment, an understanding and experienced faculty and staff, a flexible curriculum, and a pleasing campus environment (Wyatt, 2011); but the key driver of engagement is student interest as this has the power to increase positive emotions and motivation (Kahu et al., 2017). When students are motivated, they tend to bring a deeper approach to learning, and to exercise agency as they develop self-efficacy (Herrmann et al., 2017).

7.3.3 What this study shows

Andrew. By the end of the semester, Andrew confidently asserted that in the AEP he had found it *"easy to get down and study"* and was *"pumped to finish* [his] *4yrs"* at college. He scored himself 9 out of 10 for his academic engagement. In Week 10, he asserted, *"I have kept up to date with all my work and I am very happy."* The evidence supported his claims as he was spending considerably more than nine hours per week on private study, was in the habit of submitting work on time, and was earning above average grades. A Week 10 journal entry reflected how engaged he had been in the AEP:

> *These last 10 weeks I have had to understand and take on board academic culture. I have learnt how to write like a tertiary educated student and how to think critically. I have stepped up and done all of my assignments this semester with maximum help from lecturers and tutors.*

While he appreciated the help he had received from lecturers and tutors, he understood the importance of personal effort:

> *At College I have learnt that the lecturers will help me but that they also expect me to make a real effort to help myself.*

He had made an effort and had satisfied his greatest critic—himself—noting, *"I have shown myself that I can do it."*

There can be no doubt about how engaged and strategic Andrew had been as his twin objectives showed. He wanted to learn and he wanted to earn good grades:

> *I find myself studying harder, reading a lot more and starting my assignments early and finishing them early so that I can get lecturers and tutors to help me achieve a higher grade.*

A final interview with Andrew gave him one last opportunity to reiterate how engaged he had been:

> *I've been really surprised with it, how* [engaged] *I've been with my study and everything.*

The one question that could be asked about Andrew' engagement concerned his general reluctance to engage with peers in private study time, yet he had not been inflexible about it. Earlier in the semester, a journal entry made reference to working with two fellow education students on a *"group individual teaching task"*. These were not AEP peers, but students enrolled in the teacher education program that Andrew planned to join. Through effective engagement, he had developed a strong sense of belonging. He had kept up a punishing schedule, engaged not only in a busy academic program but also in a paid work load of 39 hours per week. With family and institutional support, Andrew had shown himself to be agentive throughout the semester.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi demonstrated that busy students need to be organised. Despite having three paid jobs, Jodi was able to balance the competing roles of paid worker and AEP student. Aided by an improved sleep pattern, she became *"a lot more engaged"* with study as the semester progressed; and the 10-minute *"study burst"* was helping her to engage effectively, even when her motivation was low. Like Andrew, she was studying regularly—*"many hours each day"*—was on top of the work, and was confident of passing the AEP. She had discovered that being a successful tertiary student required effort and did not come easily. She had taken an agentive approach and put a lot of effort into her AEP semester. She scored herself 8 out of 10 for academic engagement, one mark less than Andrew gave himself. Had she been as fully in control of her personal life in the orientation period, she might have awarded herself the same score as Andrew. Jodi's self-assessment was supported by the marks she was earning. The self-assessments of both these students would be fully justified by the final grades they were set to earn.

Ben. While Ben had exercised a degree of agency, his academic involvement continued to be up and down, oscillating between approaching learning tasks in a shallow way and approaching them with a degree of interest as he sometimes did with biology. His preference for playing games did not seem to help him maintain a consistently deep approach to study. In this he contrasted with Andrew and Jodi, who managed to balance sport and study effectively. In spite of this, he continued to work on study tasks. In an interview in the final week of the AEP, he mentioned that after a month in the course he had tired of wasting time on games and social activities and *"ended up falling into study"*. This choice of words did not evoke a strong sense of agency, making the process sound rather like an accident. Perhaps this was just another example of Ben's sometimes offhand way of expressing himself. Procrastination had been an ongoing challenge for Ben. Andrew and Jodi had also been forced to deal with procrastination, but they had done so in a more decisive manner as evidenced by their more timely submission of assignments and their more positive affective state. Towards the end of the semester, with multiple due dates looming, Ben found himself under considerable pressure to complete his last assignments, and in the end he got them all done. Engagement had not been easy

for Ben; he had found it a grind all the way. Even so, he would be rewarded for his efforts in his final grades.

Gaara. While Ben had persevered when struggling with the conflict between study and leisure, Gaara gave up, leaving many assignments not done. She recognised that her academic goals *"just went down the drain"*. In surrendering to distractions and pursuing fun activities, she had failed to develop effective time management. She blamed this on her lack of self-belief, her negative self-talk, and her tendency to imagine the work was too hard instead of taking the time to assess the actual level of challenge. She also lacked the self-control required to transform her social relations (Block, 2013). Three times in a final conversation, she admitted to being lazy, and twice she mentioned her lack of discipline. In the end, she had followed her *"normal pattern"* when confronted with a challenging academic workload—a pattern that involved thinking about it for a time and then not bothering to complete it. Ben, driven by his fear of failure and his determination to pass, had forced himself to keep going; but nothing drove Gaara to keep working.

As noted above, when Gaara reached a crisis point as she realised she had more assignments to write, she gave up, saying, *"Ah, kill me!"* She found academic "death" an easier path to tread than the path of seeking help from peers, lecturers or tutors. She had not interacted effectively in the educational interface. Her second chance, taken at an AEP more than 1,000 km from home, was proving no more successful than her first chance as a high school student, living at home with her family. Despite the academic support available to AEP students, she failed to demonstrate effective student engagement. This failure is best explained in terms of the poor choices she had made—choosing to prioritise play over work, choosing not to consult peers or tutors about academic matters, choosing to demonstrate little interest in study, and choosing not to organise herself for study. A non-traditional student (CALD), she had shown how greatly at risk she was by choosing not to engage effectively. She would pay a price for her determination to project the *"laid-back"* persona of a *"messy"* and *"unorganised"* artist.

7.3.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study demonstrates how successful teenage second-chance AEP students can be when they participate actively in the educational interface. It also shows that

it is possible for a teenage AEP student to succeed despite bringing a reluctant, somewhat superficial approach to engagement, provided he or she has a measure of self-efficacy and enough determination to complete the coursework. And it shows that some teenage AEP students lack the maturity and self-discipline needed for success in their first year out of school.

7.3.5 What this study adds

This study adds a grounded perspective in relation to what is known about the academic engagement of teenage AEP students, revealing considerable variability in the performance of the four participants. It shows that agency is the key to the way in which teenage AEP students engage.

7.4 Emotional Buoyancy

As has already been noted, emotions play a significant part in the experience of teenage AEP students. Their predominant affective state impacts their attitude to the course, their educational interactions, and their academic progress.

7.4.1 What this means

Emotional buoyancy refers to the capacity of the participants to use their emotions to help them achieve their academic objectives. Ideally, this means maintaining a predominantly positive affective state and ensuring that negative emotions are regulated.

7.4.2 What the literature says

Emotions play a central role in the transition to higher education (Postareff et al., 2017). Learning is only partly a function of cognition; student emotions are also involved (Gilmore & Anderson, 2016), influencing a range of cognitive processes (Rowe et al., 2015). The affective states of students contribute to their wellbeing and their willingness to engage emotionally (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Beneficial positive emotions include enjoyment, hope, pride, relief, and interest (Rowe et al., 2015), but especially interest, enthusiasm, and enjoyment of learning (Hailikari et al., 2016). Educational institutions and their personnel contribute to these affective states. In educational settings strong emotions can be involved, both positive and negative; and while positive emotional states tend to contribute more to academic success, some negative emotions—anxiety, shame—can also promote learning (Postareff et al., 2017). Negative emotions, however, need to be regulated (Hailikari et al., 2016).

Given that teenage AEP students can be emotionally vulnerable, they need to understand that emotions can be managed and socio-emotional skills can be learned (Osher et al., 2016; Swartz, 2017). Three emotional clusters have been identified among students transitioning to university: those who progress quickly, experiencing mostly positive emotions; those who progress quickly, experiencing mostly negative emotions; and those who progress slowly, experiencing mostly negative emotions (Postareff et al., 2017).

7.4.3 What this study shows

This study turned up at least one individual from each of the three clusters identified by Postareff et al. (2017). Andrew and Jodi demonstrated the qualities of the first cluster, Ben the second, and Gaara the third.

Andrew. Andrew learned from the emotional stress he had experienced earlier in the semester after procrastinating over essay writing, a skill he felt he had not mastered at high school. This negative experience taught him that by keeping up to date with the assigned work, he would feel better about his student experience and be motivated to make better progress. His emotional state in this final stage of the semester was almost entirely positive. Apart from a moment of regret as he recalled his experience with his first essay and mild stress (not distress) over an upcoming exam, all of the emotion identified in this phase was positive. His three most frequently recorded emotions were competence, enthusiasm, and satisfaction. Most of his emotions evidenced growing self-belief and academic self-efficacy as this selection of short quotations reveals: *"I am winning in my college work"* (Wk9), *"I am pumped to finish"* (Wk9), *"I am definitely going to pass and do well"* (Wk9), *"I have seen myself mature through thinking critically and independently"* (Wk10), *"I have shown myself that I can do it"* (Wk11), *"I've matured a lot"* (Wk12), *"I've really seen my writing pick up and develop this semester"* (Wk12), *"I have learnt that I am an achiever"* (Wk13). His systematic, agentive approach to study created the conditions that enabled him to remain emotionally buoyant throughout the final phase of the semester. Andrew was ending the semester feeling amazed at his changed attitude to study and looking forward to starting undergraduate study. He can be classified in the first emotional cluster, students who progress quickly, experiencing predominantly positive emotions.

Jodi. Towards the end of the semester, Jodi reflected that her learning began to improve when she started enjoying her study:

> *Once I started enjoying what I was studying, I started to pay more attention and take in a lot more information.*

She and Andrew had both been keen to find ways to enjoy study. And both found satisfaction and academic success through doing so. Jodi ended the semester feeling *"very successful"*, *"hoping to pass"*, and being *"very excited"* about finishing. Her hope was not a doubtful hope, but a positive expectation. She had not revealed any negative feelings since Week 5 until a Week 10 journal entry addressed one small disappointment:

> *I am disappointed in myself for not going to the tutors enough.*

She explained that she had been disappointed with some of the advice she had been given early in the semester. On a couple of occasions, changes made in assignments based on the advice of a tutor had later been corrected by the lecturer. This comment could not be followed up as the semester ended around the time the participant journals were submitted. This late disappointment did not change Jodi's predominantly positive emotional state, which was dominated by satisfaction, enjoyment of learning, and an increased sense of competence as this selection of short quotations reveals: *"I'm on top of my work and am very happy with myself with the amount of work I have got done"* (Wk10), *"I have learned a lot of new* [academic] *skills"* (Wk11), *"My attitude towards studying has picked up tremendously"* (Wk11), *"I have become a more critical thinker"* (Wk11), *"I'm feeling very successful"* (Wk12), *"I'm very excited to finish"* (Wk12), *"I'm a lot more focused now"* (Wk12). The AEP work had not seemed like drudgery to Jodi. On the contrary, it had contributed to her self-improvement and increasing maturity. She looked back on the semester with feelings of deep satisfaction and gratitude as she, like Andrew, looked forward to becoming an undergraduate in the teacher education program her mother and sister were enrolled in. Like Andrew, Jodi was in the first emotional cluster, a student who progressed quickly, experiencing predominantly positive emotions.

Ben. Ben can be classified in the second cluster of students, those who make quick progress despite experiencing a lot of negative emotion. He continued to ride an emotional roller-coaster. His emotions in the final phase of the semester were a mix of positive and negative. In Week 9 he was feeling nonchalant and dismissive about work that did not interest him, and the next week he was enthusiastic about broadening his knowledge. In Week 10 he claimed to be actually enjoying the work. In reality, for most of the semester his mind had been *"plagued"* about whether the AEP was a path he should be taking. He had been unable to reach the point where he could confidently assert, "this is what I'm supposed to do" (James, 2016, p. 261). He had little idea what he would do with his life. In Week 10 he felt *"stronger as a person"* for having had the experience, but in Week 13 he felt he was *"not strong enough"* to stay focused and engage consistently with academic work. With a sense of foreboding he saw difficult challenges ahead and hoped he would be able to maintain his resolve to complete a bachelor's degree. He was inclined to excuse his willingness to spend so much potential study time watching television, playing pool and surfing the internet on the ground that he got *"overloaded really easily"*. The stress created by study made him use leisure activities as a diversion to restore a positive affective state. Ben's final journal entry illustrated the mixed state of his emotions at the end of the semester as he looked back on his AEP experience:

> *I have to say this has been one of the most challenging things I have had to do. Being unsure about if this is what I want to do has plagued my mind this whole semester, but I have come to some sort of conclusion. It was difficult most of the time but deciding to continue was the better option and I feel stronger as a person for doing it. I just hope I can keep this resolve throughout the rest of my time here in Avondale. Many challenges lay ahead and the only thing I can do is keep strong and focus on where I want to be in the end.*

Perhaps fear of failure had driven him to complete the course. While his past indifference to study had been replaced by a kind of respect, ongoing uncertainty continued to create doubts. He lacked the confidence of Andrew and Jodi about passing his four units.

A number of factors contributed to Ben's erratic emotional state. First, his loss of certainty about his career goal compounded a general disposition of uncertainty, including uncertainty about the wisdom of his interstate move to take the AEP. His deep fear of failure seemed to be linked to an unhelpful attitude to intelligence, which he appeared to see in quantitative terms as a fixed capacity. Such thinking can lead to the unhelpful conclusion that smart people do not need to study hard. His interstate move had cut him off from his socio-emotional supports, including his family and friends as well as his fiancée, leaving him wondering how he would survive. A further complication was his failure to find enjoyment in study, which may have been due in part to having foreclosed on an inappropriate path. His final grades might shed light on whether science was his real strength. Then there was his ongoing struggle to resolve questions about his personal identity, a quest he appeared to have been pursuing since his childhood experiences of bullying. There was also the possibility that he could have been suffering from a depressive condition. Ben seemed to live with a considerable amount of doubt and anxiety. While he had not demonstrated the emotional buoyancy of Andrew or Jodi, he managed to keep himself afloat long enough to complete the AEP, but it remained to be seen whether he had the emotional resilience to prosper as an undergraduate student.

Gaara. By the last phase of the semester, Gaara's emotional state had dipped markedly. Even so, her semester in the AEP had been *"cool"* thanks to the interaction she had enjoyed with her *"fun-loving friends"*. When reminded that she had not done much study, her first response was to giggle. Then, becoming more subdued, she reflected on how her goals had gone *"down the drain"* as the semester unfolded. She had been attracted to the idea of study in the AEP, but had found the reality no more to her liking than it had been at high school. The failures of Ben and Gaara to find ways to enjoy study drove them to find joy in socialising and pursuing leisure activities. For Gaara, these involved *"Facebook, basketball, netball, volleyball"*—she laughed as she listed them. Despite facing probable failure in all four of her AEP units, Gaara was in remarkably good spirits and giggled some more as she acknowledged the likelihood of her failing, but perhaps it was a nervous giggle. Her emotional state had deteriorated steadily since the first couple of weeks of the semester. Predominantly negative in the middle weeks, it dipped even further

in the last month as her failure to engage with the academic program made it increasingly likely that she would not pass any of her units and might be excluded from the course. Non-commitment to study had produced anxiety, regret, and a sense of personal incompetence. The normally irrepressible Gaara was ending the semester on an emotional low as a result of her failure to exercise agency and take the opportunity provided by the AEP to build up her self-efficacy and demonstrate the potential she suspected she had. Gaara fit the third emotional cluster, a student who progressed slowly, experiencing mostly negative emotions.

7.4.4 How this study reflects the literature

First, the study supports the claim that learning is only partly a function of cognition. The affective states of the four participants made a significant contribution to their academic engagement and thereby to their learning and ultimate academic success. Second, the study supports the claim that maintaining a predominantly positive affective state is associated with successful academic outcomes. This was especially the case for Andrew and Jodi, who enjoyed the most positive emotional states throughout each phase of the AEP and earned the highest grades at the end. Third, the study supports the claim that negative emotions can promote engagement as is seen most clearly in the case of Ben. Despite his anxiety, uncertainty, non-commitment, self-doubt and fear of failure, he persevered and ended the semester successfully. Fourth, the study supports the claim that positive emotions can be detrimental to study as has been seen in Gaara's determination to be too laid back and get too comfortable. Fifth, the study supports the claim that institutions and their personnel contribute to the emotional states of students. All four of the participants maintained positive feelings for the institution, the course and most of the personnel throughout their AEP semester, even Gaara. Her experience demonstrates that institutional factors cannot make up for a student's failure to exercise personal agency and participate in the educational interface.

7.4.5 What this study adds

This study provides grounded evidence of the emotional journeys of four teenage AEP students, showing the effects of both positive and negative emotions on their academic progress, and highlighting the value of maintaining a predominantly positive emotional state.

7.5 Student Identity Formation

For most teenage students taking an AEP, it is a second chance to form a student identity after a largely unsuccessful high school attempt. Achieving success enables them to pursue other academic paths that provide access to their desired careers. Forming a student identity may not be their primary focus, and they may continue to be reluctant about embracing the student role, yet embrace it they must if they are to achieve life goals that depend on having an academic qualification. In this study, two participants embraced the student role enthusiastically, one embraced it reluctantly, and one gave up on it long before the end of the semester.

7.5.1 What this means

Forming a student identity involves demonstrating mastery of the student role, which includes developing skill in interacting in the educational interface where study skills, writing skills, and higher-level thinking skills are honed. As these attempts are successful, individuals come to see themselves as students and to have this verified by others, especially their teachers, peers and family members.

7.5.2 What the literature says

Identity formation is "self-making" (Bruner, 1991, p. 76); it is the drive to develop and authentic sense of self (La Guardia, 2009; Stets & Burke, 2014). An AEP offers students a second chance to form a student identity. For some, an AEP is a doorway to heaven, for others, a doorway to hell (Habel & Whitman, 2016). Despite typical attrition rates of around 50 per cent (Hodges et al., 2013), significant numbers of AEP students are successful in forming a student identity as is evidenced by the rate at which they go on to complete undergraduate degrees. Identity formation involves "futuring" (Sica et al., 2016, p. 183), a challenging process for many non-traditional students as they try to imagine how to get the best out of their adult lives. AEP students are likely to have explored their career options and may have committed to a career that they believe is the best choice (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Identities provide motivation (Carter, 2013), but mastering the student role is a necessary step on the path to adding a professional identity like that of teacher (Daniels & Brooker, 2014; Whannell & Whannell, 2015). AEP students may change their friends after making judgments about their academic maturity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Achieving academic success can be a turning point in the lives of teenage AEP students and lead to the kind of self-transformation (McAdams, 2008;

Willans & Seary, 2007) that makes their "dreams come true" (Baesler, 2017, p. 3201). But, as many AEP students discover, competing identities (Brown et al., 2014) and competing goals can create conflicts (Oyserman et al., 2006). Tertiary students are "prime candidates" (Whannell & Whannell, 2015, p. 45) for identity conflict. Graduate attributes have been proposed as potential identity indicators as these identify the kinds of qualities and competencies that are valued in higher education (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). These include adapting to the student role, relating to oneself as a student, and learning how to interact with academic staff and peers. Applying this method, AEP students demonstrating these qualities could be said to have developed a student identity. As they participate in the community of knowledge, AEP students learn to think like students and develop skills in finding information, building discipline knowledge, critiquing ideas, and sharing what they learn. They also develop an appreciation of the limits of their knowledge

7.5.3 What this study shows

The study shows variation in the way the participants responded to the student role. Andrew and Jodi gave evidence of embracing the student role wholeheartedly, suggesting that they were forming a college student identity. While Ben resisted the student role at an emotional level, he nevertheless engaged with the coursework at the behavioural level and completed it. After initially toying with the student role, Gaara abandoned study and put her time and effort into other pursuits.

Andrew. At the end of the AEP, Andrew reflected on how he had matured and become a more critical and independent learner in the AEP. His enthusiastic participation in academic culture evidenced his acceptance of the student role, and he saw good marks as the evidence of his success:

> *This semester has been a real eye opener for me. I have surprised myself by how I have embraced academic culture. Before I started* [the AEP] *I was at high school and I was just living off the teachers and waiting for them to give me my information. I have learnt that the lecturers will help me but that they also expect me to make a real effort to help myself. By thinking critically and independently I have found myself to succeed this semester in my studies and pass all of my assignments. I have shown myself that I can do it… I find myself studying harder, reading a lot more and starting my assignments early*

> *and finishing them early so that I can get lecturers and tutors to help me achieve a higher grade… Academic culture has had an impact on me that I thought could never occur in my life.*

Andrew was no longer waiting for things to happen; he was committed to bringing an agentive approach to his study and to his planning for the future. He believed that the AEP had put him on a path that would, within four years, set him up for his *"future job"* as a high school PDHPE teacher.

Andrew's strategy of studying in the college library had provided the double benefit of supporting his engagement with the student role and insulating him from social distractions:

> *I pretty much just camp myself in the library. So, I'm always studying because I know if I get out and about I'm going to socialise too much.*

He had a renewed belief in himself as a student:

> [My self-belief] *has taken a massive leap. You know, it's gone from beneath ground level when I was at high school and it's just jumped through the roof, you know. I've really seen myself take that step, you know. It's really good.*

Andrew was the one whose data suggested the aptness of a sporting motif for this study, and a final comment in the last week of the semester underlined its aptness:

> *I wanted to engage early and smash this semester of subjects out and feel like a winner. I kept a good consistency throughout the semester. I have learnt that I am an achiever, I can do well when I put my mind to my goal.*

It is clear that Andrew had transitioned from being a bored high school student, with little interest in study, to becoming a responsible higher education student, committed to being an academic achiever and completing a teaching degree so that he could pursue a career in teaching. While he was still training and playing rugby league, his dream of becoming a professional footballer appeared to be in the process of being displaced by his desire to become a teacher. His identity was emerging in a way that he had not foreseen as recently as six months earlier.

Jodi. Like Andrew, Jodi noted that she had become more focused—*"a lot more focused"*. She had *"learned a lot of new skills"* and gained *"a lot more knowledge"*. As someone who had left school after Year 10, she had been eager to fill the gaps in her knowledge due to missing Years 11 and 12. In the AEP, she had *"switched from being the girl in high school that barely listened"* to being a successful student, demonstrating maturity and managing the student role responsibly. And, like Andrew, she had found practical ways to enjoy being a student:

> *I have learned that being a tertiary student isn't as hard as I thought it would be. You can make it easy by enjoying yourself and what you are learning. I have learned that* [I] *need more sleep… like 8 hours a night. This has helped me with my concentration through the day… I'm fairly good with my study time management. I do have other sporting activities that sometimes come in between study, but when I get back from the sport, I'm usually straight back to study.* [Paid] *work also takes up a fair bit of time. I'm fairly confident that I will pass all of the units I'm doing. I study very regularly and seem to be on top of the work.*

Jodi's in-class participation and grades suggested that her claims were well founded. She recognised the changes in herself, including a changed attitude to study and improved critical thinking:

> *I think that this semester I have learned a lot of new skills of being an academic… My attitude towards studying has picked up tremendously… My attitude has not just changed with studying, but also with my priorities. I have learned that to be a tertiary student, nothing comes easily. I have realised that I really need to put a lot of effort into it… This semester, I think that I have become a more critical thinker by looking into the work I have been given a lot more. I break down the parts of it bit by bit, analysing every part.*

Jodi had progressed from having little interest in reading to spending hours each day on academic reading and assignment writing. She used to think that study was not important, but her AEP experience had provided a new perspective. With the semester almost over, she commenced her final journal entry with the words, *"I'm feeling very successful"*. From her engagement in the AEP, her excellent grades, and

her greatly enhanced self-efficacy, it was clear that Jodi—like Andrew—saw herself as a successful student. She and Andrew were both in the process of forming a college student identity.

Ben. Ben claimed that in the AEP he had *"matured a lot"*, a reference to his personal development, not his academic development. He did not appear to have embraced the student role the way Andrew and Jodi had. A journal entry in Week 10 suggested he had approached the student role tepidly, not with a warm embrace:

> *I suppose the culture of education here has rubbed off on me. I am starting to see more reason to study and broaden my knowledge and I have to say I am enjoying it.*

His comment about *"enjoying it"* did not mesh with other comments he had made. A couple of weeks later, he was less certain about what his AEP semester had meant to him and how effectively he had embraced the student role. It revealed that he had contemplated withdrawing:

> *I have to say this has been one of the most challenging things I have had to do, being unsure about if this is what I want to do* [has] *plagued my mind this whole semester, but I have come to some sort of conclusion. It was difficult most of the time but deciding to continue was the better option and I feel stronger as a person for doing it. I just hope I can keep this resolve throughout the rest of my time here*.

A series of comments in a final interview in the last week of the semester suggested more uncertainty for Ben about the effectiveness of his study. He began with a positive comment:

> *I actually find that I'm willingly sitting down and studying biology … maybe an hour or two a night.*

Several minutes later, he estimated that, despite the many distractions of college life, he had managed to spend at least six hours each day in his room studying—considerably more than *"an hour or two"*:

> *I'd say half the time* [college life is] *very distracting and half the time it's very study orientated. I find that I'm in my room for a good 13 hours and*

maybe half of that I'll be studying and half of it I'll be playing games, or if I'm not in my room I'll be outside at the squash courts or playing frisbee down at the field.

Shortly after making this claim, he further qualified his assessment of how he managed his out-of-class time, including his need to de-stress:

I probably spend a good hour … doing nothing, to relax. I find I get overloaded really easily, so after an hour of doing nothing, maybe out in the hall watching TV or playing pool, I go back to my room and might, like, go on the internet for a while or do study; it really depends on the day or what I have to do.

Ben's final self-assessment had the strong flavour of uncertainty that had permeated his AEP experience:

I feel like I'm not strong enough because—especially in the mad month of May—I had a ton of assignments due over the whole month, and I was struggling to find time because, um, it would be down, especially towards the end, I was down to finishing one assignment, sending it in the night it was due, then starting the next one that was due the next day.

His struggle was not to find the time, but to find the will to study. Responding to a question about whether he had become a serious student in the AEP, he replied:

More serious than I was, yeah. [Study] *is something that was very passé before, and now I don't see it like this.*

It did not follow that Ben was confident of passing his four units. He knew he had passed his writing unit but was in doubt about the other three:

I'm really worried about [an education unit] *because* [the teacher] *tends to mark really hard… Biology I think I'll pass but I'm not sure because my grade started off okay, but towards the end of the term* [semester], *when everything started getting all hectic, it declined, so it's really up to the exam as to whether I pass that. And* [professional teaching unit] *is up to the prac in the holidays.*

Unlike Andrew and Jodi, Ben had no paid-work commitments and no family commitments to compete for his time. This meant he had 30-40 hours a week more time than they had available for studying. Whereas they ended the semester optimistic about passing and believing in themselves as students, Ben was ending the semester doubting his effectiveness as a student and uncertain about passing. This might have been explained in part by his fading career goal. Commenting on this in the final week of the semester, he admitted he was *"not entirely sure"* about becoming a teacher and might do laboratory work instead. In the meantime, he was *"probably"* going to continue with an undergraduate program after completing the AEP. While he appeared to be focused on going further with higher education, his thinking was characterised by chronic uncertainty. His AEP semester was almost over, and—despite his doubts—it appeared likely to be successful. While he rated himself more highly as a student now than at high school, his self-rating lacked the confidence of the self-ratings of Andrew and Jodi. He had shown he had the potential to be a successful higher education student without demonstrating enthusiasm for study or the self-belief that would suggest he had progressed far in developing a college student identity.

Gaara. Gaara had spent the semester pursuing fun activities and doing a diminishing amount of academic work. Yet, she had begun the AEP with good intentions as she explained in a final interview:

> *Oh, I thought I was keen, but I started getting lazy* [meaningful cough]. *I always start like that. I don't know why, like, I'm pumped up for school and then during the semester I, like, get to the end and don't…* [trailing off] *I'm motivated in the beginning and then when I get comfortable, like, you know … I don't know.*

Gaara's intentions at the start seemed to be similar to the intentions of the other three. While they were focused on becoming teachers, she was focused on a career in art. There were also significant differences in their student behaviour. Andrew and Jodi remained focused on their academic goals throughout the semester, driven by their passion to become teachers. Gaara had not been so driven by her goals:

> [My goals] *just went down the drain … When I was doing the 1200-word essay, like you know, I started it then, like, I stopped doing it and then it went overdue and then I became lazy.*

Her use of the word lazy seemed to be an attempt to explain the battle she had had with role conflicts. All four of the participants had been forced to deal with competing roles, especially Andrew and Jodi, who both had heavy off-campus work commitments. Whereas they had managed their competing roles effectively, Gaara had not. She readily identified the issues that had been problematic, including:

> *time management, distractions, and spending too much time on fun stuff … Facebook, basketball, netball and volleyball.*

Having acknowledged her academic engagement as being *"below zero"*, she added, *"I was thinking about what I should do, but I never done it."* She knew she had no one to blame but herself: "*The fault is mine for letting the distractions get to me."*

Gaara could have used agency more effectively and chosen study over pleasure as the other three had done. Even Ben had interrupted his games to complete assigned academic work. Asked what had happened to her self-belief during the semester, Gaara replied:

> *Ahhh, I dunno. I think, like, I'm always saying that I can't do it … But I want to … I thought it was too hard but then I wasn't, like, into it, so I started getting lazy ... I have to believe in myself. Sometimes I just doubt myself.*

Again, her failure—in her view—had been due to laziness. The work had not been too hard; she had just been unwilling to discipline herself to do it. When asked whether she had become a serious student in the AEP, she replied, *"No, I'm still laid back … I need discipline."* A final proposition brought into focus Gaara's haphazard work ethic: "If you're doing something that you find fun, you do well. And if you're doing something that doesn't seem like such fun, you get bored with it [she giggled]. And you go and have another chocolate or do something else." Her response: *"Chocolate, yummm* [giggling]*!"*

In a submission to the college written shortly after learning she had failed her four units, Gaara wrote:

> *During the semester, time management and distractions were the main cause that kept me from completing my studies. I did not set a certain time on when I should study. My sleeping pattern was* [so] *disorganised that I attended class late or missed it. Playing a lot of sports and too much time spent on social activities, assessments were handed in late, I often procrastinated therefore* [it] *became too much to bear. I was too laid back … I lacked work commitment, which led me to unsatisfactory results.*

Her explanation had not been well edited. With appropriate application, Gaara could have achieved academic success. With a level of engagement that she described as *"below zero"*, she had come within five per cent of passing. By choosing not to bring an agentive approach, she failed to make significant progress towards forming a student identity, choosing instead to remain the *"funny joker"* she had been at high school.

7.5.4 How this study reflects the literature

This study reflects the literature in that the four participants had explored and committed (Kroger & Marcia, 2011) to particular careers before enrolling in the AEP. Driven by instrumental motives, they were using the AEP as a second chance to qualify for entry to undergraduate courses that they hoped would provide access to these careers.

The study supports the literature by showing that identities can be motivational (Carter, 2013). While Andrew and Jodi were highly motivated to pursue identities as teachers, Ben struggled as his teaching vision faded. Gaara's dream of a career as an artist did not motivate her to put her best effort into the AEP.

The study reflects the literature by demonstrating that futuring (Sica et al., 2016) is a challenging process for teenagers. Two showed that their imagined futures were a good fit by converting their career goals into study goals and finding the motivation and enthusiasm to pursue these goals in a focused way. One managed to successfully complete the course, despite losing his desire to become a teacher, being less successful in setting study goals, and generating little enthusiasm for study. And one found that her desire to become an artist did not encourage her to exercise agency and complete the coursework.

The study reflects the literature in that the AEP experience was not a uniform one for the participants. For Andrew and Jodi, it was the doorway to heaven (Habel & Whitman); for Gaara, it seemed like a doorway to hell; and for Ben, it was an unpleasant journey that he still was not convinced had taken him in the right direction. Competing goals and competing identities created conflicts that two managed well, one managed with a struggle, and one failed to manage effectively.

The study supports the claim in the literature that AEP students may change their friends after making the decision to pursue an academic identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). All four made new friends at college. Having left home and travelled more than a thousand kilometres to attend the AEP, Ben and Gaara had little choice. The other two had less reason to change friends, especially Andrew, as many of his friends had moved with him to a college that was close to the high school they had all attended.

The study reflects the literature in that the AEP was a turning point in the lives of at least two participants, confirming for them that they were on a path of self-transformation (McAdams, 2008; Willans & Seary, 2007). Three participants were involved with the community of knowledge—interacting in the educational interface—learning to think like higher education students, and honing the requisite skills. The participants showed themselves to be in the process of self-making (Bruner, 1991), on a mission to define their true selves (La Guardia, 2009). Three were successful in redefining themselves as worthy higher education students while the fourth one showed that she was not yet ready to step up.

7.5.5 What this study adds

This study adds a grounded perspective on how teenage AEP students go about forming a college student identity, showing that some make great progress in a single semester. According to the literature, identities form slowly. This study shows that two of the four participants formed a surprisingly mature college student identity during one AEP semester, while a third participant achieved academic success, despite not demonstrating a mature college student identity. While Gaara had demonstrated considerable immaturity, she had given glimpses of having potential. She had not yet formed a college student identity, but given another chance, perhaps she would.

7.6 Final Grades

Three of the four participants successfully passed their four units. Andrew recorded the best result, with three distinctions and one high credit (av. 75.25%). Jodi's hope for academic rehabilitation was realised when she passed her units with straight credits (av. 70.5%). With one distinction, two credits and a high pass (av. 67.8%), Ben was not far behind Jodi. These three accepted the undergraduate places they were offered at the college. In contrast to them, Gaara failed her four units (av. 45.4%) and was advised that she had been discontinued from the course. Appealing the decision, she was permitted a second semester in the AEP.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the four participants ended their AEP semester. It has shown how their academic attitude matured, how their academic engagement unfolded, how their predominant emotional state sustained them, and how their college student identity evolved. The stories of two participants—Andrew and Jodi—were stories of success across the board. Ben's story demonstrated what can happen when the life goal of an AEP student begins to fade after they enrol in an AEP. And Gaara, through immaturity and lack of self-discipline, showed that she had not been ready to meet the academic challenges of the course. The next chapter shows how the research questions have been answered.

Chapter 8: Game Over

8.1 Introduction

This research project has examined how teenage students, a diverse aggregate, experience an AEP and how they interpret the experience of what is, for most, a second attempt to matriculate. Variations in their backgrounds, personal goals, and willingness to engage in the educational interface explain the considerable variation in the outcome of their AEP attempts. This study highlights the variation and identifies the key factors that contribute to the success of teenage AEP students. The original contribution of the study is its focus on teenage AEP students and its balanced gender representation. Previous studies tend to be quantitative, focusing on mature-age students, and featuring mainly female voices. This study is qualitative, focusing on the teenage experience as exemplified by two male and two female participants.

8.2 Research findings

This study adds to the literature on AEPs by offering a framework of concepts which, when taken together, create a narrative picture of the teenage AEP experience. The key backstory factors include family habitus and parental influence, the role modelling of school teachers, and the influence of peers and community mentors; these contribute to the aspirations and intentionality that students have when they enrol in an AEP. The key factors in the AEP experience include how they follow through on their intentions by exercising personal agency in converting their career goals into proximal study goals, putting into action their developed plans by engaging in the educational interface, monitoring their progress and making necessary adjustments, dealing effectively with the engagement battles created by competing roles such as work and sport, and maintaining positive attitudes and a mostly positive emotional state. Keeping a harmonious balance among these factors creates favourable conditions for the emergence of a student identity—an emergence that can occur within a single semester. It is a process of making new connections: connecting with the AEP, with socio-emotional supports at the educational interface, and with themselves as they use agency to build their self-efficacy.

8.2.1 How do teenage AEP students connect with the AEP?

Teenage students' initial connection with an AEP can set them up for success or make them vulnerable to possible failure. Their career goals, the fruitage of their envisioning or futuring, are what drive them to enrol in an AEP. Their initial contact with the course involves balancing hope and fear. They hope to find a way to achieve academic success and access a career, but their previous experiences of education make them fear they might fail. How they respond to their reflections, which should produce a self-evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses they displayed at high school, has implications for their success in the AEP. Out of this self-diagnosis, they need to develop an action plan. They need the courage and determination to embrace their opponent (study), take a positive attitude to the student role, and form proximal study goals. Driven by agency, the facility that determines how they engage academically, they find they have battles to fight, including learning how to manage time and prioritise study, negotiating the first assignment(s), applying their learning and responding to study tips picked up during the course, and managing competing roles such as paid work, sport, and socialising. These battles have to be recognised, fought, and won. Teenage AEP students might feel discouraged to know that being younger is associated with poorer academic outcomes; but by making agentive choices, they can overcome the age liability. Former habits can be changed and past mistakes can be avoided.

8.2.2 How do teenage AEP students connect with socio-emotional supports?

Teenage AEP students can benefit significantly from socio-emotional support, especially as they navigate stressful stages of the journey. Being involved with others who take an interest in their progress helps them to be accountable and stay true to themselves. They benefit from taking a positive attitude to forming relationships in the educational interface with peers sharing the academic journey, and with lecturers and tutors. Family members who are graduates or current students can also provide significant socio-emotional, as well as academic, support. Such family members can be a great source of support and encouragement, especially in times of crisis.

8.2.3 How do teenage AEP students connect with themselves?

Students reconnect with themselves by using personal agency and making mature choices about the way to manage their commitments and prioritise study.

They reconnect by demonstrating to themselves that they can do the work and be successful students. The best way to do this is by engaging with the coursework from Day One, developing academic skills, and writing effective assignments. Earning positive grades and receiving helpful feedback from lecturers builds self-efficacy and contributes to the capacity of students to maintain a predominantly positive affective state. Institutional factors also contribute to this affective state. As students monitor their academic progress and continue to engage, they establish an upward spiralling feedback loop that creates satisfaction and the awareness that they are becoming effective students. This study adds a grounded perspective on how teenage AEP students form a college student identity, revealing that by embracing the student role they can make rapid progress within a single semester.

8.2.4 What explains the variation in the academic outcomes of teenage AEP students?

The answers to this question are embodied in the answers to the previous three questions. The academic outcomes for teenage AEP students vary because of the many ways in which the students differ, including their attitudes to the AEP and the student role, personal flexibility, planning ability, career and study goals, maturity, approach to interacting in the educational interface, balancing competing roles, connecting with socio-emotional supports, self-beliefs, predominant emotional states, use of personal agency, and dedication to forming a student identity. Each of these components affects the outcome, and combining them creates significant variation.

In this study, career goal appeared to have a major impact on the academic outcomes of the participants. A career goal formed after leaving high school appears to be a more mature goal. Students with such a goal tend to be more motivated to get organised for study, and to engage more willingly with the course material. They are likely to see the AEP as a challenge, not an imposition. Having a goal formed at high school may be associated with retaining attitudes formed at high school. Career goals that do not motivate students to prioritise study in Year 12 might not motivate them to prioritise study in an AEP either. They might see the AEP as an imposition, a repeat of something they have done before.

As this study shows, teenage AEP students with a parent currently enrolled in higher education appear to take added inspiration from that parent's example. Such a parent can serve as a powerful role model.

8.3 Recommendations

Two types of recommendation arise from this research. First, there are recommendations for those involved with AEPs. Second, there are suggestions for future research.

8.3.1 This study

The individuals involved with AEPs include the students, the non-teaching personnel who represent the human face of the institution, teachers and tutors, curriculum developers, and parents.

AEP students

Recommendation 1. Students need a well-formulated career goal. A goal chosen at high school should be analysed critically to ensure it is a good fit. If it is a goal suggested by another person—for example, a parent or teacher—the student needs to make it their own through careful investigation. If it was significantly influenced by a mentor, the student should ensure the choice was made on grounds that are likely to prove enduring.

Recommendation 2. Students need to reflect on their poor performance at high school and identify the mistakes they made and the changes they need to implement in their approach to learning.

Recommendation 3. Students should strive to maintain a positive attitude to the AEP and to the student role as positive attitudes and emotions are associated with academic success.

Recommendation 4. Students who have had negative attitudes to study in the past can benefit from finding ways to make study enjoyable. The specific techniques employed will vary according to individual preference.

Recommendation 5. Students moving away from home to take an AEP need to identify new sources of socio-emotional support, for example, the AEP staff, tutors, and even peers.

Recommendation 6. Students need to convert their career goal to proximal study goals that are achievable in the short term and provide a clear focus.

Recommendation 7. Students should engage in study from the first day of the AEP and use the orientation period to organise themselves for effective, regular study.

Recommendation 8. Students should identify sources of academic support so that they know where to go when they need help. They need to understand that it is normal to require help. Getting stuck is not evidence of a lack of ability.

Recommendation 9. Students must not give up at the first hurdle—for example, the first assignment—but meet each challenge strategically, with the help of a mentor or tutor, according to need.

Recommendation 10. Students should be alert to study tips and identify course content that helps them as learners, especially if they recognise themselves as having been reluctant learners in the past.

Recommendation 11. Students should understand that it is normal to have battles with things like procrastination, socialising and competing roles. These tests of their capacity to prioritise study and maintain their focus can be met successfully.

Recommendation 12. Students need to work out how to balance a study load with paid work. Getting themselves organised will help them to manage both.

Recommendation 13. The key to success is students' use of personal agency: they are the ones making the decisions about the actions required to move them towards achieving their goals. Age, a pitfall for many younger AEP students, is unlikely to be a liability if they are agentive in pursuing their goals.

Institutions

Recommendation 14. Institutions must provide a total learning environment with a context and culture that is inviting, offering experiences that make students feel positive about themselves and about learning. The process starts at the enquiry phase. Applicants need to know from the start that they are valued by the people they see as the face of the institution. Institutions should work to empower students and foster relationships between staff and students.

Teachers and tutors

Recommendation 15. Teachers and tutors are the public face of the institution. They need to focus on the individual welfare of students, not just on the delivery of curriculum.

Recommendation 16. Teachers should encourage students who lack a career goal to examine their options and their interests and identify a suitable career as having a career goal can provide strong motivation to study.

Recommendation 17. The professional interactions of teachers and tutors with students should be tempered with kindness so that students see them as welcoming sources of socio-emotional support. Through being empathetic role models, teachers and tutors help their students to thrive academically.

Curriculum developers

Recommendation 18. The challenge for curriculum developers is to make learning accessible and relevant to teenage AEP students. The topics selected for study need to engage young, inquiring minds. The curriculum must not seem like a repeat of high school. Challenging students, without overwhelming them, can be achieved by providing careful staging and scaffolding.

Parents

Recommendation 19. Parents can help their teenage AEP student by taking an interest in their academic journey. Even if they are unable to provide financial support, parents can provide socio-emotional support, especially at crisis points where students might be tempted to quit. If parents are graduates or higher education students themselves, they may be able to offer specific help with academic processes and perhaps even content knowledge. Family tends to be a trusted source as it offers a familiar worldview that students relate to.

8.3.2 Future research

This research project has examined the AEP experience of four teenage students. There is still much to know about how teenage AEP students understand and interpret their AEP experience. Here are some suggestions for future research.

Sample size

Suggestion 1. A sample size of four participants is limited. It illustrates the diversity of the AEP experience, without testing the extent of that diversity. A fuller picture of the range of ways in which an AEP can be experienced would be revealed by conducting the research on a larger scale and gaining the perspectives of more participants.

Location

Suggestion 2. A larger view of the AEP experience would be gained by conducting studies in different contexts, for example in fee-free AEPs or urban AEPs. In different kinds of AEPs, students are likely to face different challenges and different pressures, resulting in different ways of experiencing and interpreting the AEP journey.

Type of student

Suggestion 3. There is great diversity among AEP students. It would be interesting to study subgroupings of AEP students based on variables other than age, for example, students from particular equity groups like LSES, CALD, first in family, the alienated, those with no ATAR, high school drop-outs, those with learning difficulties, those without a settled career goal, and those with other types of social or psychological disadvantage.

Student issues

Suggestion 4. Studies could focus on AEP issues identified by students, such as curriculum and andragogy issues, student perceptions of institutional culture, perceptions of faculty warmth, or perceptions of the quality of student support. Such studies could broaden our understanding of what these aspects contribute to the willingness of students to engage academically.

Learning approaches

Suggestion 5. Studies could investigate and compare the academic performance of students with different learning styles, for example those bringing a deep approach and those adopting a more superficial approach to learning. It would be interesting to discover whether it is possible for superficial learners to be transitioned to the point where they become willing to adopt a consistently deeper

approach to learning. Is their style more or less fixed by their personality or temperament? Or does neuroplasticity make it possible for them to change?

Study length

Suggestion 6. This study collected participant data intensively for one semester, and tracked the participants distantly until three of the four completed baccalaureate degrees. Typically, studies are likely to involve a one-semester data-gathering phase. With longer or shorter courses, this may vary. Research projects might study larger cohorts during a single phase of an AEP, for example the orientation phase.

8.4 Contribution to knowledge

This qualitative research project contributes to our understanding of the student AEP experience by examining it from the perspective of a balanced selection of male and female participants, all teenagers and recent school leavers, with two having taken gap years before enrolling in the AEP. Teenage AEP students have the advantages of youth along with the disadvantages of relative immaturity. This study identifies components of the AEP journey that can help students make better use of agency as they strive to achieve successful academic outcomes and form a student identity.

8.4.1 Overview

The study has responded to several deficiencies identified in the literature, including the call of Habel et al. (2016) for qualitative studies of the AEP experience to complement the findings of quantitative research, the observation of Debenham and May (2005) that knowledge of the male experience was a gap in the literature, the observation of Hagel, Carr and Devlin (2012) that there are gaps in our understanding of engagement, the problem of the student voice not emerging strongly enough in the literature (Hellmundt & Baker, 2017), the observation of Bookallil and Harreveld (2017) that the motivation of pathway students to re-engage with education is not well understood, and the claim of Newell (2012) that there is a need for qualitative studies of student perceptions of the effectiveness of AEPs in preparing students for degree study. The study makes a unique contribution to knowledge by focusing on teenagers as a subset of AEP students. Quantitative research has revealed a correlation between age and academic success among AEP

students, with lower results reported for younger students (Cantwell et al., 2001; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Whitson, 1995). Numerous studies have focused on enabling programs at the University of Newcastle, home to 13 per cent of Australia's more than 22,000 AEP students (McMillen, 2017). The studies show that mature age students (age 20yr plus) in the Open Foundation Program typically outperform Newstep students, most of whom appear to be teenagers, given their age range of 17 to 20 (Vandyke et al., 2012). As reported in the literature review, numerous papers and reports have been written on the performance of students in Australian AEPs, many of them using quantitative approaches. To date, few qualitative studies have investigated the lived experience of the students and the processes that contribute to the correlations and other statistical measures examined in the quantitative studies. However, progress is being made as the following points suggest.

8.4.2 Filling the gaps

This dissertation reports on a qualitative narrative study of the lived experience of a gender-balanced group of teenage AEP students. Given that there do not appear to be any studies that focus specifically on the teenage experience, all of the key findings add to existing knowledge.

Power of the backstory

As Kinzie and Kuh (2017) note, "student success is a process that begins long before students first enrol in postsecondary education" (p. 22). This dissertation provides rich details about the backstories of the four teenage participants, showing why they underperformed at high school and failed to qualify for places in higher education. Two main types of failure have been recognised: failure due to lack of skills and failure due to lack of self-discipline (McNaught & Benson, 2015). This dissertation identifies another significant contributor to failure: failure to form a suitable career goal at high school. If an imagined future career does not come into view so that students know that this is what they must do with their lives, they may lack the passion to develop and commit to study goals. The backstory can be a poor source of information about an AEP student's academic aptitude and may be complicated by issues that negatively impact their experience, including identity conflicts, peer influences, and negative or conflicting parental attitudes.

Emotional response to the institution

The institution where this research was conducted was a regional denominational NUHEP, which is now a university college. It is a small institution by most standards. In the year in which the data for this dissertation were collected, the total student enrolment across two separate campuses was 1537 EFTSL (equivalent full-time student load), with 38 full-time students in the AEP in Semester 1. The four teenage participants appreciated the relaxed feel of the college and quickly felt at home, sensing it was a place where they could thrive. After initial nervousness about making a new start in a new place, they did not find the institution intimidating. Regional students readily feel at home in the expansive rural setting of this regional campus while students from urban areas appear to adapt readily.

Emotional response to the AEP, lecturers, and support staff

Little is known about the emotional responses of teenage AEP students to the teachers and support staff. This study shows that having positive attitudes to an AEP includes more than simply feeling good about being in the course. Students benefit from embracing the full AEP experience, including the assistance of support staff tasked with providing free tutoring and other services. Tutors function like coaches by helping teenage students not just with understanding, writing, and editing assignments, but also with aspects like focus, motivation, and belonging.

Impact of initial self-reflections

Teenage students are likely to start an AEP with a mix of hope, self-belief, self-doubt, and uncertainty about whether they are taking the right course of action. Most have recent memories of a disappointing high school performance. Many may be in danger of repeating past mistakes and letting themselves get too comfortable. They benefit from recognising the AEP as a journey to be shared with peers and teachers, not one to be taken alone. Their initial self-reflections can create an awareness of what has contributed to past academic underperformance, enabling them to make changes as they take their second-chance journey. They are at a crucial crossroads where their maturity is tested as they begin to make decisions about their use of agency as they interact in a new educational interface.

Converting career goals into AEP study goals

This study confirms the claim that AEP students benefit from having an emotional commitment to a long-term employment or career goal that they link to study goals as they engage in the process of forming a college student identity (Whannell & Whannell, 2015). The study also supports the observation that career goals can be motivated by both self-interest and a service orientation (Yeager et al., 2012). The two most successful participants in this study had a service orientation that was not apparent in the other two.

Orientation to study in the opening game

Because younger AEP students appear to be academically less engaged than others, it is important that they receive an effective orientation. For AEP students, this may take as long as six weeks (Levy & Treacey, 2013). While the literature shows that younger AEP students tend to bring a shallow approach to learning, little attention has been paid to the processes involved in the initial orientation of AEP students. This study shows that AEPs can successfully induct teenage students and encourage early academic engagement. Some students engage from the start of the program despite their disappointing high school performance while some fail to engage despite the provisions of the AEP and the efforts of lecturers and tutors to encourage them.

The first assessment

There are few references in the literature to the importance of the first assessment (Debenham & May, 2005). This study provides evidence of the importance of the first assignment, a potential crisis point that tutors can help teenage AEP students navigate successfully. It is also a point that significantly impacts retention (Hodges et al., 2013; Whannell & Whannell, 2015). When the dreams of students are shattered, institutions also lose—in short, nobody benefits.

Management of social relationships plus other distractions

Little has been written about the strategies employed by teenage AEP students in managing their life balance. This study shows how the approaches of four students contributed to their academic outcomes. While some younger AEP students seem to be more interested in socialising than learning, bringing a surface approach to their learning, this is not true of all. The study shows how teenage AEP students

can be agentive in managing competing roles and potential distractions, can maintain their focus and commitment, and can bring a critical approach to their learning.

Agency and self-efficacy

The literature notes that by exercising agency, AEP students can boost their self-efficacy in as little as one month (Habel, 2012). This study supports Habel's finding and demonstrates that rapid progress can be made by teenage AEP students who choose to exercise agency in pursuing their academic goals.

Family support

The importance of family support is recognised in the literature. This study shows the significant advantage that working-class teenage students can gain from having a parent who is a higher education student while they are taking an AEP. And it shows how students who relocate to take an AEP a long way from home can struggle with the loss of ready access to family and traditional sources of support.

Final self-assessments

The self-assessments of the four at the end of their second-chance semester demonstrate how diverse the AEP experience can be for teenage enrolees. They may see themselves as winners, on track to start undergraduate degrees that provide access to future careers. Such "stories of transformation" (Hall, 2015, p. 256) involve an expanding of the identity repertoire to include an identity as a tertiary student. Other responses might be more muted, with students ending the semester almost as confused as they had been at the start. Or they might look back on the experience as a largely wasted academic opportunity, notable mainly for a failure to prioritise study and learn how take a deep interest in academic learning; yet, the experience is not all loss if it has provided valuable life lessons.

Giving voice to students

The student voice does not emerge strongly in the literature (Hellmundt & Baker, 2017). There is often a focus on AEP statistical analysis: attrition, retention, success rates, the effects of age, approaches to study, and so on. As noted above, there is a need for qualitative studies that give prominence to the student voice. This study gives voice to the participants by allowing them to share their experiences, their emotions, and their reflections in their own words—in short, letting them speak for themselves.

Need for longitudinal studies

The need for longitudinal studies has been pointed out (Debenham & May, 2005). The main focus of this study was the lived experience of four students in a single AEP semester, but it adds a longitudinal component by tracking the four participants for several years until three of the four completed baccalaureate degrees.

8.4.3 Limitations of the study

Qualitative studies involving one researcher are necessarily limited in the number of participants that can be managed. This study focuses on a small student sample at a single AEP. Gathering data from a larger number of participants and from multiple sites would provide a fuller picture of the AEP experience. To achieve greater understanding of the lived AEP experience of students, more qualitative studies are needed.

8.5 Conclusion

There is need for AEP education. It is a necessary component of life-long learning for many young Australians who arrive at the end of their school education without having decided what to do with the rest of their lives. In terms of career aspiration, conventional schooling has not delivered for these students. They might have been blinded by an unrealistic vision of turning a favourite pastime or hobby into an unlikely career, or they might have given undue weight to a possibility that beckoned briefly, before proving not to be a good fit. Such false steps can be explained in part by the inexperience of youth. The world of paid work could offer an opportunity to gain life experience and develop more maturity, but in a world of diminishing opportunities for unskilled workers, this may not be the best option in the longer term; nor is work the best alternative for those who make a late decision about what to do next. For a range of reasons, many teenagers leave high school each year without matriculating, including many thousands who decide to seek a second chance to do so. AEPs make a significant contribution for these individuals.

A key finding of this study is that teenage AEP students benefit significantly from having a career goal that has been explored, committed to, and is a good fit. Unless all three of these conditions are met, they may make a false start. They could find their goal is not right for them, or not right for them at this stage in their life. A suitable career goal acts as a powerful incentive to learn how to re-engage with the

student role more effectively than they did at high school. It can contribute to a personal transformation that the student had not thought possible at the start.

The first task of teenage students commencing an AEP is to reflect on their recent high school performance and identify the areas in which they need to improve. They may have done little or no study at high school. They may have studied without enjoying the experience. They may have lacked the courage or motivation to seek needed help. They may have struggled with personal identity issues caused by physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. Whatever the cause of their underperformance at high school, the student needs to face it and put in place strategies to ensure that it does not impede their AEP attempt.

This study demonstrated that teenage AEP students can benefit from finding ways to enjoy study, but their study may continue to suffer if they fail to do this. By experimenting with the strategies that they encounter as part of the AEP, they can discover what works for them. It is important for students to appreciate that new habits can be formed and new ways of thinking, adopted. This study demonstrated that teenage AEP students with a poor academic record can develop through their AEP learning experiences and become effective students within the first month of the AEP.

As learning is a shared experience, teenage AEP students should not plan to take the AEP journey alone. They benefit significantly by finding fellow travellers with whom to share the journey. This study highlights the value of relationships formed with teachers and tutors—even one tutor, not necessarily every tutor. Shared learning experiences should be integral to the AEP curriculum. Also highlighted is the value of family, especially parents, who can help by giving students someone they know they can go to in times of stress or academic crisis. If parents are not in a position to help, students should identify alternative sources of socio-emotional support.

The person teenage AEP students most need to convince that they are up to the AEP challenge is themselves. This study confirmed that by using agency and engaging from Day One, students give themselves the best chance of being successful in their coursework and achieving good grades. This can quickly become

an upward spiral of increasingly effective academic engagement that produces positive outcomes as evidenced in their achieved grades.

The variation in the performance of teenage AEP students is accounted for by the many variations in their personal profiles, including variations in their attitudes to the AEP and the student role, plus variations in other personal factors like flexibility, planning ability, maturity and emotional stability, willingness to engage with others in the educational interface, ability to balance competing roles, and the wide variation in students' self-beliefs. However, the most important source of variability is the use students make of personal agency. The priority they give to activities that move them closer to achieving their life goals (study goals and career goal) contributes significantly to the academic outcome they achieve.

Finally, it is imperative that institutions provide an environment in which teenage AEP students can flourish. When students feel good about the physical and academic environment, the course, and the personnel—especially the lecturers and tutors—they have the best chance of being able to relax and focus on the academic challenges presented by the AEP. These factors have been articulated through the findings of this study.

Postscript

It has been claimed that AEP graduates perform as well as traditional students in subsequent undergraduate study (Chesters & Watson, 2016), a claim based on the findings of Thomas (2014). Thomas, however, noted that his participants "struggled to provide data to support" (p. 811) the claim, leaving it resting on anecdotal evidence. The study reported in this dissertation offers evidence that supports the anecdotal claims of Thomas's participants, in that two of the four participants—Andrew and Jodi—recorded weighted average marks (WAM) half a grade above the institution average in their subsequent undergraduate study. This put them comfortably in the top half of their graduating class. Starting with the best performer, their details are summarised here.

After exiting the DGS, by overloading, Andrew was able to complete a 4-year education degree in a further seven semesters, with a WAM of 73.65—just short of distinction level (75%). The similarity between his DGS average (75.25) and

degree WAM suggests that he had worked consistently throughout his time at college. He is now teaching in a school in a major Australian city and advises that he is *"loving it"*. In his second year out of college, he married the long-term girlfriend he had been dating since senior high school. She, too, had taken the DGS, before completing a teacher education degree at the same institution.

Like Andrew, Jodi was accepted into a teacher education program, after her DGS semester. She was making excellent academic progress when a serious injury forced her to withdraw from study for a semester. This delayed her graduation by a year and gave her a reduced study load in her fifth and final year. Approaching graduation, she was teaching regularly at a nearby government primary school. She completed her degree with a WAM of 74.36, just above Andrew and just below distinction level. She had improved her average mark by almost half a grade over her AEP performance. She now has a full-time teaching position at the government primary school where she had filled in as a relief teacher.

In her second DGS semester, Gaara earned two high passes and a credit (av. 64.3%), after withdrawing late from an art unit. She needed to have passed four units in order to qualify to join the BA program. This meant continuing as a DGS student for a third semester. Her third-semester grades included one high pass and two credits (av. 66%). With one complete semester's worth of credit towards a BA, she was allowed to transfer to the BA program for her fourth semester. Again, she took a reduced study load, earning distinctions for two art units and a very low fail (2%) for a theology unit taken as an elective. Gaara's grades revealed a pattern of doing well in units she enjoyed (average 66.9%) and badly in units she did not enjoy (average 13.5%). Her low grades included four of less than 10 per cent, showing that her problem was non-completion of work, not lack of ability. She completed her BA with a WAM of 50.93. It should be noted that a WAM of 66 is around the average for BA students at this institution. At her graduation, I asked her whether she remembered telling me in her first semester that she just wanted to be *"laid back"*. She did remember and considered that she had not changed. Nevertheless, hers is a success story. Gaara may have taken a scenic route, but she reached her desired destination in the end.

Along with Andrew and Jodi, Ben had taken just one semester to qualify for a place in a degree program. In the first semester of his undergraduate program, he passed three of his four units, but earned zero per cent in a professional teaching unit. Despite seeming to have lost interest in teaching, he enrolled in another teaching unit the following semester. It was not a good semester: he passed just one of his four units, earning 12 per cent in his teaching unit. The following semester, he withdrew from college. The evidence suggested that he had given up on teaching, but it took another disappointing semester for this to occur. Consistently poor results in professional education units were followed by a switch to a 3-year BSc program. This was puzzling as his progress in science units—including biology—had not been encouraging. After battling on for three more semesters on a reduced study load, he switched course again and enrolled in a BA. I still see Ben from time to time. Last time we spoke, he told me he was enjoying his course, but graduation—if he remains in the course—is still some distance off.

It is interesting to compare the high school results of the four participants with their higher education performance. Their high school qualifications saw Ben ranked first (ATAR 50.65), Gaara second (ATAR 42.15), Andrew third (no ATAR), and Jodi fourth (Yr10 leaver). Their performance in degree study exactly reversed this order, with Jodi ranked first (WAM 74.36), Andrew second (WAM 73.65), Gaara third (WAM 50.93), and Ben fourth (degree not completed). For these four students, ATAR appeared to have no predictive value—adding support to the conclusions of others (Blyth, 2014; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Kemp & Norton, 2014; Pilcher & Torii, 2018; Whannell, 2013).

Successfully completing an AEP enables students to dream bigger dreams and pursue careers previously closed to them. The experience can be transformative. I recall the reaction of Jodi's mother after her own success in the DGS and the spontaneous hug she gave me when she successfully completed the course. She has remained in touch and keeps me updated on Jodi's progress. Recently, she sent me a copy of a letter (see Appendix F) received by the public school where Jodi has been teaching since her graduation. Sent by the father of a boy in Jodi's class, the letter is a glowing testimonial to a young teacher he described as a "superstar in her profession". It made me reflect on the Jodi Wetherill that I first met in the DGS class—anxious to make friends, anxious about her lack of knowledge, anxious about

whether she would be able to keep up with the academic workload, and anxious about comparisons with her peers, who had the advantage of two extra years of schooling.

My experience with this AEP has made me aware of many similar success stories. There was the young teacher who started teaching interstate after completing his teacher education degree and several years later won a national teacher of the year award and a trip to a NASA space camp in Alabama, USA. Another young male came into the program after a term in a Victorian Prison and subsequently went on to complete a PhD in his chosen discipline. Many others have completed graduate degrees. So Andrew, Jodi and Gaara—now graduates—are not alone. Around 45 per cent of the students who complete a semester in the DGS go on to complete bachelor's degrees at this institution. Most DGS students start the course as teenagers, some as young as 17. Without an AEP to fall back on, they would be unable to access higher education upon leaving high school. This study has illustrated the value of AEP education to second-chance teenage students and the important contribution it is making to equity in education and to life-long learning. It shows that despite the high attrition rates that are typical of AEPs, the investment in the further education of second-chance, teenage AEP students is not wasted. For many, an AEP is a transformative experience, providing access to professional careers and opportunity to honour the community's faith in them.

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Appendix A Diploma of General Studies

Introduction

The Diploma of General Studies (DGS) is an alternative entry program (AEP) offered by Avondale University College (formerly Avondale College of Higher Education), established in 1897 and located a 40-minute drive from the University of Newcastle, the first university in Australia to institute an AEP, in 1974, the Open Foundation Program (OFP) (May, 2005). The Newcastle region has had a consistent need for pathway education, with the Newcastle AEPs attracting 13 per cent of Australia's AEP students and 20 per cent of commencing students at the University of Newcastle earning entry through its AEPs (McMillen, 2017). Avondale's interest in enabling programs was inspired by the Newcastle example. The DGS was accredited as a 2-year Associate Diploma of General Studies in late 1994, replacing an earlier non-accredited Foundation Studies (FS) course, offered for four years (1991-1994). In 1999, when associate diplomas were rebadged as diplomas, associate was dropped from the name and the course became the Diploma of General Studies. The purpose of the DGS is to increase access to higher education for three main groups of students: recent school leavers who finish Year 12 without earning a qualifying ATAR, students returning to study after one or more gap years, and mature age students. Subgroups include Indigenous students and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), generally referred to now as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) (Gilligan & Outram, 2012). The DGS acts as a pathway for students seeking access to undergraduate courses offered at Avondale; it is not taken as an end in itself.

The first four years

Avondale's Foundation Studies course commenced at the same time as Newcastle's Newstep AEP (Whitson, 1995). FS was not an accredited course and did not lead to an award. The name Foundation Studies was inspired by the University of Newcastle's OFP. However, FS was not a foundation course; from the start, it was a tertiary pathways program. The 15 students in the first intake took a mix of generic and undergraduate units. Almost two thirds (61%) of their units were sourced from the degree courses they aspired to take after articulating from the pathways course, including programs in business, education, and nursing. These FS students shared their degree units with students who had earned direct entry based on qualifications

such as Year 12 results. Their lecturers may have been unaware that they had FS students in their classes. FS students were treated no differently from other students: they attended the same lectures, completed the same assignments, sat the same exams, and were graded using the same criteria.

The study loads of FS students included from one to four degree units, with generic units added to complete a full study load, which at the time was five units (reduced to 4 units in 2004). Six of the 15 students in the class took a reduced load of four units in their FS program. The generic units taken included FT050 Foundation English, a writing course that taught students how to write university-level essays and assignments, and FT052 Foundation for Tertiary Study, a tutoring program offering three hours a week of one-to-one tutorial assistance, but no lectures or coursework. Two students took a unit from a sub-degree course run by the School of Business. This first intake of FS students passed all of their generic units, earning an average grade of 61%, and most of their undergraduate units (56% average). The one degree unit in which they did poorly was a first-year BA unit, Communication and Literature (av. 44%). Of the nine who took this unit, four failed and five passed, two with conceded passes. The two earning conceded passes both went on to complete BN degrees, and two of those that failed repeated the unit and went on to complete teaching awards. Seven of the 15 students in this inaugural FS class completed awards at Avondale—two BEd (Sec), two Dip Teach, and three BN. Their average grades ranged from 59 per cent to 67 per cent (62.14 average).

As FS evolved, the generic units evolved and were expanded. The writing class, FT050 Foundation English, continued to be at the heart of the curriculum, but significant changes were made to FT052 Foundation for Tertiary Study. From the start, the students did not respond well to three hours per week of one-to-one tutoring. This led to FT052 being developed into a coursework unit, focusing on study skills. Two new sub-tertiary units were added: FT060 Keyboard Skills, and FT051 Foundation Maths for those with weak numeracy skills. Adding more generic units shifted the balance of the student workload from being comprised predominantly of degree units to being comprised predominantly of generic units.

Table A1: Foundation Studies performance, 1991-1994

	n	qualify	start	graduate

male	25	21	84%	18	86%	13	72%
female	22	17	77%	14	82%	11	79%
	47	38	81%	32	84%	24	75%

Initially, FS appeared to be a viable course, but numbers dropped to unsustainable levels in the third and fourth years, making it apparent that FS would have to be replaced by an accredited course. In the 4-year life of the FS program, 47 students passed through it. Table A1 provides a summary of the student performance for the period, revealing that just over four out of five earned alternative matriculation and qualified to articulate to an undergraduate program. Most qualifiers (84%) chose to commence undergraduate study at Avondale, and three quarters of these went on to complete Avondale awards, including 9 education awards (mostly BEd degrees), 8 BN degrees, 5 BA degrees, one BBus degree, and one BSc degree. Two of the BN students subsequently completed graduate qualifications at Avondale—one Grad Dip Nurs, one Grad Cert Nurs, and one MN. One of the education graduates returned 15 years later for a change of career and completed a Grad Dip (Min & Theol). Commencing FS with a reading difficulty, this student had taken six and a half years to complete his 4-year BEd (Sec), earning an average grade of 68 per cent. With more maturity and increased academic skills, he completed his 2-year Grad Dip (Min/Theol) in two years, with an average grade of 79 per cent.

In 1994 with FS student numbers declining, Avondale developed plans for a 2-year Associate Diploma of General Studies. Towards the end of the year, accreditation was achieved, and the new program—accredited for 5 years—commenced in 1995.

Accredited DGS to 2014

The 2-year DGS was offered for four consecutive 5-year periods, spanning the years 1995 to 2014. None of the entrants chose to complete the Diploma: all had the intention of using the DGS as a pathway to a degree program. DGS students continued to take a mix of generic units and undergraduate units from Avondale's degree courses. Under former vice president Dr Vivian Watts (2004-2012), the pathways concept was given greater clarity as the paths became more clearly defined. Dr Watts encouraged an open approach to course entry, offering applicants

the challenge of demonstrating that they had the capacity to cope with study at this level.

The generic units continued to evolve and in 2010 their sub-degree codes were replaced by 100-level codes to reflect the academic level at which they had been written. Thus FT050 became GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing [later GSTL15000 Tertiary Writing], and FT052 became GSEN16700 Principles of Tertiary Learning [later GSTL17000 Academic Principles]. The core was extended with the addition of another generic unit, GSTL16000 Reading and Language, focusing on critical reading and providing an introduction to traditional grammar.

As Table A2 shows, in the 20-year period of the accredited 2-year DGS, 1,176 students completed a semester in the DGS program. Around three quarters of these—2 out of 3 males, 4 out of 5 females—qualified to articulate to an undergraduate program at Avondale. More than 90 per cent of these qualifiers chose to accept a place at Avondale, and two thirds were successful in completing a bachelor's degree, mostly in nursing or education, with smaller numbers in theology and business and a few in science. An unknown number who chose not to take up an offer at Avondale completed degree study at other institutions, including the nearby University of Newcastle. The proportion completing a degree at Avondale represents around 45 per cent of the total DGS intake. Given that Australian AEP attrition rates are around 50 per cent (Goggin et al., 2016; Kemp & Norton, 2014; Pilkington & Lock, 2012), this is a positive result. The slightly lower degree completion rate for students articulating from the DGS (cf. FS) might be explained by several considerations. It could be an artefact of the low student numbers involved, the more open entry policy applied for part of the DGS period, increased academic standards, or decreased student quality. The 7 per cent drop (81% to 74%) in the proportion of qualifiers gives credence to the last two suggestions.

Table A2: DGS performance, 1995-2014

	n	qualify		start		graduate	
male	508	341	67%	317	93%	211	66.6%
female	668	527	79%	478	91%	314	65.7%
	1176	868	74%	795	92%	525	66%

Any student wanting to graduate with a DGS in this period would have been required to successfully complete 2 years of full-time study, taking units from the degree programs offered at Avondale. From 2004, this meant earning 96 credit points (1 unit = 6 credit points). No DGS student chose to complete the award across the two decades.

Accreditation crisis

Following a 2008 visit to Avondale, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (2009) produced a report that covered all of Avondale's programs. The report included a number of commendations, including one that related to the DGS: "AUQA commends Avondale College's development of the Diploma of General Studies as an alternative entry pathway and for support given to students" (p. 17). The visiting team had been impressed with the flexibility and effectiveness of the program plus the positive impressions gained from interviews with several DGS students. Briefly, we basked in the glow of this affirmation, but trouble lay ahead.

The year of the AUQA report was the final year of a 5-year accreditation cycle. Avondale was in the process of preparing an application that sought approval to offer the program for a fourth 5-year term. The new application brought a significant change that proposed to reduce the duration of the course from 2 years to 1 year. In practice, the new course length would change nothing as students would continue to use the DGS as a pathway and would not choose to graduate with the Diploma. Most would be enrolled in the DGS for just one semester. The completed accreditation application was sent to the NSW Department of Education and Training in June. The course administrators did not expect any difficulty with the accreditation process as there had been no difficulties with the previous three accreditation cycles, which had provided 15 years of successful DGS operation. In this period, more than 800 students had passed through the course, and 44.7 per cent of the entrants had subsequently completed degrees at this institution. Four of the graduates had gone on to complete an Avondale master's degree, and one is known to have completed a PhD at another institution. The panel that examined the application requested several clarifications, and—when these were dealt with—recommended (10 November 2009) that:

> "Under section 7 of the *Higher Education Act* 2001, the following course of study be accredited for a period of five years: Diploma of General Studies."

Avondale was invited to respond to the Assessment Panel report within one month so that its response could be included with the panel's findings and recommendations when these were referred to the Higher Education Advisory Committee (HEAC). This committee would make a final recommendation to the Department's General Manager, External Relations Policy, the one tasked with making final decisions on accreditation applications. The assembled documents were sent to HEAC, but the outcome was not favourable. After 15 years of operating as a highly successful AEP, the DGS no longer had the support of HEAC as a Higher Education award under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). After considering the HEAC recommendation, the General Manager decided "to seek additional advice on the application's alignment with the requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework" (letter, 23 Feb 2010). Two experts from Victoria were consulted, and they separately offered conflicting opinions, with one agreeing the DGS met the AQF guidelines for a pathway course and one saying the course was not compliant with the AQF. Based on this advice, HEAC recommended (11 May 2010) that the DGS not be accredited as it did not meet the AQF specifications for a higher education course. This advice was accepted and the DGS was not re-accredited.

This outcome was met with disappointment at Avondale. A careful analysis of the report suggested that there were grounds for an appeal. A letter of appeal, written by the president of Avondale, expressed four causes of concern: DET's failure to demonstrate how the application failed to meet the AQF criteria, the contradiction between the decisions of the Accreditation Panel and HEAC on whether the DGS was a higher education course, the fact that Avondale had not been given opportunity to respond to HEAC's concerns, and the unfairness of the procedure that DET had followed. In the appeal, the president wrote, "It is rather ironic that the Australian Universities Quality Agency has recently cited Avondale's DGS as 'best practice' in its field." It seemed that best practice was not good enough.

Responding to the appeal in August 2010, DET set up an internal review panel to examine all the documentation relating to the DGS accreditation process. The panel met (13 Aug) and produced a 7-page report that delivered nine specific findings. In summary, the findings rejected the conclusion that the DGS was a foundation or tertiary preparation course; disagreed with the decision of the General Manager, External Relations Policy not to accredit the course; and recommended that the DGS be "accredited under section 7 of the *Higher Education Act 2001*, for a period of five years" (p. 7). Subsequently, Avondale was advised by letter (13 Sep 2010) that the internal panel had not supported the Department's decision to reject the DGS accreditation application. The course had been reprieved.

The temporary loss of accreditation had a minimal impact on Avondale and on DGS students. In February 2010, while the Department sought external advice on its judgment that the DGS did not meet the AQF criteria for a higher education course, it granted Avondale a six-month extension to the existing DGS accreditation so that the course could be offered until 30 June 2010. This made it possible for the almost 100 students who had already been accepted into the course to proceed with their studies. The one drawback was that no new entrants would be able to commence the course in second semester as the advice restoring accreditation did not arrive until after the start of second semester.

One of the most significant outcomes of this crisis was the removal of the word "foundation" from course documentation. The practice was a hang-over from the pre-accreditation period when the course had been known as Foundation Studies. As noted above, this was a misnomer as most of the units taken by FS students were accredited units from Avondale's degree programs. For some years the core generic units had been written at AQF level 7, but, the writing unit still bore the title Foundation English. The temporary loss of accreditation resulted in a name change for this unit. From 2010, FT050 Foundation English became GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing [later GSTL15000 Tertiary Writing]. It seemed likely that the accreditation crisis had been triggered by faulty nomenclature and a failure to give the generic units codes that reflected their level of academic challenge. Avondale had learned the hard way that names matter.

Self-accreditation and beyond

In late 2014, the DGS was reaccredited for seven years. Around the same time Avondale achieved self-accrediting status as a college of higher education. As this paper is being written, Avondale has just been notified that its application for university college status has been accepted, establishing the right to call itself Avondale University College. The hope is that within 5 years it will be ready to become a university. At this stage, the role of the DGS is unclear as student numbers have declined again. With most Australian universities now offering fee-free AEPs (Baker & Irwin, 2016; Bookallil & Rolfe, 2016), Avondale—a self-funding institution—finds it hard to compete, offering an AEP with tuition costs of around $10,000 per semester.

Student characteristics

The students taking the DGS are a mix of recent school leavers (c. 75%) and mature age students (c. 25%). Up to half are CALD, and many have learning difficulties like ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and dyscalculia—some diagnosed and some not. Also, there are small numbers of Indigenous students and overseas students. Some have been home-schooled, but home-schooling does not necessarily explain the need for an AEP (Jackson, 2014). Indeed, it appears that home-schooling encourages self-regulation and the development of agentive skills (Jackson, 2016). Post-secondary students can be slow to adjust to a new learning environment (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, & Nordström, 2009). In common with other AEP students, DGS students display a range of engagement approaches. Some engage in academically helpful ways and quickly start to develop self-efficacy (Habel, 2012) while others are less engaged. In short, DGS students reflect the levels of study commitment found among AEP students generally, ranging from very high to very low (Hodges et al., 2013). About half of DGS entrants report an ATAR, and ATARs range from 30 or less to just under 60, averaging around 45. Most DGS entrants lack academic self-belief. Their reasons for needing an AEP echo the reasons identified in the literature (Elsom, Greenaway, & Marshman, 2017). Many have had negative experiences of school, and some are alienated, with a predominantly negative attitude to learning. Some have a clear sense of purpose plus a willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve their goals. Even so, most struggle with time management and many find motivating themselves to study a “battle” (Krause, 2005,

p. 4). Despite their battles, as indicated above, three quarters of the intake meet the challenges of the course and qualify to articulate to degree programs. Most of these choose to accept a place in an Avondale degree course, and two thirds of those that commence undergraduate study complete a bachelor's degree at this institution.

Program characteristics

As noted by AUQA, the DGS is a flexible program, comprising multiple pathways. There are four generic units for students with minimal qualifications. These include a writing unit, a study skills unit, a critical reading and language unit, and a religious studies unit. Applicants with an ATAR of 40+ are likely to be offered the option of taking three generic units plus one unit from the degree program of their choice. Those with an ATAR of 45+ might take two generic units and two degree units. Those with an ATAR of 50+ are likely to take one generic unit (usually GSTL15000 Tertiary Writing) and three degree units. And those with an ATAR of 55+ are likely to be placed on Path 4, enabling them to take four units from the degree of their choice. Regardless of the path taken, DGS students qualify to articulate to an undergraduate program by passing their four units.

Table A3 illustrates the five DGS pathways for students aspiring to articulate from DGS into a Bachelor of Nursing program. Path G involves the four core generic units. Paths 1 to 4 involve substituting units from the nursing degree for the core DGS units. A student on Path 4 takes the same four units as a first-semester nursing student with direct entry to the nursing program. For students intending to articulate to different degree programs, for example a Bachelor of Education or a Bachelor of Business, Paths 1 to 4 would involve substituting education or business units for the core DGS units. Many permutations and combinations are possible, illustrating the AUQA observation that the DGS is a very flexible program.

Table A3: Five DGS pathways

Path G	GSTL15000	GSTL16000	GSTL17000	CHST16100
Path 1	GSTL15000	GSTL16000	GSTL17000	NURS10013
Path 2	GSTL15000	GSTL17000	NURS10015	NURS10013
Path 3	GSTL15000	NUSC10057	NURS10015	NURS10013
Path 4	NURS10011	NUSC10057	NURS10015	NURS10013

Academic support is available for all students in the form of free one-to-one tutoring, in a study room in the Avondale library, from Monday to Friday. This includes help with essay and assignment writing, managing a study program, and numeracy. In the core units, the curriculum makes extensive use of exemplars and scaffolding (Gibbs, 2014; McNaught & Benson, 2015; Pittaway, 2012). Student-staff relationships are valued and encouraged (Rowe et al., 2015). A natural advantage for Avondale is the small size of most classes. Given that Avondale is a university college, DGS students enjoy the enriching experience of sharing classes with undergraduate students. Their classmates and lecturers might be unaware they are not enrolled in a degree program. The DGS was set up to be a pathway, and entrants anticipate exiting the DGS at the first opportunity so that they can enrol in a degree program. Most qualify to do this in one semester. When they move on, they take with them the academic credit earned for degree-specific units taken in the DGS program. Those on Path 4 move directly into the second semester of the degree program.

DGS Graduates

Until 2014, to complete the DGS required two years of full-time study. No DGS student chose to complete the 2-year DGS. All successful students chose to articulate to a degree program instead. However, one overseas student taking a Bachelor of Arts took the opportunity to graduate with a Diploma of General Studies as an exit strategy rather than return to Europe empty handed after running out of time to complete a BA. This made him the only student to graduate with a 2-year DGS. He had never been enrolled in the DGS but had earned the academic credit required to graduate. In 2015, the year the DGS became a 1-year diploma, a former DGS student chose to graduate with a DGS. After exiting the DGS several years earlier, he had enrolled first in a BA program and then in a BEd (Prim) program, without completing either award. This made him the first to graduate with a 1-year DGS. At the time of writing, he is still the only former DGS student to have graduated with a DGS.

Staff

Setting up the DGS did not require a significant increase in Avondale's teaching staff. No additional full-time staff members were added to teach the

inaugural Foundation Studies class in 1991. One sessional lecturer was hired on contract to teach FT050 Foundation English, and half a dozen tutors were hired to conduct 3 hours a week of one-on-one tutorials for 11 of the 15 enrolees. Most of the teaching was absorbed by existing staff. For example, FS supplied the teacher of HR100, a core first-year Christian studies unit for the degree programs, with 15 extra students; and it supplied the teacher of EN100, a core first-year degree unit in communication and literature, with 10 extra students. In this way, Foundation Studies students were absorbed into seven degree units and one business certificate unit. In summary, almost two thirds (63.8%) of the extra teaching was absorbed by existing staff. The contracted FT050 teacher was an experienced teacher with a graduate qualification in English language teaching. The tutors were qualified teachers, including one with a master's degree.

From the middle of 1991, responsibility for the fledgling FS program was given to a new staff member who had been hired to set up an ELICOS (English language intensive courses for overseas students) program. He continued to teach FT050 and to develop other core units for the program. Under his guidance, the core DGS units evolved into 100-level units that could be used as credit towards some Avondale degree programs. At the time of his retirement in 2018, he was teaching three of the core DGS units, GSTL15000 Effective Writing, GSTL16000 Reading & Language, and GSTL17000 Academic Principles. By this time, he had earned two master's degrees and was partway through a doctoral study, examining the student experience of pathway education. A considerable body of literature supports the contention that the quality of teachers and teaching matters for AEP students and students transitioning to higher education (Coates, 2011; Hellmundt & Baker, 2017; Kinzie & Kuh, 2017; Komarraju et al., 2010; Zepke & Leach, 2010; Zepke, Leach & Butler, 2014). The evidence, including student feedback, suggests that the teachers involved in teaching DGS students are of high quality and passionate about their role. All have master's degrees, many have doctoral degrees, and all are experienced in teaching at this level. Also, due to the impact of the DGS program over the years, all are experienced in relating to students from the pathways program.

Conclusion

The DGS has made a significant contribution to Avondale University College. A high point was reached in 2013 when 19.6 per cent of those completing undergraduate degrees had qualified for entry to their degree program via the DGS. After completing their degrees, most of these students commence professional careers in nursing, teaching, and pastoral ministry, while the smaller numbers completing degrees in arts, business or science start careers in areas suited to those qualifications. Because Avondale is a small institution, offering a limited range of degrees, some successful DGS students find places at other universities where they take degrees not available at Avondale. From time to time, past graduates return to upgrade their qualifications. Some former DGS students complete master's degrees and at least one has completed a PhD. He had enrolled at Avondale after serving time in gaol. His difficulties and troubled experience of education were due, in part, to an undiagnosed learning difficulty that was detected by the DGS staff. With increased self-understanding, he was able to develop the learning strategies that he needed for success. AEPs like the DGS will continue to function as second-chance programs as long as young people finish high school without forming a clear idea of what they want to do with their lives. For many, it will prove a transformative experience that contributes to their life-long learning and enables them to pursue careers that would otherwise not have been available to them.

Appendix B Information and Consent Forms

INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

RESEARCH TITLE: Evaluation of the impact on students of Avondale's Diploma of General Studies as reflected in student stories of education

RESEARCHER: David Potter

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROJECT

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research project to gather student stories of education in which you will share your perceptions of the impact of Avondale's Diploma of General Studies (DGS). This journey of self-discovery is part of the researcher's PhD project.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The DGS has been operating for 21 years. In 2011 the total number of students to enrol in the course passed 1000. Data have been collected for all the students who have been involved in the course. The purpose of the project is to evaluate the impact of the DGS using the stories of students involved in the program in first semester [year].

PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

Participation is voluntary. All DGS students will be invited to participate. At a later stage a small number of participants will be invited to participate in interviews. Again, participation is voluntary.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR INCONVENIENCES

The ethics process requires that participants be notified of possible risks and inconveniences should they choose to participate. There are no risks associated with participating in this research. The only slight inconvenience will be the time involved in participating. For a small number of volunteers, there will be the extra time involved in the interviews. The information you provide will be confidential and will not be used in such a way that your identity is revealed.

BENEFITS

You can benefit from the opportunity to reflect on your experience of education and from your participation in a research project. In the longer term, DGS students will benefit from any course improvements that arise from the insights the research provides. Pathway education is making a significant contribution to the federal government's objective of widening participation in higher education. Avondale's DGS is part of this process.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

Data collected from you during the research will remain within the confidence of the researcher. Reports will not identify individual students. Data will be kept secure in a locked office accessed only by the principal investigator at Avondale College and stored for five years after completion of the study. All data will be de-identified.

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

The data collected will be used in a PhD thesis. It may also be used in scholarly papers written for publication in journals such as the FYHE Journal and in presentations at professional conferences. Confidentiality of individual participants will be assured. In any presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

FREEDOM OF CONSENT

Your participation in this study is voluntary and there is no payment to students for their participation. Please note that you are free to choose not to take part in this research and you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason. Withdrawing will not disadvantage you or impact your final grade.

Any questions about the above information can be obtained by contacting David Potter at Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW 2265; phone (02) 4980 2152; email david.potter@avondale.edu.au

This research project has been approved by the Avondale college Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to Avondale's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW 2265; phone (02) 4980 2121; fax (02) 4980 2117; email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au

For Consent Form, see next page.

[Institution logo]

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH TITLE: Evaluation of the impact on students of Avondale's DGS [the title evolved with the project]

RESEARCHER: David Potter

I, _____ agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.

I have read and understood the information provided in the Information Statement to Research Participants.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement to Research Participants, a copy of which has been given to me to keep.

I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to filling out the 2-page document, My Story, and allowing the researcher to use my story in his thesis in a way that does not reveal my identity or compromise me in any way.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C Ethics Approval

*Response to revised ethics application

Ethics approval



From the Office of the Vice President
(Administration and Research)
Email: vivienne.watts@avondale.edu.au
Tel: 02 4980 2120
Fax: 02 4980 2117

14 April 2011

Mr David Potter
Faculty of Arts & Theology
Avondale College
PO Box 19
COORANBONG NSW 2265

Dear David

Thank you for submitting your revised application and supporting documents to the Avondale College of Higher Education Human Research Ethics committee for your project titled: *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Avondale's Diploma of General Studies*.

The committee reviewed the revised documentation at its meeting on 31 March 2011 and was satisfied with the content. Therefore, I am pleased to advise that final approval has been granted for your project *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Avondale's Diploma of General Studies* for the duration of your project till 31 December 2011, (project number [2011:05]).

The following additional standard conditions apply:

1. That you notify the committee of any changes to circumstances or research design, which might require a review of the ethics approval.
2. That you provide an annual interim report of your progress to the committee, and a final report once this project is completed. The first report will be due twelve months from the date you commence the research.

We wish you well in this valuable research endeavour.

Sincerely

V. Watts

Dr Vivienne Watts
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix D Tools for Data Creation

Introduction

Apart from the three rounds of interviews, most of the data creation tools were written as coursework for two DGS units, GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing and GSEN16700 Principles of Tertiary Learning.

Table: Tools for Data Creation

1. Pre-enrolment placement piece

Document 1 was a placement piece written by DGS applicants before they were accepted into the course. It had a two-fold purpose. For those without a qualifying ATAR (45), it provided evidence for their application for special entry. And for all applicants, it gave an indication of the academic path best suited to their needs. Those with an ATAR over 54 and good writing and numeracy skills might be placed on Path 4, which enabled them to take four units from the degree they aspired to take. In most cases, this meant they would be taking the same academic load as direct-entry undergraduate students. For example, a DGS student who aspired to study nursing would take the four first-semester BN units. Those without an ATAR and found to be in need of extra help with literacy, numeracy and study skills would be enrolled in four generic skills units. In between these two paths were paths offering mixes of generic units and degree-specific units. Regardless of their path, passing the four units qualified them to articulate to their desired undergraduate program in their second semester.

2. A New Beginning

This tool was distributed on the first day of classes in Week 1, before the research participants had been selected. It was distributed to every student taking GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing. It took the form of a single A4 page containing the following instruction plus 24 lines on which to write.

Protocol: So here you are, enrolled at [college name]; a new semester has begun. This is the start of the rest of your life. Tell me what it feels like to be commencing your new journey as a higher education student.

3. My Story

This tool was distributed on the second day of classes in Week 1. It was a double-sided A4 page requesting several items of demographic information and inviting responses to a series of open-ended narrative items. Students were not required to return the form, and those returning it were not required to attach their name to it (this advice was included on the form). Most chose to return the form, with around half choosing to attach their name. For each of the open-ended items, four or five lines were provided for written responses.

My Story

Please record some information about yourself here.

M / F Age: …… yr ATAR / OP: ……..

At home the language I speak all/most of the time is ……

List any language other than English that is regularly used at your home:

……

Now, please tell me a little about your background.

☺ Tell me about your parents and family, their level of education and their attitude to education.

☺ Tell me about your schoolmates, especially the ones you hung out with.

☺ My favourite teacher would have described me as

……

☹ My least favourite teacher would tell you that I

……

☺ My best memory from school was

……

☺ Some of the things I enjoyed doing away from school include

……

☺ For me, the last couple of years of life have been memorable because ……

☺ Tell me how your family members feel about your being at college this semester ……

☺ Describe your first impressions of [the college] ……

☺ Tell me how you feel about being in the DGS course and what you hope to gain from it ……..

☺ Apart from study, what other things are important to you at the moment? ……

Thank you for your response. It will be treated with confidence.

4. Folio 1

This tool was the first marked assignment for GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing. Due at the end of Week 2, it was worth 10 per cent of the final grade for the unit. The recommended length was 350 words. Having completed Year 12 the previous year, most of the class had no post-school experience, but several had taken gap years and one was a mature-age student.

Protocol: Outline the story of your educational journey up to this point, focusing on your school and post-school experience.

5. Interview 1

The first round of interviews took place in Week 5. These semi-structured interviews were conducted in my office and recorded on a small digital recorder. The participants were a little nervous about being recorded at first, but readily shared their stories and responded to questions. While they showed no reticence, their responses tended to be short. The interviews ran for 20-30 min each.

Protocol. I began by reminding the participants that this was their story of education. I then used an interview guide containing prompts about:

- Their backstory, including family attitudes and experiences in relation to formal education
- Their own attitudes and experience of school education
- Community influences that affected their attitude to education
- Their experience of the transition to college and their first month in the AEP
- How they would sum up their education journey (story of education) thus far
- Particular issues arising from their document data

6. Learning style essay

The learning style essay, written as an assignment for GSEN16700 Principles of Tertiary Learning, was due in Week 5.

Protocol. Based on the course readings and your own research, write a 500-word analysis of your personal learning style.

7. Folio 3

This was the third of four folio writing pieces that were part of the coursework for GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing. The two reflective pieces, Folio 1 and Folio 3, provided useful data for this study. The suggested length for Folio 3 was 350 words.

Protocol. Write a short reflection on your transition to college in the first half of this semester.

8. Academic culture essay

The 1,000-word academic culture essay, a major written assignment for GSEN16700 Principles of Tertiary Learning, was due in Week 11. The essay would reveal what students had learned about learning processes and about themselves as learners and would provide an opportunity for self-evaluation.

Protocol. What do you see as the salient features of academic culture? To what degree have you embraced academic culture this semester? Is there anything you

wish you had done differently? In what ways have you become a more critical thinker?

9. Reflective Journal

Journal writing was encouraged in GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing. A first foray into journal writing, it was made an optional assessment tool. Those who kept an acceptable 1,500-word journal were not required to sit the final exam for the unit. Exactly one third of the class (7 of 21) chose to keep a journal, including three of my four research participants. This small response rate surprised me as keeping a journal seemed like an attractive option.

Protocol. Keep a reflective journal, in which you record your thoughts and feelings about your student experience this semester (your journey as a learner).

When it became apparent that many students were not sure what to write in their journals, I provided further guidance in the form of suggestions like these: "After a week at college, I'm feeling…" // Write about your willingness to consult the tutors and discuss academic issues with peers // "After a month at college, my hopes and academic plans are…" // "For me, writing the 1,200-word essay was…" // "My most effective study strategy is…"

9. GSEN15000 Final Examination

The final exam was an alternative assessment tool for students who chose not to keep a reflective journal—two thirds of the class. The exam (2hr, 10min) asked students to respond to three questions. Question 1 invited them to reflect on their experience in the GSEN15000 class. Question 2 invited them to write a response to one of six questions on reading topics discussed in the weekly tutorials. Question 3 invited them to choose one of seven short quotations (also taken from the weekly tutorial topics) to critique. Only the responses to the reflective writing question, Question 1, are relevant to this research project.

Protocol. Question 1: Reflect on your personal commitment and willingness to engage in study this semester. Identify the main strengths and weaknesses of your approach to study. Do you plan to change your approach next semester? Discuss the contribution of this unit to your learning.

10. Interview 2

The second round of interviews was conducted in the last two weeks of the semester. These interviews began with individualised questions that related to issues arising in the participant data and ended with a set of standard prompts. Because of their differing experiences, the conversation took different turns for each participant.

Protocol. The standard prompts invited the participants to comment on their AEP semester:

- How they had found the college as a place to study
- Their most important sources of socio-emotional and academic support
- How their story of education had developed
- What had happened to their goals and their self-belief
- Moments of deep insight they may have experienced
- Crises they may have faced
- Unresolved issues remaining to be dealt with
- Their time use and academic engagement
- The AEP itself
- Their expectations about passing the AEP
- Their plans for the next semester
- How they had been impacted by our Week 5 recorded conversation

11. Observations

I kept a record of researcher observations in an electronic reflective journal, in which I noted casual conversations and comments plus anything that related to the participants' performance of the student role. I was interested in their story of education and evidence that they were forming a college student identity.

12. Interview 3

Interviews conducted after the participants' AEP semester ended were more informal. Some were recorded, some were not. The main purpose was to keep in touch with the participants and let them know that I continued to have an interest in their stories of education and was looking forward to seeing them complete their degree and graduate as three of the four have now done.

Appendix E Participant Narratives

Introduction

This appendix presents the four vignettes of the four research participants. Each vignette begins by outlining the backstory of the participant and describing their early experience of schooling and their general attitude to study before commencing the AEP. The research project documents their academic journey in their first semester at college as AEP students. Most of the documents from which the narratives have been reconstructed were produced by the participants themselves, including reflective writing pieces, and reflective journal writing. These documents have been supplemented by interview data and researcher observation data. The narratives reveal the degree to which each participant was successful in adding a student identity (Whannell & Whannell, 2015) to their integrated sense of self (Vignoles, 2017). To enhance readability and ensure that the participants' voices are clearly heard, the narratives are written as first-person accounts. The narratives blend verbatim quotations taken from the participant data with paraphrases that summarise sections of data. Written in the form of nonfiction "impressionist tales" (Gullion, 2016, p. 37), the accounts are designed to invite the reader into the stories of the participants. Most of the data were gathered in the participants' first semester at college while they were enrolled in the DGS.

To support the credibility and trustworthiness (Polkinghorne, 2007) of the narratives, text boxes have been used to insert quotations taken from the participant data. These illustrate the close relationship between the text of the narratives and the data on which the narratives are based. All of the ideas and most of the actual words are taken from the participant data. Textboxes are also used to insert researcher observations plus a postscript to each of the four narratives.

The narratives are presented in a particular sequence. Andrew's comes first because he was the most successful of the four, earning the highest average grade for his four DGS units (75.25%). He was also the first of the four to complete a degree. Jodi's narrative is second because her average DGS grade (70.5%) ranked her second. She was also the second of the four to complete a degree. Gaara's narrative is presented third despite the fact that her average grade (45.4%) was by far the lowest of the four. Nevertheless, she made better degree progress than Ben, whose narrative is presented last. Ben's average DGS grade (67.75%) was not far behind

Jodi's, but it took him longer than the others to find himself after he articulated into a degree program. At the time of writing, it is not yet clear that he has truly established himself as a student. Of the four, he had been the top Year 12 qualifier (ATAR 50.65). Yet, several years after leaving the DGS, he appears to be still wandering in a wilderness of self-doubt and academic uncertainty and is a long way from completing a degree.

Andrew's Narrative

My name is Andrew, and this is my story of education. Let me tell you about myself. My mother is Australian, my biological father is Asian, and the man I know as 'dad' is Polynesian. My mother married my step-dad when I was an infant. My parents were not university graduates but they were keen for me to have a good education. So they sent me to a small church primary school. When I was halfway through primary school, they found my school fees a bit of a struggle. In Grade 4, I transferred to a government school. At the new school, I made a new group of friends from whom I picked up the habit of ignoring school work and focusing on everything else instead. It was frustrating for my teachers. They all would have said the same thing about me: "Andrew could be a good student, but he lacks focus in class." My Grade 6 teacher, Mr Williamson, believed I had potential. He took an interest in my progress and built me up so that I started to aim higher. Having a changed attitude to schoolwork paid off as my Year 6 report showed.

> "From a young age my parents wanted me to attend a private school and get myself a good education, so I started kindy at [name] Church Primary School. In Year 3 I left because my parents found the fees too dear, and I attended [name] Public School. I started at this new school in Year 4, where I made a new group of friends from whom I picked up the habit of ignoring my school work. I focused more on everything else and not what I should have. A teacher by the name of Mr Williamson saw the potential that I had for school and recommended that I attend his Year 6 class. Mr Williamson built me up and changed my attitude. I started to aim high and it showed on my Year 6 report." (Week 2 reflective writing)

In my last year of primary school, my family started talking about moving away from the city. They were keen to send me back to church school. And it wasn't

just mum and dad. My grandparents were offering to pay my school fees at a church school in the country. So we moved. At my new high school, I kept a low profile at first. But it wasn't long before I got comfortable and started focusing more on sport than on study. I was restless and always had to be moving. Sport was fun. I was good at it. Reading didn't interest me, and writing seemed like a complete waste of time. No matter how hard I tried, I never seemed to get very good marks for my writing. School, for me, was all about sport. I'd just do the sport and not really bother with schoolwork. I represented the school in basketball and football and captained the school athletics team when we won the championship for 18-year-olds at the regional independent schools championships. Rugby league was my passion. I played at school and out of school and dreamed of becoming a professional footballer and playing in the NRL.

"My grandparents actually wanted me to go to [names church school], and, um, they said they were going to pay for it if I went. They really were pushing me to go to a private school rather than a public school because they thought the education there was better. That's when me [*sic*] and the family moved up from [the city] so that I could attend [church high school]." (Week 12 interview)

"[At school] I wasn't a reader much at all." (Interview 3)

Andrew readily agreed with the suggestion that he probably didn't enjoy writing either: "Nah, no, not much [laughing]." (Interview 3)

"[Sport] played a huge role in my life at school because from Year 8 till Year 12 was all about sport for me. I'd just do the sport and not really bother with work … Sport played a huge role in my school life and it wasn't really for the good." (Week 5 interview)

I was so committed to rugby league that by Year 11 I had decided not to bother trying for an ATAR. But in Year 12, I began to wonder whether sport would take me as far as I dreamed of going. Perhaps I should have put more effort into my education. In school, I'd been the class clown—which didn't endear me to the teachers. They knew I could have been doing better academically. Some of them would have said that I was a useless student who had let the school down. "His skills are not where they should be and he has a lot to work on before he goes anywhere in

life," they would have said. More generous teachers would have described me as a student who could achieve whatever he wanted if he would stop playing the clown.

One thing I did know for sure: I had no intention of becoming a school teacher. There were already enough teachers in the family. Even my grandmother trained as a teacher. I wouldn't be like them. I'd chart my own course. Some of my school teachers I found quite boring. But, in senior high school, I developed good relations with several teachers. In class, I sometimes found myself thinking about how I would do things differently for the sake of kids who struggled with learning—kids like me, who preferred to be more active and hated being stuck at a desk. Now, why would I have such thoughts? I wasn't planning to be a teacher. I hated study. I planned to stay as far away from study as possible. Rugby league was my future.

"I got taught by … a lot of boring teachers too. I sat there in class and every now and then I got to thinking how I could change class to make it better for those kids that struggled just like I did." (Week 5 interview)

"Coming straight out of high school I wanted to stay away from study as much as I was able to." (Week 1 reflective writing)

Finishing Year 12 without an ATAR, I managed to get an apprenticeship at a well-known restaurant. My plan was to work there while I continued preparing myself for professional football. When the apprenticeship didn't work out, I needed a Plan B. It was then that I began listening to my parents and several of my former high school teachers. They were all urging me to go to college. "You'd make a great teacher," they insisted. I thought about how I had struggled at school, about how lots of kids struggle at school. Maybe I could make learning more interesting for kids who were not engaged by traditional classroom learning. But without an ATAR, what hope did I have of getting into teaching?

At the time, my father was halfway through a 4-year theology degree at a local college of higher education. I knew the college well. I'd played basketball there. It was not a good memory. There had been an incident on the court that still made me cringe. I was aware that many of my best mates from high school were enrolling in courses at that college. I decided to investigate a pathways course at the college. Perhaps I could use it as a second chance to get into teaching. If I was

successful, I could overload and catch up with my mates and graduate with them in four years.

This is how I came to enrol in the AEP at my father's college, the college where my grandmother had completed her teaching degree some 40 years earlier. My first day at college was very nerve wracking. I was nervous because it was a new start and I didn't know what to expect from tertiary education. I knew what to do on a football field or a basketball court, but my classroom skills didn't match my sporting skills. I doubted my reading and writing ability and knew I had poor time management. I feared I might be setting myself up for more academic failure. Yet, I was excited to be commencing my new journey at college. It made me feel good to know that I was making my family proud. Perhaps I could make them even prouder by acing the course and finishing a degree. I determined to give it my best shot and see what I could achieve. I knew it would be a juggling act as I was still attending football training twice a week and would soon be playing matches every weekend. I also had a serious girlfriend. We'd been going steady since I was in Year 11.

"I am very excited to be at college on my new journey as it is making my family proud of me. Knowing that my family is behind me will push me to succeed and do well in my degree." (Week 1 reflective writing)

Researcher observation: Andrew was a kindred spirit. Having been consumed by sport at his age, I was anxious to see how he would manage to balance sport and study—anxious because in my early years at college, I had not achieved a healthy balance. Would Andrew succeed where I had failed? Time would tell.

It's exciting to be starting college. I might not have a good track record as a student, but I'm a winner on the sporting field. I've decided to treat study like a game and do what I have to do to be a winner. My father has encouraged me in this. He once told me that if I won at one point in my life, I'd win in other areas too. But I know I have to be strategic. In my school days, I'd start the year well enough. Then I'd get comfortable, my attitude would change, and I'd lose focus. I don't want this to happen at college. I want to have a positive first semester that will set a trend for

the next four years. For this to happen, I know I have to get control of my social life. I don't plan to get too social at college. To help me stay away from the social side of college life, I've decided to lock myself away in the college library and bury myself in study.

"I find myself sitting in the library every day and just staying away from the social side of college." (Week 3 journal entry)

"Whenever I am free at college I find myself camped in the library doing work. This enables me to focus and not get distracted by others." (Week 6 journal entry)

It's ironic. For someone who, a few months ago, vowed to stay away from study, I'm facing a serious load of reading and writing in each of my four college units. I will have to be organised. My first assignment, due at the end of Week 2, is a 350-word reflection on my experience of education. It's been easy enough to write as it's about me and doesn't require any research. After writing a draft, I took it to one of the free college tutors. I knew it wasn't perfect. Sure enough, the tutor found many mistakes that I had to fix. I went back to him four times before submitting a final draft. I'm really happy with my mark for this assignment. I've made the start to college that I'd been hoping for. This is really encouraging and has given me a huge boost. It's helped me stay focused and reinforced my determination not to allow peers or anything else to distract me. I must continue to start assignments early and stay ahead of the game. I really appreciate the free tutoring service that the college provides. It's a great help to pathway students like me.

"I was really happy with my mark for this assignment. It was the start to college that I was hoping for." (Week 3 journal entry)

"The tutors have been an awesome help to me." (Week 5 journal entry)

Having decided to study alone to avoid distractions, I'm anxious about group tasks. But in Week 4 I worked with two of my peers, James and Henry, on a group tutorial to be presented in Week 6 in one of my education units. Perhaps I should explain. My four units include two generic skills units plus two units from the first semester of the education degree. The generic units include a writing unit and a

study skills unit. Working with James and Henry was the first of several new experiences for the week. The other day, I borrowed my first book from the college library. For some reason, borrowing the book made me feel nervous. I've been at college nearly a month and am still adjusting to the new experiences I'm having. I hope the book will help with a 500-word essay that's due next week. As if that isn't enough, we've also begun critique writing. I've never written a critique before and I'm struggling to write it. I'll spend as much time with the tutors as I can until I get the hang of it. I'll also visit the lecturer to see what he can share with me about critique writing.

"I went to see the lecturer a couple of times to learn how to write a critique." (Week 4 journal entry)

After a month at college, I'm very happy with the way I'm going. But I feel I could be doing better in my assignments. I could be doing better with time management, too. To help, I've set goals for myself—not just for this semester, but also for next semester. My sense of hope is quite high; it isn't as high as it could be, but I feel sure it will there by the end of the semester. I got my 500-word essay finalised and checked by the tutor, and emailed it to the lecturer. I'm very happy with my mark (75%). This has really boosted my confidence. The tutors have been a great help with my writing. Larry, the senior tutor, has told me that I can write good essays. But I feel I'm still struggling to make the sentences flow. I'm very worried about the 1200-word essay that's due in less than two weeks. I've done some reading research, and it's time to start writing, but I've been putting it off.

"After a month of college I am very happy with the way that I am going … I have set goals for myself … My sense of hope is quite high; it isn't as high as I want it to be but I will get it there by the end of the semester … I got my [500-word essay] mark back and I was really happy with the mark that I achieved. I got 75% in my essay. I have boosted my confidence in college with getting the marks I have been achieving." (Week 5 journal entry)

I'm enjoying having my father at college. He's been a big influence in my life. He and mum always put education first in my life. In high school, when I was

playing a lot of sport and neglecting study, dad banned me from sport for a while. Looking back, I have to admit that while sport played a huge role in my school life, it wasn't always for the best. Dad did his best to try to keep me on track. In senior high school, he gave me a curfew. He insisted that I be home by 10.00 p.m. on the one night a week when I visited my girlfriend. She lived quite a distance away, so I had to drop her home by 9.00 p.m. Dad also gave me advice about how to study. When I was in Year 12, he told me I should stick my study notes up on the wall and walk around the room rehearsing them to myself. I tried it and it worked. It's a method I should have used much earlier. Dad played a big part in encouraging me to come to college. He tried to interest me in teaching. He used to say, "Look, I think you'd be a good teacher. You really should go and do teaching." Having him studying at college is helping me to engage. I'm getting my assignments done—not just finishing them on time, but getting most of them done a week before they are due.

"Having him [my father] here at the same time has really impacted me." (Week 5 interview)

Having started the semester strongly, I'm pushing myself to keep going. I'm studying my butt off and finding plenty of time to study. I spend all day at college, beavering away in the library until five or six o'clock in the afternoon. I'm really picking up academically. It feels good. I know that if I can stay focused, even focus a bit more, I'll have a good semester. While I'm busy with study, I'm also going to football training twice a week as well as playing football every Sunday in the local competition. It's a balancing act, but I have surprised myself how well I am managing. My initial fears about being a college student have passed, and I'm feeling more comfortable. Only one thing has let me down, my 1200-word essay, due at the end of Week 6. This was my first major writing task, the most demanding writing task I've ever attempted. The other writing we've done has involved reflective pieces that don't require much research. This one, I left till the last minute. It was the first of two big essays that I had to write, and I procrastinated over both of them. Looking back, I wish I hadn't put them off for so long as I got good marks for

both of them. Had I not left them to the last minute, I probably would have earned higher grades.

> "I'm finding enough time to study … I mainly spend my time in the library until about five or six o'clock in the afternoon. I study my butt off." (Week 5 interview)

I've discovered that I am a visual learner and that I learn by doing. I like to dive in and get things done, without wasting time. Being a social person, I enjoy working and studying in groups as ideas came to me easier this way. I enjoy motivating others and being motivated by them. I work best when I take short bursts of activity every 30 minutes to give my body some time away from the books. I prefer listening and talking rather than writing. It's been helpful for me to discover both my strengths and my weaknesses and recognise that my weaknesses have been holding me back from being a fully productive learner. These weaknesses include a lack of attention to planning, a seeming inability to work for long periods, a low level of interest in study, and a tendency to procrastinate, especially with writing tasks. When studying at home, I often find myself cleaning my room, or clearing my closet, or doing something else when I should be studying. I need to make two big changes. First, I have to learn how to plan. This will improve my efficiency and make study a lot less stressful. And second, I need to find a way to enjoy studying. I think this will help me learn more quickly. I'm in a hurry. I want to get study over with and get on with my life.

> "I work best when I have short bursts of activity every 30 minutes to give my body some time away from my work." (Week 5 reflective writing)
> "Planning is the main factor that I will have to strengthen in the short term. This is because if I can make planning a strength then this will allow me to reduce my working time and make my study a lot less stressful. I also need to find a way to enjoy studying and be able to help myself learn faster." (Week 5 reflective writing)

Half a semester has flown by. Easter and mid-semester break have arrived. Being up to date with my work feels good. It's time I took a break. The 1200-word essay has been my biggest challenge. My experience with writing in high school haunted me so badly that I put off getting started. I did some early reading but didn't

actually start writing the essay till the week it was due. I put a lot of pressure on myself with this essay, and my family copped all of my pressure and stress. My family are one of the biggest support systems I have. I go to them for help, and I go to them when I'm down and upset about my college journey. They're always supportive. It's not just emotional support. As a current student, my dad is full of practical support that helps with my study program.

"The 1200-word essay was a bit of a struggle. I never enjoyed doing essays in high school because I would put so much time and effort into it and I would achieve a low mark. I [did] not bother with essays because I got discouraged doing them; although, I did start the 1200-word essay the week it was due. I had borrowed some books from the library … and had done some research. After this I didn't look at the essay until the week it was due. I put a lot of pressure on myself with this essay and my family copped all of my pressure and stress." (Week 7 journal entry)

I started the second half of the semester with a completely different mindset. I've met every challenge the course has thrown at me, including the 1200-word essay. I'm averaging four to five hours of study each day and am easily keeping up with the workload. While I'm naturally sociable, I've learnt that I study best when I'm alone and have nothing and no one to distract me. I'm visiting the tutors regularly, especially Larry. My writing is improving. Larry found only two spelling errors and one grammatical error in the last piece I wrote. In my journal, I wrote, "I'm really happy because I can now see myself writing better and learning from my mistakes." I'm becoming an independent learner. In the process I surprised myself with the way I've adapted to college and kept a regular, positive attitude towards my workload. Being responsible for my own fees is a factor that keeps driving me. I know that spending more than four years at college is not an option.

"Yesterday was a solid day of study. 5 hours of study was good for me as I completed a number of different activities and assignments. I am up to date with my assignments and my study time was very exceptional. I am averaging about 4-5 hours of study each day which is really helping me." (Week 7 reflective writing)

However, I still see essays as a weak point. Not being naturally good at essay writing, I tend to leave them till the last minute and then feel discouraged. I've finally decided that I have to take my weaknesses head on and show myself that I'm capable of completing essays at the level required in tertiary education. I've set myself a goal. Before I finish college, I plan to earn a high distinction for at least five essays. I saw myself step up my game in the first half of the semester and found it satisfying. I'm getting through the work and passing all my subjects. What remains is for me to turn my weaknesses into strengths. From my sporting experience, I know that this is what winners do.

"I have seen myself step up my game in the first semester at college and I am enjoying it. I get my assignments in on time and the best thing about it is that I'm passing all my subjects." (Week 5 reflective writing)

As I think about it late in the semester, I recognise that my approach to learning in Week 1 was at the shallow end. But I didn't stay there. In Week 9, I'm in the deep end, thinking deeply and researching effectively. I put this down to the mature, supportive environment of the college, where I have developed planning skills and learnt how to focus on the things that matter. I'm still training hard at football, but I'm finding it easy enough to get down and study. I'm pumped to finish my degree in four years. This objective keeps pushing me along. I'm confident of doing well in the AEP and transferring to a teaching degree next semester. The "Mad Month of May" has not eaten me up. I've picked up some helpful study tips and am managing my time well. I've surprised myself with how I have changed my attitude to study.

"I think my approach to learning at the beginning of the semester was at the shallow end, but in Week 9 I can confidently say that I am now in the deep end thinking deeply and researching. I have noticed that being in a mature environment has changed my study plan and I focus on what is best instead of focusing on things that are irrelevant to me." (Week 9 journal entry)

"My footy training and games take away from my study BUT I have goals in footy so I am pushing to do both college and footy. It is quite easy for me to get down and

study this semester as I am pumped to finish my 4 years … I am definitely going to pass and do well." (Week 9 reflective writing)

Things could not have been going better for me. Now, I've gone and broken my ulna playing football. Suddenly, I have to do everything with one arm strapped. This makes me glad I've embraced academic culture so well. I've really stepped up. I've seen myself mature through thinking critically and independently. I'm asking questions and not just accepting life for what it appears to be. I've seen that a critical approach is essential in my teaching career. Above all, I've shown myself that I can do it. My first semester at college has really pulled me together and given me a lot more confidence in myself than I had in high school. My family has been supportive. My grandparents have been supportive. The church members have been supportive; knowing they were praying for me pushed me that little bit harder.

I hadn't planned to come to college. In Year 12 I told myself I wouldn't come here because I just couldn't see myself doing it. I had pretty much failed at high school for so many years and I just didn't want to waste any more time. I was determined to stay away from study as much as I could. But one semester at college has turned my life around. My self-belief has taken a massive leap. It's gone from beneath ground level at high school and just jumped through the roof. I am really confident that I have passed all my subjects and am confident about the final exam. I have changed my writing technique and the way I think when it comes to assignments. Essays no longer frighten me. The college has been great; I've loved it as a place to study. And the AEP course has been a real blessing to me. This one semester has set me up for the remaining seven semesters I plan to take to complete my degree. It's been an awesome way to get into tertiary education and learn how to write essays. I began the semester wanting to engage in study early and smash the semester of subjects out and feel like a winner, and I've succeeded. Along the way, I've learnt that I'm an achiever. I can do well when I put my mind to my goal. My goal now is to join my mates in the education degree program next semester and work hard to catch up with them as they are two units ahead of me. I'm confident I can do this by overloading.

"[This semester, my self-belief] has taken a massive leap. It's gone from beneath ground level when I was at high school and it's just jumped through the roof, you know. I've really seen myself take that step, you know. It's really good." (Week 12 interview)
"I wanted to engage [in study] early and smash this semester of subjects out and feel like a winner. I worked consistently throughout the semester. I have learnt that I am an achiever; I can do well when I put my mind to my goal." (Week 13 reflective writing)

Postscript: Andrew completed his AEP semester successfully, earning three distinctions and one high credit (av. 75.25%). It took him a further seven semesters to complete a 4-year education degree, earning an average grade of 73.65 per cent, one per cent under distinction level. He is now teaching in a church school in a major Australian city and says he is "loving it".

Jodi's Narrative

My name is Jodi, and this is my story of education. My parents did not have a lot of education; they both left school after Year 10. We're a typical Australian working class family. We especially enjoy our sport. We also enjoy learning new things. As a child, I loved attending primary school. I was eager to learn and did my best in my schoolwork. I used to be the one that would put my hand up to answer questions. I especially enjoyed going to the front to demonstrate things on the board. But, as I got older, my interest in school began to slip. I sometimes did my best on schoolwork, but there were times when I was not focused and I got too involved in other things, especially socialising. Friends and relationships are very important to me; they make me feel connected. In addition to being very sociable, I also love being active. I hate sitting around doing nothing. I get really bored sitting in the same spot. I need to be doing something.

"We've got a family who loves doing sport and action stuff." (Week 5 interview)
"Our whole family enjoys learning new things and loves going to school/college."

(Week 1 reflective writing)

"I used to be the one that put my hand up, wanting to demonstrate on the board and everything." (Week 5 interview)

"I hate sitting at home doing nothing … I need to be doing things." (Week 5 interview)

Researcher observation data: "Jodi is an action girl."

At high school I decided I wanted to be a police officer. Police work sounded exciting. I liked people and I liked action. Police work seemed like a good fit. After the first term in high school, my attitude towards school started to change. I began hanging around with the wrong groups, occasionally doing wrong things. Actually, the problem was not so much a group; it was mainly one girl. She was just a really bad influence. She'd be the girl who would get into trouble nearly every class. Because we were friends, I got into similar bad habits. We'd be sent from the classroom for doing things like calling out without putting our hands up. On weekends, my friend wouldn't do any schoolwork. She was always having trouble with her parents. I didn't make trouble at home, but I did have issues at school. It took me a long time to realise that my friendship with this girl wasn't helping. I can't blame her, but I didn't make schoolwork my top priority.

"I always wanted to be a police officer." (Week 5 interview)

"After the first term in high school, my attitude towards school started to change. I started hanging around with the wrong groups, occasionally doing the wrong things and most significantly, I decided that school work wasn't my top priority." (Week 2 reflective writing)

"It was mainly one girl. She was a really bad influence. She'd … get into trouble nearly every class and then it slowly got me into that habit." (Week 5 interview)

In Year 8, a very influential girl at the school started bullying me. She turned a lot of my friends against me. They made my school life very difficult. I was being threatened nearly every day. I finally realised that I needed to do something about it. The only solution I could see was to change schools. My sister had some friends at a

small Christian school. They all said it was such a "loving" school that I'd be sure to fit in. They reckoned the teachers were more like friends than teachers. So I changed schools. This gave me the chance to make a new beginning. My new school was as friendly as I had been told. It was so small that everyone knew everyone. At first, I had a really positive attitude. My grades picked up dramatically, as did my attitude to learning. I found a great new group of friends and got along with everyone, including the teachers.

"In Year 8, I started being bullied by a very influential girl who turned a lot of friends against me. They made my school life very difficult … I changed schools and that was my chance to have a new beginning." (Week 2 reflective writing)
"It's such a loving school. Like, the teachers aren't your teachers. They're more your friends." (Week 5 interview)

At the new school, I continued to be heavily involved in sport. The school would take us to a different place nearly every week. We'd go swimming, canoeing, rock climbing and golfing. We even got to do laser tag and bowling. On the weekends, I'd be involved in dance or soccer or netball. I was really into fitness and sport. In school, I also enjoyed the theory part of PE, learning about the body and muscles and how it all works. I enjoyed the practical aspects of science too. For some reason they put me in an upper-level maths class that separated me from the girls I used to fool around with in class. Even though I didn't fool around in maths, I was always behind the rest of the class. They'd be moving on while I was still stuck on the first task. I kept telling the teacher that I needed to drop down to the middle maths class, but he encouraged me to keep going.

"I loved the theory part of PE, learning about the body and muscles and how it all works." (Week 1 reflective writing)

My maths teacher took a genuine interest in me. He tried to explain that I was an influence on others in the class. My poor attitude to maths was rubbing off on some of the others and their marks were dropping. He thought that I was a leader and didn't understand the power of my influence. I couldn't see it. He explained that the

people I'd had trouble with at school were also leaders. He thought that I had it in me to be a true leader, but I just couldn't see it. Week after week, he'd say things like this to me, telling me how great a person I was and that I knew I could do it. I just needed to see it. I'm not sure how much I believed him. I knew I could do some things, but upper-level maths was just too much effort. In fact, I was reaching the point where I wasn't all that keen on school. I liked learning the things that I liked, but things that took longer to learn I'd quickly lose interest in.

"He thinks it's because I'm a leader but I don't see it … He said that I was a very influencing person, like, I'm a true leader … I just have to see it." (Week 5 interview)

In Year10 I got a job making pizzas, and another new friend came along. We became very close, but that wasn't good for me because she became a negative influence. At this point, my attitude to school changed and I was no longer interested in study. I completed my School Certificate that year, knowing I could have got better marks if my priorities had been right. I left at the end of Year 10 hoping to get into a TAFE course that would get me into the police. When I failed to get into the TAFE course, I decided to work for a while. I found several casual jobs. Two of these involved coaching gymnastics to children aged from 18 months to 18 years. I loved it. I can confidently say I became a lot more mature as a result of the life experience this gave me. I enjoyed rubbing shoulders with parents and had lots of opportunity to interact with the teachers. When they'd come up to speak to me, I'd act professionally and talk with them about how the kids were developing. I enjoyed the 45-minute classes I was running and started thinking: "I can do this all day. I like kids. I like coaching kids. I like making them enjoy what they do. I could do this full time."

"Then I just thought I'm enjoying my job. I'm enjoying earning money. I might just do this." (Week 5 interview)

I was encouraged in this by my boss. Whenever I would say to her, "I could do this professionally," she was all for it. She would say things like, "I reckon you should do it. You should go to university and become a teacher." She just

encouraged me the whole way. She had two kids of her own and sometimes got me to babysit them. She noticed the energy I had and the connection I made with her kids and how they just loved me all the time. She influenced me big time.

> "I'd go to [my boss's] house every now and then and look after her kids, and she'd see, like, the connection that I'd have with the kids, how the kids just loved me all the time and how energetic I am … You'll go to university … She just encouraged me the whole way." (Week 5 interview)

Six months before I started coaching gymnastics, my mother and older sister enrolled in the AEP tertiary pathway course at a nearby college of higher education. My sister Lara had completed Year 12 the previous year without earning university entrance. She and mum decided to give the course a go. They both did well, and I could see they were getting on with their lives, especially mum. She's always been a big influence on me. She started challenging me, saying things like, "If I can do it, why can't you?" So I looked at her and thought, "Well, she's in her 40s and she can do it; maybe I should give it a try." I realised that the longer I waited, the less chance I'd have to go places. With encouragement from both my family and my boss, I finally made the decision to see if I could get into the AEP course. I wasn't sure if they accepted Year 10 leavers, but I'd been out of school for a couple of years and was the same age as students finishing Year 12. Perhaps they would accept me.

It was February before I got up the courage to apply. In my placement piece I wrote that I'd always wanted to be a teacher. Perhaps I could have added, "Since giving up on the idea of joining the police." I was so excited when I heard I'd been accepted that within 10 minutes all of my family and friends knew. They were just as happy for me as I was. Starting my first semester at college made me very happy and proud of myself. I'd lost a lot of hope for my future when I pulled out of Year 10. Starting at college restored my sense of hope. I began to believe in myself again and make bigger plans. I saw the AEP course as a small stepping stone that would take me in the direction I wanted to go.

> "I lost a lot of hope for my future when I pulled out of Year 10 in [year deleted]. Starting at college this year has given me hope in myself and my future ... I was so

excited when I heard I had been excepted [sic]. Straight away, within 10 minutes, all of my family and friends knew." (Week 1 reflective writing)

On the first day of college, I woke up feeling nervous about what might happen. My head was buzzing. Would I make friends? Would I fit in? Would I be able to handle the work? Would I be able to keep up with students who had completed Year 12? I need not have worried. Everyone at college was amazingly friendly. I received many smiles and greetings from people I'd never met before. The college had a great feeling. I loved the atmosphere. As the morning went on, my nerves disappeared. I remember thinking to myself, "If my nearly 50-year-old mother can do this, so can I." This had almost become a refrain. When I got to class, I recognised one of the girls as being from my former high school. We had lost touch when I dropped out after Year 10. Having her in all of my classes meant I didn't have to feel like the girl who didn't know anyone. As I sat through my first two lectures, I pictured myself in the future with a professional job, teaching my own class. I knew I was going to love my time at college. I saw it as a good place to develop more maturity. Immaturity had been one of my biggest problems in high school. I wanted to turn this around. I would get straight to work and visit the college tutors as soon as I completed a draft of my first assignment, a personal narrative that was due in Week 2.

"Everyone is so friendly around college. I have received so many smiles and greetings from people that I have never met before. It has a great vibe and I love the atmosphere." (Week 1 reflective writing)
"I thought to myself, if my nearly 50 year old mother can do this, then so can I. As I sat through the first two lectures, I pictured myself in the future with a professional job." (Week 1 journal entry)
"I am looking forward to a continuing advance of my maturity as I study at college." (Week 2 reflective writing)

Early in my second week I spent some time with the tutor, Larry, working on my narrative. We spent about 15 minutes going over the paper. He pointed out a few

mistakes and some things that he thought could be left out. It made me realise that a paragraph needs to stay on the topic announced in the first sentence. While in the library, I completed a worksheet we'd been given. It was a bit difficult, but I think I went all right. Having no classes the following day, I used the time to work on my subjects. I went over the pile of notes I'd taken in my lectures. It was starting to make sense, but there were lots of little things that I didn't quite understand. I feared that dropping out of school in Year 10 had put me behind everyone else in the class. I found this stressful as I don't like being behind. I soon began to feel overwhelmed with all the assessments that seemed to be piling up. It all seemed a bit much, but I refused to let it get me down and managed to convince myself that I would get my head around it somehow. Seeing me under so much pressure, my parents tried their hardest to keep my confidence up. I especially valued my mother's support. Having done the course herself a couple of years earlier, she knew exactly what I was going through.

"I feel as if I'm not keeping up as well as everyone else in my classes … My parents are supporting me a lot with my work. They are trying their very hardest to keep my confidence up." (Week 3 journal entry)

After a month at college, it had begun to feel like a treadmill. The pressure was constant. It didn't help that my priorities were not properly sorted. Study should have been at the top, but I was letting other little things get in the way, especially my social life. Outside of college, I had plenty of friends that I loved spending time with. Sometimes a friend would ask me out to lunch or invite me to a movie when I knew I should have been studying. Too often I'd go with them instead of taking the better option and studying. I began to realise that I'd have to be stronger and learn to say no when I had work to do. I'd have to distance myself from former friends who were not on the same journey and not helping me focus on my studies.

"I love my social life. I have plenty of friends outside of college that I love spending time with ... Sometimes I will know that I really need to study or finish my assessment when a friend will ask me to go out for lunch or to see a movie. I know in my head what I should really be doing, but I still decide to go out anyway since

that seems like the better option. In the end, it really isn't the better option as I am then behind with my work. I'm hoping that I can and will get stronger at saying no to going out." (Week 5 journal entry)

I found myself deeply regretting having not finished senior high school. Everyone in my classes seemed to know more than I did. Having completed year 12, they had more advanced knowledge. I felt sure things would have been more relaxing for me if I'd done Year 12. I would have been better prepared for this big step in my life. But I didn't give up. I was beginning to understand academic requirements such as referencing styles. With a 1200-word essay almost due, this was important.

I found it useful in one of my AEP classes to discover my learning style. Knowing my strengths and weaknesses might help me become a more effective learner. Here are some of the things I've learnt: I can sometimes see connections between things and I am very creative. I find most things interesting. I'm extremely motivated, especially with tasks I find appealing. I love to move around and find it hard to sit still. I enjoy hands-on activities as this keeps me active. I always get carried away when telling a story or doing creative writing. I love to make things and draw things even though I'm not very good at drawing. When I find myself losing focus in a class, I'm usually doodling on my note paper. I like to jump in and get on with tasks. I don't enjoy all of the lead-ups to something, especially physical things like sport. I'm good at role playing and enjoy acting things out. If I don't enjoy a subject, I don't usually learn much about it. I also get bored very easily. Sometimes, I'm a bit of a dreamer. I like thinking of new and creative ideas. If there's one thing that I don't entirely enjoy, it's writing. I usually try to avoid that for as long as I can. Other difficulties I have include making decisions and managing time. Too often I leave things, intending to return to them, but somehow the time gets away so quickly that I don't know where it went. I enjoy asking questions and sometimes stress over small things. Knowing all this about my preferred learning style makes it possible to develop an improved learning pattern for myself.

"I don't enjoy all of the lead-ups to something, especially anything physical like

sport … I don't entirely enjoy writing, so I usually try to avoid that for as long as I can" (Week 5 reflective writing)

One thing that continues to plague me is time management, but I can't let this defeat me now. I don't know where the first half of the semester has gone. It went by so fast! Despite a battle with procrastination, I managed to keep up with the work. I even got my 1200-word essay written on time after working on it the weekend before the break. I saw the break as an opportunity to catch up on some lesser tasks that I hadn't found time for. Looking back on my first six weeks at college, I'm happy with the amount of work I've done. I'm grateful for the help my mother and sister gave me with my essay. They helped me develop a better understanding of research. I have confidence in their advice because I know they've both been through what I'm going through. Having done the AEP themselves, they know what is expected and are able to give me focused help. I used the mid-semester break well. I'm proud of what I achieved during the break. It's helpful that I'm learning how to say no to my friends when I have work to do. I'm paying a lot of money to attend college and I know that I have to pass my four units in one semester so that I can start my degree in my second semester.

"Time just seems to go so quickly." (Week 5 reflective writing)
"My sister and also my mum have been helping me out with my essay that is due soon. They helped me understand a little bit better about the information I needed to research. I'm so glad that they have both gone through what I'm doing so they can help me out a lot." (Mid-semester break journal entry)

In the AEP I've picked up some useful study hints. One of these is the 10-minute study burst. It's a method we've been told is good for reluctant learners and chronic procrastinators. You sit down with a study task and promise to engage with it as deeply as you can for 10 minutes. When the time is up, you decide whether to stick with it or do something else. I tried it, and two hours later I was still there studying. I realised it was making it a lot easier for me to study. I was reading more and taking most of it in.

"I tried the ten-minute study burst and two hours later I was still there studying … I can now say that I have learnt how to say no to my friends … I pay a lot of money to learn." (Week 7 journal entry)

A lecture on student health has made me more aware of the importance of sleep. We were told about some research that showed having a good night's sleep can improve your comprehension and learning. I decided to put it to the test. I found that if I went to bed after 11.30 p.m., the next day I'd be very tired and not focused in class, especially an 8.00 a.m. class. But if I went to bed before 11.00 p.m., I'd wake up feeling refreshed and ready to learn. I'd be more energetic in class and take in more than I would if I was tired. Getting my body into a regular pattern of sleep has been one of the best things for me. It wasn't just good for my study; it was also good for my health. It's made me feel so much happier about myself! My habits have changed and I like it this way.

"Getting my body into this habit had been one of the best things for me. Not only for my hope to become more successful at college, but also for my body. It makes me feel so much happier about myself. My habits have changed and I like it this way." (Week 7 journal entry)

At college, my confidence has really picked up. I'm asking questions and getting involved with the conversations in class. I'm also learning how to study. In high school, I rarely studied; I didn't think study was very important. I'm more focused now. College has taught me that it's extremely important to study every day. I'm very proud of the amount of study I'm doing. My sleeping pattern has improved, and the 10-minute study burst is really helping my motivation to study, especially on days when I don't feel highly motivated. My whole approach has changed. At the start of the semester, I'd choose spending time with friends over studying. But later in the semester, I'm choosing study over friends. I'm reading more than I've read in my life, and despite my sporting activities, I'm somehow finding time to do eight hours of study on the weekend. I find I actually enjoy what I'm learning, and this makes it easier to pay attention and take it in.

"In high school, I never really understood the point of studying, but now being a tertiary student, every day I am studying many hours to get on top of the work." (Week 11 reflective writing)
"Now I'm reading a lot more and taking in a lot of information. I'm focused." (Week 12 reflective writing)

As the semester nears its end, I'm a lot more engaged in my studies than I was at the start. I'm on top of my work and very happy with myself. It feels good when my dad praises me for the way I'm working and the marks I receive from my lecturers. It's been a battle. I've been balancing nine hours a week of sporting activities, with two days a week coaching gymnastics, and at least three nights a week working at the pizza shop. In spite of this, I've been keeping up with my study. As I said before, I like to keep active.

"Even with the 9 hours a week of sporting activities that I do and with the 2 full days that I have off college, I'm at work all day long coaching gymnastics and usually going to work at [a pizza shop] at least 3 nights a week. I'm still getting a fair amount of study done." (Week 10 journal entry)

In my first semester at college, I have learnt a lot. I've learnt that being a tertiary student isn't as hard as I had feared it would be. You can make it easy by enjoying yourself and taking an interest in what you're learning. I've learnt the value of getting regular sleep. I've learnt some great study techniques plus better time management and greater skill in prioritising. I've learnt the importance of regular study and being academically engaged. My attitude towards study has picked up tremendously. I now know that becoming a successful tertiary student takes a lot of effort plus the right attitude. The AEP has helped me become a more critical thinker. I've learnt how to break things down and analyse them bit by bit. I've switched from being the girl in high school who barely listened, to becoming a young lady in higher education acting a lot more mature than the average person her age. At the end of the semester, I'm confident of passing my four units and being offered a place in an education degree program next semester.

”Every day I am studying many hours to get on top of the work I have been given … I have switched from being the girl in high school that barely listened, to a young lady in higher education acting a lot more mature than the average person her age.” (Week 11 reflective writing)

“I’m feeling very successful … I’m very excited to finish.” (Week 12 journal entry)

Researcher observation: Jodi has developed a student identity in the AEP. She knows it and is very pleased with herself.

Postscript. Jodi comfortably passed her four AEP units (av. 70.5%). She would have completed her education degree in a further seven semesters, but for a serious injury sustained in her second year at college. Taking a semester off delayed her graduation by a year. Needing just four units to graduate, she studied part time in her final year, while working casually at a nearby government primary school. Her average degree grade (74.36%) was just under a distinction. She now has a full-time teaching position at the government school where she had been working as a casual.

Gaara’s Narrative

My name is Gaara, and this is my story of education. I’m from a big Polynesian family. There are nine siblings, including me, but four are actually cousins that we adopted into our family; this is how family works in our culture. My dad is an agricultural worker and my mum finished a BA (Psychology) while I was in high school. Two of my older sisters were studying at university when I started college. My older brother could have gone to university but chose not to. He got a job as a tiler instead. Another sister dropped out of school, and my younger siblings are still in school. We’re a happy family; there are no dramas. We’re well known in the country town where we live. My dad was vice president of the Islander community. They wanted him to become president, but he said no. He reckoned it was too much work and too much responsibility.

“My family is a big one. There are nine siblings including me. Four are adopted but

are still relatives. Two of my older sisters are studying in university." (Week 1 reflective writing)

Our parents wanted us to do well at school. They had a traditional approach: if we didn't do our work, we'd get a hiding. Back in the islands, my mum didn't start school until she was 15. She got expelled in Year 11 after punching an overseas teacher that she heard making a racist comment. This experience motivated her to help us when we started school. She had good intentions, but the home environment didn't help us focus on study. At home, the family watched TV too much, and I was influenced to join them. Sometimes they'd tell us to go and study, but we'd end up watching rugby instead. I remember mum saying that we wouldn't get TV as long as we kids were at school. But she couldn't help it. She loved the TV. Another time she said, "There'll be no PlayStation or X-Box. We won't get it for you." My brother got it. She had no choice.

The Islander community wasn't much help when it came to study. They spent a lot of time playing games. Three nights a week, they'd play volleyball. They had little interest in education. My extended family were the only ones involved in higher education. My sisters and my cousins are the only Islanders from our community who went to university. The church community was helpful. The pastors were inspiring. They believed in education and encouraged us to study the Bible.

"They played volleyball too much, like every Wednesday and Monday and Saturday … My church helped me, especially the pastors." (Week 5 interview)

My schoolmates in senior high school were awesome, so loud and outgoing. Everyone knew us because of our laughs and the trouble we sometimes got into. We were known as the "table girls". I enjoyed chilling with my friends, laughing sessions, volleyball games, jamming (singing) and playing the guitar with my mates. When we were bored, we'd end up mocking everyone who walked past till we couldn't stop laughing. We had a ball, "cheeshoo"! We were loud. I was loud. I was known as a funny joker. Every time any of our friends got bullied, we would just tell the people off. We had a gay friend who was being bullied and I went to tell one guy

off. He was on crutches. I went up to him and said, “I heard you been talking about my gay friend.” I was really going to tell him off, but suddenly I slipped and fell over. My friends started laughing. You should have seen their faces!

Another time someone wrote racist stuff in the toilets. I was so angry that I went around asking everyone who did it. I challenged one group of girls and they just looked scared. I shouldn’t have been so aggressive. Sometimes I’d get angry about things. One time a boy took my calculator and started playing with it. I wanted it back. When I slapped him, he started bleeding, and that made me feel bad.

I had some friends at school who studied and I thought about studying with them, but my other friends weren’t so keen on study. I felt torn between the two groups, but most of the time I’d join the ones who didn’t study. I liked all my friends. They were cool. Some of them were organised—my sister was organised. But I wasn’t organised. All my books were ugly and disorganised. I was used to it. I was an artist. Artists are supposed to be messy.

“Artists are supposed to be messy.” (Week 5 interview)

Art is one of the things I’m most passionate about because it allows me to express ideas and feelings through my paintings and drawings. In Year 6, my art teacher saw something I drew and she said, “Oh, that is exquisite!” I didn’t know what exquisite meant. I thought it was something bad until she explained it to me. She encouraged me to enter my drawings in an art show. I entered and won second place plus a merit award. This event shaped my thinking about what I would become. It made me want to explore the world of art. In Year 9, I won an art competition and was awarded $500. I continued to win awards in art shows. In Years 11 and 12, I earned a Certificate I and II in Fashion Design. Fashion was a favourite subject of mine as I saw it as another form of art. But, too much time spent on art caused me to spend less time on other important VCE subjects. I also spent too much time on sport. I dropped out of soccer when it began taking over my studies. But I continued to play touch, rugby, basketball and volleyball. I was bad with time management.

“I was bad with time management.” (Week 2 reflective writing)

I completed Year 12, but didn't gain the ATAR I needed. No university offered me a place. This was discouraging, but it didn't destroy my self-belief. I knew I had the potential, but I hadn't tried hard enough. I could've done better. My maths teacher had told me that if I studied, I'd do well. He believed I had potential. But potential wasn't enough to get me through. I should've been more dedicated to study and more willing to engage in other studies besides art. I had to face the fact that I lacked self-discipline. There were always distractions that prevented me from focusing on the task at hand. Despite my low ATAR (42.15), the college offered me a place in the AEP. If I did well in that, I'd be able to transfer to an arts degree.

"I knew I had [ability], but I did not try hard enough to show [my] full potential … I lacked self-discipline. There were always distractions that prevented me from focusing on the task in hand." (Week 2 reflective writing)

I was grateful that the college offered me a place, but it meant travelling interstate, a long way from my home and family. Dad wasn't sure if I should go, but my mum wanted me to continue my education. In the end, they were both happy for me to make the big move. My first impression was that the college was a sleepy place, in the middle of nowhere. There were hardly any shops. But, I was excited to be starting my journey as a higher education student. I felt comfortable. The small size of the classes made me feel like I was in high school again. The teacher was welcoming. I could see that he was keen to see us all do well in the AEP and get into our desired degree courses. It felt like a family and I was very optimistic. I thought it was going to be pretty much like high school only with more assignments. I felt that this time things would turn out differently, that I'd change my approach and learn from the mistakes I'd made in high school. I knew I'd have to improve my organisation and be more punctual. I expected to have some stress, but felt I was in for a fun experience. I was sure that being at college was part of God's plan. I intended to use my abilities to the fullest.

"It feels like I'm in high school again … I feel things will turn out different … As my new journey starts as a higher education student, I believe it will be a stressing but

also fun experience, and [I] will do my best. Hi 5!" (Week 1 reflective writing)
"It was God's plan to send me here." (Week 1 reflective writing)

Unfortunately, my good resolutions about studying at college conflict with my natural disposition, my desire to be laid back. Life in the residence hall is a blast. I quickly developed the habit of staying up late, sometimes all night. I'm doing very little study and am not bothering to keep a reflective journal. So far, I've made no attempt to get properly organised for the semester. Despite the lecturers urging us to visit the free tutors in the college library, I haven't been able to find the time. Nor have I taken a library orientation tour. There's been no time to feel homesick. I'm having too much fun. The other day a lecturer asked me how I was enjoying the course, and I complained about the workload. When he inquired how much work I was doing, I had to admit, "Not that much." Then he wanted to know how well I expected to do in the course. "Well enough to pass," I replied. He interrupted my laughter to rip me off about having a minimalist approach to study and wondered whether I put the same amount of effort into my art. I could see his point and modified my response: "Okay, I want to do *really* well then."

I've just done an analysis of my learning style. I study when I feel like it. I don't use a schedule and I leave everything to the last minute. I'm a laid-back learner, who waits for information to be given to me by teachers. In class, I'm easily distracted and always fidgeting. Sitting in the back row probably doesn't help. In lectures, I'm a passive learner. I'm not always attentive, but I can be, especially with subjects that interest me. Anything hands-on that keeps me entertained interests me, for example, art. I like to figure out how things work before asking for help. I try to listen for the argument to work out what is being taught. Background music helps me concentrate when studying and helps prevent me from daydreaming. I'm strongly visual. I prefer information to be presented in pictures, diagrams, movies and charts. I like being creative and using my imagination. When I put effort into study, I like to reward myself by playing sport or a console game or watching Korean animes. But motivating myself to study is difficult. I have trouble getting organised, I have poor time management, and I'm easily distracted. This means I have trouble getting started on projects and keeping track of what I'm doing. I forget things. I forget due

dates. I'm not punctual. Trying to get organised is exhausting. I quickly get tired, even in class. Sometimes, I fall asleep in class. I'm indecisive, I'm not good at taking notes, I struggle with essays, and I daydream a lot. These are my main weaknesses. As I wrote this, I thought I knew the solution. I needed to get organised, develop some time management skill, and stop procrastinating. It would also help if I could learn to keep my notes neat and tidy.

> "My study methods are usually studying when the time best fits me. I have no schedule and [am] likely to leave my assignments to the last minute. I tend to be a laid back learner … During class I'm the type of person that gets distracted easily, mainly sits at the back of the class and gets fidgety." (Week 5 reflective writing)

For me, knowing what to do and actually doing it are two different things. Doing this self-analysis has made no lasting difference to my general approach to study. I continue to be laid back. I don't get my work done on time. I spend too much time on things other than assignments. One day I admitted to myself—and the lecturer—that I was lazy. The lecturer was right: my approach to study is minimalist. I'm aiming for 50 per cent, hoping to just get through. My good intentions about visiting the tutors and becoming serious about study have achieved nothing. I'm finding far too many distractions. Mid-semester is here, and I'm not up to date with my work.

> "I'm too lazy but [hoping] to pass even if the grade I get is just over 50, sort of." (Week 7 reflective writing)

Reflecting after the break, I recall the expectations I'd had at the start of the semester: being committed to my studies, balancing my education and social life, being punctual, changing my sleeping pattern, and making time for God. In most of these areas, I've made no progress. The first half of the semester has been challenging. It's been enjoyable, though. I've made lots of new friends. I've enjoyed the family environment of the college and the residence hall. I've felt welcomed and comfortable and am making heaps of memories. College Church has been a blessing; it's been spiritually uplifting. But in many ways, I've found college too comfortable;

I've been too laid back. The proximity of the residence hall to the classrooms makes me careless about time. I can see that I'm going further down the path of failing. I've fallen into the same pattern that spoiled my performance in senior high school. Being a higher education student is hard. I seem unable to make enough time for assignments because of the many distractions that demand my attention every day. This reflection makes me realise there's a strong chance I'll be forced to repeat the course. I'm not becoming an independent learner. I've not improved my self-discipline. I've spent too much time having fun and not focusing on my future career. I need to become an active learner and use the college facilities more wisely.

I knew I'd have some explaining to do in my final conversation with my AEP lecturer. When he asked how keen I'd become about study, I had to admit I'd started with good intentions but soon lost motivation. I told him I'd always been like this. I'd be pumped up for school at the start, and then I'd get comfortable and forget what I was supposed to be doing. To me, a 1200-word essay seemed too hard, way too long. Next he asked me whether any of my college friends were studious types. My answer was short: "Not that I know of." I'd found college a cool place to be, but I'd not done much study. I'd failed to submit several major assignments and many smaller ones. My educational goals had just gone down the drain. I knew I hadn't done anywhere near my best. As I thought about this, I had to admit I'd been lazy. But there was more to it than that. Looking back, I realise I should have gone to the tutors for help. They might have helped not just with academic advice, but also in other areas. They might have helped me get organised. My time management was still non-existent. In fact, my life was chaotic. I was rarely in bed before 3.00 a.m. and sometimes I didn't get to bed at all. My engagement with study had been below zero.

"I thought I was keen [beginning of semester] but I started getting lazy [ironic cough]." (Week 13 interview)

I've spent the whole semester just cruising. I know this won't take me where I want to go. But I can't help myself. If I don't learn how to study, I won't develop my skills and my future life will be boring because I won't have the career I want. In my first semester at college, I haven't become a responsible, independent student.

Instead, I've followed my normal (laid-back) pattern. I need self-discipline, starting with a regular sleep pattern. I know I'm not going to pass my four units—I'll be lucky to pass any of them. One thing did surprise me though. In my final conversation with my writing lecturer, he told me I had earned the equal top mark (90%) for our first writing assignment, back in Week 2. I agreed when he suggested I needed more self-belief. Sometimes I just doubt myself. But there are things I could do to help myself. Most of my friends are not very studious. I've been influenced to follow their lead and not get much work done. This isn't helpful, but I can't put all the blame on them. The fault is mine for letting the distractions get to me. I've been too laid back. I still lack a commitment to work. I don't know if I can change this.

Problems identified by Gaara: "Time management, distractions and spending too much time on fun stuff … Sometimes I don't go to sleep [at night] at all … I need discipline." (Week 13 interview)

In my final piece of reflective writing for the semester, I noted that college had given me the chance "to redo the mistakes I had done when I was a high school student." That's not quite what I meant to say. I so badly did not want to repeat my mistakes from high school. But that's exactly what I've done. I've allowed myself to be drawn into an unhelpful pattern of living, influenced by friends who are not committed to study. But I can't blame them. The fault is mine for letting the distractions get to me. I've been too laid back.

"[College] gave me a new path to redo the mistakes I had done when I was a high school student." (Week 14 reflective writing)

"My sleeping pattern was disorganised … [I played] a lot of sports and spent too much time on social activities, assessments were handed in late, I often procrastinated … [It] became too much to bear. I was too laid back … I lacked work commitment, which led me to unsatisfactory results." (Letter written by Gaara after her first semester at college)

Postscript. Gaara failed her four units (av. 42.5%) and was discontinued from the

AEP. On appeal, she was allowed to return for a second semester. In her second semester, she passed three of four units (av. 64.3%) and withdrew late from one. Having not passed all of her units, she was required to spend another semester in the AEP. This time she passed all her units (av. 66%) and was finally accepted into a BA program. She completed her BA with a WAM of 50.93. Her low WAM is explained by her uneven effort. She did well in units she enjoyed, earning numerous credits and distinctions, even a high distinction (average 66.9%). But she did badly in units she did not enjoy (average 13.5%). Laid back to the end, her last failing grade came in her final year of study (0%). Gaara is now working in a major Australian city, working with the underprivileged. She has not ruled out the possibility of returning to college to train as a teacher.

Ben's Narrative

My name is Ben, and this is my story of education. My parents were both born overseas, in far-flung parts of the English-speaking world. My mum, a college graduate, has a nursing degree. But my dad dropped out of school around Grade 9 or 10. They met while working at a large private hospital here in Australia. Within weeks they were engaged to be married. By the time my sister and I were born, they had moved interstate. They sent us to a church school for a Christian education. I remember little about my time at primary school, and what I do remember isn't worth remembering. I was regularly picked on at school and spent my days avoiding people. At home, it wasn't much different. When I left school, it felt like I was trading one bully for another as my father was sometimes very hard on me. But his childhood had been difficult. His family belittled him and doubted his intelligence. Combined with his limited education, this might explain his cavalier attitude to education and why he sees educated people as showing off. I tried not to take offence at his mistreatment, but I did find it confusing.

"[At primary school] I was being picked on. My days were spent avoiding people, and at home it was not much different. When I left school, it did not feel like I was leaving the bully for the day, but trading one for another. My father … was very hard on me." (Week 2 reflective writing)

"My father sees educated people as showing off." (Undated conversation)

Despite being bullied at school, I tried not to let it worry me too much because I liked going to school. One of the bullies in primary school was Caleb. One day he stabbed me in the arm with a pencil. When I told mum about this she said: "Well, there are two things you can do. You can either make friends with him, or just ignore him for the rest of the time there." I decided to make friends. We remained friends for the rest of our school days. In the upper primary grades, making friends was more difficult. On one occasion, some of the boys invited me to go with them to these little cabins that they'd made down the back of the schoolyard in a wooded area sometimes used for church gatherings. When we got there, someone produced a pack of cigarettes and they started smoking. When they offered me a cigarette, I refused. I never really fitted in with them.

Towards the end of primary school I was hospitalised with appendicitis. During the six weeks I was out of action, I put on a growth spurt, and by the time I got back to school, I was noticeably taller. The bullying stopped. I started high school hoping that my life would improve, but nothing really changed. I continued to avoid people and people avoided me. By Grade 8, I was quite tall; I got the feeling people were unnerved by my forbidding presence. I was happy to keep them guessing as it gave me the space I needed. But a small group of three or four friends saw safety in hanging out with me. I became their protector. My mate Caleb, who fancied himself as the alpha male—which quite obviously he was not—got himself into a few fights. When he got in too deep, I helped him out. I was suspended and reprimanded several times for standing up for mates like Caleb. I had a feeling the teachers thought my actions were justified; nevertheless, I had to be punished. The school principal saw to that. He and I never saw eye to eye. I guess we were both a bit too headstrong. I remained good friends with these mates right through high school and beyond. In Grade 8, we'd been just a small group of misfits that didn't have too many friends and didn't belong to any clique. A few years later, we became an influential group that included people from everywhere. By Year 12, we were pretty much the majority group.

"I was this height in Grade 8 and everyone avoided me because I was the quiet guy

in the corner … the scariest … One of my friends, Caleb—he's the type of person that likes to think he is the alpha male, and he is quite obviously not—but he got into a few fights with a few people. He got in too deep and I had to help him out a bit." (Week 5 interview)

"The former principal at my school [and I] never saw eye to eye. I guess we were a bit too head strong." (Week 1 reflective writing)

Things began to turn for me after a school sports day when I won every event that I entered. It was the first time this had been achieved in the history of the school. The next year, when I was in Grade 9, a service trip to Kenya proved to be a life-changing experience. It opened my eyes to the larger world. The purpose of the trip was to support an orphanage—building, painting and providing financial assistance. This experience gave me a new lease on life and made me appreciate how well off I was. It wasn't all about me; there were people in the world with far greater needs.

"It suddenly wasn't all about me. It was about everything else." (Week 5 interview)

I returned home from the Kenya trip with a renewed interest in spirituality. I remember being inspired by a youth mentor at church, a private businessman who was an independent thinker. I was amused by his aloof approach to the religious disputes that arose in our conservative church. I'd notice him chuckling to himself, evidently enjoying the drama unfolding around him. He wasn't as conservative as the rest. I began to investigate alternative forms of spirituality, attending some Buddhist gatherings. They seemed a lot friendlier than any of the Christian churches I'd visited. But I didn't join in when they prayed; I just stood and watched. It was a nice community. It felt better than my ultra-legalistic church, where I'd been called many things from an early age. I was called a heretic once for asking a perfectly reasonable question. This did nothing to endear me to the church. Something else I tried was parkour. On Sundays, I'd head to the city for regular parkour lessons. Parkour gave me a sense of freedom and control that I hadn't found at church. It became a spiritual alternative. After all the bullying at school, at home, and at church, I needed to find my own personal space and experience freedom.

"I didn't pray. I just stood there and watched how it went on and I saw the [Buddhist] community and everything and it was a lot friendlier than every Christian church I've been to up to now." (Week 5 interview)

In the end, my quest for a more meaningful spirituality and greater self-understanding took its toll on my study. I had never had trouble with my subjects. I could pass most with ease. However, leading up to my Year 12 exams, I was taking things a bit too easy. I had a life-long habit of avoiding study. I never studied at home and spent my time at school doing what I wanted. Travelling to school each day took almost two hours on public transport, but I didn't study on the bus or on the train. I would just sit there, looking out the window, immersed in my thoughts, enjoying the freedom of the moment. I could have studied at home on the weekends, but I didn't. My failure to learn how to study took its toll. My Year 12 ATAR (50.65) was a huge disappointment and didn't earn me university entrance. This was a blow, but it didn't destroy my self-belief. It simply reminded me that I was an underachiever. I didn't enjoy study. I found it painful and gruelling. The one bright spot had been biology. My biology teacher had been my favourite teacher. He treated me differently; he showed understanding. He encouraged me to continue to be who I was—which I found interesting because I wasn't sure who I was. Under his influence, I came to believe it my calling to study biology and make some contribution to the great world of science. But my low ATAR made this seem unlikely.

"I was an underachiever." (Week 1 reflective writing)
"I never studied at home." (Week 8 journal entry)
"[My] biology teacher treated me different. He was more understanding and more or less encouraged me to continue to be who I was. He is the main reason I took an interest in biology." (Week 1 reflective writing)

I finished Year 12 filled with uncertainty. After so many years at school, I needed a break, just to clear my mind. University seemed out of reach, and attending my mother's alma mater, a private college, would be expensive and would require moving interstate. I wondered whether I should just go to TAFE and become a

builder or something. In my uncertainty, I decided to take a gap year and save money for my future education once I worked out what to do. I spent the next 14 months in the real world, including nine months working for a well-known fast-food chain. At the end of the year, my uncertainty hadn't gone away. I had to take stock. At close to 20 years of age, I was still dependent on my parents. Maybe I should take mum's suggestion and attend her former college. After all, it was a long way from home. The move would make me more independent and give me a fresh start. Weighing the unknown risks of moving against my growing desire to find my purpose in life, I made the momentous decision to go. This meant leaving behind everything that mattered to me, including my girlfriend.

"[My] gap year [I spent] living in the real world." (Week 1 reflective writing)
"I just wanted to come here [to college] … because it was far away from home and I wouldn't be so dependent on my parents." (Week 13 interview)

Initially, I found college life impersonal and lonely. On the morning of my first day at college, my gut was wrenching in fear as I faced the uncertainty of my new situation. I felt physically ill. I had an overwhelming fear of failure. I was in survival mode, facing a very unknown future. It had been more than a year since the disappointment of my poor Year 12 results, but the memory still haunted me. Having breezed through high school believing I was as smart as my peers—maybe smarter—my ATAR had been a big reality check. Of course, I hadn't really tried. I found comfort in accepting that I was an underachiever. But the thought of further failure at college was terrifying. It would shake my already shaky self-belief to the core. Had I done the right thing by coming to college? I wasn't sure. I was assailed by doubt.

"My gut [was] wrenching in fear of what it [college] was really going to be like … [I had] an overwhelming fear of failure; it even made me question if it was the right thing to do to come here." (Week 2 reflective writing)

I quickly discovered that college is a lot better than I had expected. In fact, it's quite a fun place to be. As my nerves disappear, I'm beginning to enjoy myself. The work is easy enough. A short personal reflection in Week 2 took only half an

hour to write. Nothing that has been thrown at me in the first couple of weeks has required a 100 per cent effort. I'm cruising. I'm also avoiding study. My preferred way of avoiding study is to go to the foyer of the residence hall and play pool. One day this week, I spent three hours playing pool with Liam and Justin. Video games are another diversion. In fact, there are distractions everywhere. It's taking me hours to find the motivation to even begin to study. I won't be able to write all my assignments in half an hour. It's clear that if I don't find a way to immerse myself in study, I'll soon be falling behind. We've been encouraged to visit the college tutors for help with assignments and getting organised for study. But I'm reluctant to do this. The idea of someone I have no previous connection with looking at my work, especially work of a personal nature, I find quite daunting. I don't want strangers peeking into various parts of my life and passing judgment on me and on my work. I've made several attempts to visit the tutors but just can't bring myself to do it. I've decided to talk to my Year 12 English teacher by email instead.

"Nothing … requires a 100% effort … My preferred way of avoiding study is to go to the foyer to play pool … It takes me hours to find motivation to even begin my study … I am reluctant to go and see [the tutors] … I believe I will talk to my old English teacher via email." (Week 3 journal entry)

I continue to be haunted by my fear of failure and fear of repeating the mistakes I made in senior high school. I'm spending some time on study, but I'm not getting much done. I sit at my desk for two or three hours and get maybe four or five lines written. But at least I'm starting assignments when they are given to us. I'm getting most things out of the way in two or three nights. I'm somewhat organised, but the semester is racing along. The first five weeks have gone by so fast that I've lost track of time. I find myself focusing more on enjoying my time with friends and putting little effort into studying. I know I should be giving priority to study, but it's just too grinding. With mid-semester break looming and assignments piling up, the pressure is increasing. I'm getting decent marks, but I'm feeling a little lost as to where I'm heading. If only I had a light or a signal to show me that I'm going in the right direction! Then I wouldn't have this feeling of hopelessly wandering through

the semester, without a clue. I fear I'm losing sight of my goals. I need to re-evaluate what I'm doing at college.

"I just don't enjoy [study]. I find it painful and gruelling." (Week 5 interview)
"My studies have started to take second place … I find it all too grinding … I feel a little lost as to where I am heading … hopelessly wandering … without a clue." (Week 5 journal entry)

My time management is almost non-existent. I'm finding it hard to divide my time appropriately between what I need to do and what I enjoy doing. Perhaps I'm improving. Yet, the constant pressure of work is flustering me. I know I'm spending too much time playing games, but I find games an adequate escape from the reality of grinding away on assessments. Clearly, I'd benefit from changing my study habits; however, in the past I've been unable to make such a change. With these thoughts bouncing around in my head, an essay due at the end of the week, and my girlfriend arriving from interstate to drive me home for the break, I'm going to have to email my lecturer to request an extension on the 1200-word essay. Besides, my girlfriend needs to get back home to complete her law assignment.

"My time management skills seem to be non-existent. I find it hard to appropriately segment my time between what I need to do and what I enjoy doing … I probably am spending too much time playing games." (Week 6 journal entry)

I'd planned to complete my essay during the break, but somehow it didn't happen. Reflecting on my progress in the first half of the semester, I'm forced to admit that procrastination has become more of a problem. At the start of the semester, I was more alert and managed to stay on task most of the time. With the passage of time, I've found more excuses to avoid study. The other day in desperation, I made a deal with myself: I'd do an hour of study and then take a 15-minute break to do whatever I wanted. This seemed like a good idea. However, in no time, my resolve has slipped and I find myself splitting my time 50-50, with 30 minutes of work followed by 30 minutes of recreation. It isn't ideal, but it's better than nothing. The essay has been a struggle. I just haven't been able to get my

thoughts down on paper. Nothing flowed. So I put it aside. Finally, in desperation I sat down and finished it off in a night or two. It was more than a week late, but at least it was out of the way.

"The amount of procrastination from the start of the semester till now has increased dramatically. At the start, I was ready for it … whereas now I try to find any excuse to avoid [study]." (Week 7 journal entry)

While my apathy towards study is troubling, my social life is full. Back home my social life had been comparatively limited. At college, apart from pool and other activities in the residence hall, there is always something happening. On Thursdays I play Ultimate Frisbee, on Fridays I swim, and at other times I go rock climbing. I'm pleased with how outgoing I've become. I'm genuinely surprised how quickly I've adapted to college life. The one thing I miss is not having my mother there to give me an extra push to get up in the morning and help with my washing and my dirty dishes. Making friends at college has been easy. In the past, I'd stick to a few close friends, but at college everything is different. Without a doubt, the main reason I adapted so quickly is the friends I've made. Without them consistently pushing me to do things, I would probably be antisocial and just stay in my room.

"This apathy I have developed towards study is something I have to lose … I find myself to be more outgoing than I was back home … The main reason I adapted to this new lifestyle so quickly is because of the friends I made. Without them consistently pushing me to do things, I would probably be antisocial and just stay in my room." (Week 8 reflective writing)

But have I developed any study skills? By the end of the semester, I'm doing an hour or so of worthwhile study a night—not every night of the week, but maybe three nights out of four. My apathy has decreased a little, I think. If a topic intrigues me, I research it and make sure I know enough to be able to explain it to someone. But, if it's something that I find rather dull, I won't do much on it. I just skim read some notes or reports to get a basic idea of the premise. It's a shallow approach. I should be taking an interest in all of the course content, but I just can't force myself

to get into things that seem like little more than common sense. And yet, I must be doing something right because I'm getting good grades.

"I should try to have a deeper approach." (Week 9 journal entry)

I have found the academic culture of the college to be unlike anything I've experienced before. I enjoy the educational environment that has been set up for the students and feel I've matured in my first semester at college. In particular, I've gained a greater knowledge of myself and the direction in life that I want to take. Contributing to this has been the constant questioning of other students about where I came from and where I want to go. Another contributing factor has been writing a reflective journal for my writing class. These influences have helped me follow through and reach some conclusions I might not otherwise have reached. I can see that the academic culture has rubbed off on me and helped me to see more reason to study and to broaden my knowledge. I've enjoyed the journey. The AEP has been interesting to say the least. It has enabled me to grow and to learn more about myself, including how I feel about studying in an institution of higher education.

"I feel as though I have matured throughout my first semester here and … gained a greater knowledge of myself and the direction in life I want to get." (Week 10 journal entry)

Coming to college has been one of the most challenging things I've ever done. At the end of the semester, my mind is still plagued by uncertainty. But I figure that coming has probably been the right thing to do. I feel stronger as a person for having made the move. If only I had more assurance! Am I really on the right path? The way ahead looks anything but clear. I hope my focus and resolve will take me where I want to go, but fear I might not be strong enough to follow through. I seem to get overloaded so easily! I've done some study during the semester. That's more than I achieved at high school, where my attitude to study was passé. I've really enjoyed the AEP. It has worked for me. I didn't struggle too much with the writing class except when I was juggling assignments for other units. One of my other teachers was a bit pedantic with her marking. Some of the students were bad-

mouthing her on Facebook, but I didn't take offence. I'm ending the semester fairly confident of passing my four units and expecting to return in second semester to start a degree course.

"I really enjoyed [the AEP] … It worked for me, and I didn't really struggle too much with it unless I was juggling several other assignments at a time." (Week 13 interview)

Postscript. Ben comfortably passed his four units (av. 67.75%), earning his lowest grade in biology (59%). He transferred to an education degree course in his second semester, passing three of his four units and earning the lowest possible grade for his practice teaching unit (0%). This suggested that teaching was not for him. He spent the next several years switching courses, withdrawing from units and earning a mix of passing and failing grades in science and maths units. At the time of writing, Ben appears to have given up on science and turned to arts. He is at least 2 years away from finishing a BA.

Appendix F Letter in praise of Jodi

Copy of letter written to [name] Public School by the father of Robert [pseudonym], one of Jodi's students in her first year out of college:

To whom it may concern,

My son Robert was enrolled in your school last year. He was in Year 1 with Miss Wetherill. Unfortunately due to life circumstances he has had to shift to [name] Street Public School in [name of location].

As Robert's father and speaking on behalf of his late mother I would just like to say how much we appreciated Jodi Wetherill [pseudonym] as a teacher. It was discussed on many occasions before Cheryl's [Robert's mother] death how happy we were with Jodi as his teacher and how well Robert related to Jodi.

I personally believe Miss Wetherill is a superstar in her profession and would just like to say how much both Cheryl and I appreciated that he got the chance to be in a class with such a remarkable individual.

Thank you [to the school].

Warm regards,

[Signature]