

**STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCE OF  
TRANSITION INTO HIGH SCHOOL:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
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August 2006

## **STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

I certify that the work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This EdD is dedicated to my mother, Leilavathy Krishnasamy, whose love and support has made it possible for me to get this far in life and to my father who has been there spiritually, guiding me.

I would like to thank my sister, Rani (Meena) and brother-in-law Kumar for their invaluable support and unconditional love; my brothers Loga and Guru for believing in me and my ability. I would like to thank my very good friends, Senthilnathan and Vicky for their continual encouragement and support.

Without the fantastic support and unstinting help and time given by my supervisor, Dr. Lisa C. Ehrich there is no way I could have come this far in this timeframe. Her constant support, reassurance and excellent supervision made it possible for me to meet my personal goals.

Thanks go to Dr. Susan Danby for her support during the initial stages of my study as well as to Dr. Marilyn Campbell, my associate supervisor, for her invaluable suggestions.

Finally I would like to thank my school, the site of my study, and my friends and colleagues for being supportive of my study and for taking an interest in my work.

Krishnaveni Ganeson

August 2006.

## ABSTRACT

There is a need to understand the transition of students from primary to secondary schooling outside the confines of practitioners' and academics' viewpoints. This thesis explores that transition from the perspectives of the students themselves. It argues that they experience the transition into secondary schooling as challenging. This issue is significant because transition into high school coincides with adolescent<sup>1</sup> developmental changes – social, physical, emotional, cognitive and psychological - as well as the move from the relative stability of one teacher a year to different teachers for each subject, and the shift in status from being the most senior to the most junior students in their school. These students also face challenges such as friendship and identity issues as well as problems locating places in the new environment, for example, subject classrooms, play areas, teachers' rooms.

This study's theoretical framework is constructed from a phenomenological psychological stance. A phenomenological methodology guides this study, allowing students' experiences to speak for themselves. Other methodologies were not appropriate as the researcher wanted to hear the students' voices while they were experiencing transition.

Few studies in the past have attempted to study transition into high school as it is lived and experienced by students themselves. This empirical study addresses that gap in the literature. Its findings could provide the necessary information needed to further assist educationalists in developing appropriate programs and activities to support this group.

Sixteen adolescents participated in the study. Of two common methods of collecting data in phenomenological studies – interviews and journal writing – journal writing was chosen. This data collection technique enabled the researcher to learn about transition from students' perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, adolescents are 11-12 year old students transferring to New South Wales secondary schooling.

The data were collected in the first ten weeks of high school from Year 7 students (first year of high school in New South Wales). Drawing on the work of Giorgi (1985a, 1985b), who translated aspects of phenomenological philosophy into a concrete method of research (Ehrich, 1997), a phenomenological psychological approach was used to analyse the data in a step-by-step process. There were four steps to the analysis of the data. The first step involved reading through the entire description of the participants' experience to get a sense of the meaning of the experience as a whole. In the second step, the description was read to identify meaning units, i.e. words/phrases that clearly express meanings of the experience of transition. In the third step, the analysis involved transformation of the meaning units from participants' concrete descriptions into more general categories. The fourth step involved two aspects: a situated structural description of the experience was written, and finally the researcher produced a general structural description that represented the whole experience of the phenomenon.

Because of the small sample selected, the study does not claim generalisability across other populations of adolescents. However, what the study does is to highlight seven essential themes of transition. First peers can play a significant role in enabling a smooth transition to high school. Second, schools support transition through a number of programs and activities to help students adapt to the new environment. Third, students need to learn new procedures, location of rooms and other new routines in this environment. Fourth, learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning. Fifth, high school transition is enhanced when students are confident and feel a sense of achievement and success in their new environment. Sixth, homework and assignments are a part of the high school curriculum. Finally, teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND CODES**

### **ACRONYMS**

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ELLA	English Language and Literacy Test
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
Qld	Queensland
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

### **CODES**

A1	Participant A, Experience 1
MU1	Meaning Unit 1
TU1	Transformation Unit 1

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Schooling is seen to provide a foundation for young people's intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development according to the government (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1999). By providing a supportive and nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future.

The Constitution of Australia allocates responsibility for school education to State and Territory governments which in turn provide and manage government schools as well as supporting non-government schools. Schooling in Australia is compulsory for children aged from 6 to 15 years (16 years in Tasmania) (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2001). However, the majority of children start school before they are six and remain at school beyond the age of 15. In most States, children start full-time schooling at around the age of five, when they enrol in a kindergarten or a preparatory year. It is most likely that the majority of these students will have already had some part-time school or preschool experience before they commence primary school. After the preparatory year, primary education lasts for either six or seven years, depending on the State concerned. Secondary schooling is available for either five or six years according to the State arrangements as set out in Table 1. Students usually commence secondary education at about age 12.

**Table 1: Primary and secondary school structures by State and Territory, 2001**  
 (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2001)  
 (MCEETYA). \*Changes made to Queensland Education system from 2007.

School year level	NSW, Vic., Tas., ACT	SA, NT	Qld, WA
12			
11			
10	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
9			
8			
7			
6			
5			
4	Primary	Primary	Primary
3			
2			
1			
Pre-year 1	Kindergarten(NSW, ACT)	Reception(SA)	
	Preparatory (Vic., Tas.)	Transition(NT)	*Preparatory (Qld)
		Pre-primary (WA)	

From the table above, it is evident that children, generally, go through three main stages of education – pre-primary education, primary education and secondary education (which goes up to Year 12). School children in Australia, therefore, face transition a number of times. With the exception of a small number of schools (mainly non-government) that offer P–12 education (i.e., education from preschool to high school on the one campus, although students still face different organisational structures from P–12), most children in Australia face transition at

least twice in their school life: once when they leave home and go to pre-primary/kindergarten and primary school and again when they enter secondary education. Potentially, some school children may experience up to four transitions: from home to kindergarten to pre-school to primary school to secondary school. The overarching consequence of transition is that it results in children entering into a new environment and/or a new structural organisation characterised by new rules, procedures, curriculum and expectations.

While many schools have the traditional primary and secondary schooling on different campuses, the organisational structure in some schools has changed in recent years. The organisational structure in these schools has been further divided into primary school (K to Year 6), middle school (Years 7 to 9) and secondary school/college (Years 10 to 12). Other schools have adopted a system of primary school (K to Year 6), junior high school (Years 7 to 10) and senior college (Years 11 to 12). These organisational and geographical changes have meant that students undergo an additional transition in their school life when they enter into senior school. The rationale underpinning these changes is to better meet the needs of particular groups of students by ensuring that schools facilitate students' building of connections with other peers and between learning areas, foster flexible use of learning time, foster teamwork and integrated curriculum (Barratt, 1998) whether they are in their middle years of schooling or senior schooling.

That transition into high school during adolescence is considered to be an important issue is evident from research that shows students' experiences of transition influence their educational success (Barratt, 1998; Department of Education and Training, 2005b; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003; Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999). Thus, schools that have had little emphasis on ways to ease transition have had higher failure and dropout rates among their high school students than schools that had specific programs to ease transition (Legters & Kerr, 2001). Attention given by education departments and institutions in Australia also emphasises the importance of transition. For example, education departments in recent years initiated forums and seminars and associations (e.g. Middle Years of Schooling Association, Queensland) have been established in recognition of transition as an important issue for adolescents. The Department of Education in New South Wales

has implemented a focused strategy to improve transition practices among particular groups of schools through its state-wide Linkages Project. The aim of this project is to link primary schools to their feeder high schools to gather information about new incoming students. The project promotes continuity of literacy and numeracy development in Stages Three (Primary 5 and 6) and Four (Year 7 and 8). It is based on the premise that “students’ learning plateaus or declines” (Department of Education and Training, 2005a, p. 1) on entering high school and disengagement can continue on to high school. For this reason, the project focus is on continuity of learning for students, particularly those deemed at risk.

Adolescence itself is a transitional state where adolescents undergo major developmental changes. These changes include cognitive, physical, emotional and psychological aspects. That students experience these changes while perhaps entering high school for the first time, makes transition an important educational issue. At this point they have to cope with the double transition of personal developmental changes and changes to their learning environment, covering such aspects as its physical size, curricular, academic, geographical and structural settings.

The personal developmental changes which coincide with the stage of starting high school, are greater than at any other stage of a child’s life (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Stowell, Rios, McDaniel, & Christopher, 1996). Attention to this period of personal and academic transition is clearly warranted. However, of the extensive body of literature on school transitions (e.g., Akos, 2002; Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Cotterell, 1982; Dockett & Perry, 1999a; 1999b; 2001; 2003; Dockett, Perry, Howard, Whitton, & Cusack, 2002; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1995; Yates, 1999), only a few studies in Australia (Cotterell, 1982; Kirkpatrick, 1992) have examined students’ perceptions of high school transition while they live through it. Significantly, none of them have done so from a phenomenological perspective.

It is likely that students’ experience of transition into high school differs. While some adolescents thrive when moving to high school (Hatton, 1995), most

adolescents find it difficult at first but soon adjust (Yates, 1999). However, vulnerable students find the transition extremely difficult (Walker, 2002).

When reforms are introduced into schools and new policies are implemented, young adolescents tend to be absent as active participants in these reforms. They are “present as the passive objects of teachers, administrators and parents, but they do not actively contribute to life in schools nor to the production of the goals and aims of middle graders education” (Lesko, 1994, p. 147). As noted previously, very few studies (Cotterell, 1982) have involved adolescents in the initial weeks of transition and endeavoured to find out from them what their experience of being in high school is during this period. For this reason, a phenomenological approach, which investigates students’ experience of transition, is employed in this study. As phenomenology is the search for the essential structures of a phenomenon (Valle & Halling, 1989) and the main aim of this study is to identify the essential themes and structures of the subjects’ experiences of being in high school for the first time, Giorgi’s (1985a, 1985b) phenomenological psychological research methodology which marries phenomenological philosophy to psychology, has been selected as best suited for the current study. Such an approach seeks to understand the meaning of the experience as it is lived by the students during transition into high school, in contrast to meanings intended and imposed by most research and review literature on this process. It needs to be acknowledged that while the study is about listening to students’ voices as they experience transition into high school, the researcher plays a part in weaving meanings while listening to these experiences.

van Manen (1997) states, “phenomenological research carries a moral force” (p. 12) since it is a search for a deeper understanding of human experience. In the context of education, educators, education departments and policy makers have a moral responsibility to find out about the experiences of transition for students. It is this researcher’s belief that all involved with adolescent education need to be more aware of what adolescents experience as they enter high school in order to facilitate and support them during this crucial stage of their student life. Such an investigation using this methodology has the potential to uncover information about student experiences not previously found by other studies using different methodologies.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

What happens to individuals during adolescence affects their adulthood (Stowell et al., 1996). Thus, it is incumbent on all involved in the education of adolescents to be more aware of adolescence as a critical stage of cognitive, physical, emotional and social development.

The first year into high school coincides with the onset of adolescence with students experiencing developmental changes and, therefore, may pose serious problems for them (Department of Education and Training, 2005b; Kiloh & Morris, 2000).

Students may face social, curriculum and peer challenges (La Rue, Raymond, & Weiss, 2003) such as the fear of being bullied (Akos, 2002; Cormack, 1991; Cumming & Cormack, 1996; Kiloh & Morris, 2000), and friendship (Green, 1997; Hinebauch, 2002), and identity issues (Elias, 2002; Gattis, 1995; Kaplan, 1996; Walker, 2002). As well, adolescents can sometimes fear being lost in the new environment (Kaplan, 1996) or find the new academic challenges too rigorous (Hatton, 1995). Many of the conclusions arrived at to date have been based mainly on teachers' viewpoints, or on some empirical research based on students' views. Of the latter, most of this research has not examined transition experiences while students undergo it during the first term of high school. Thus, this study investigates the experiences of transition by seeking insights from students themselves, rather than from teachers and academics as past research has done. It is anticipated that by understanding what young adolescents experience, schools, teachers and policy makers will be better equipped to facilitate students' transition during this time.

Luke et al. (2003a) are concerned that the significant growth in official reports that are not based on empirical evidence could risk reform in the middle years of schooling being driven by an economic and political agenda which could be misrecognised as reform. Thus, a lack of empirical evidence using students' experiences of transition requires urgent attention and a study such as this would inform educationalists of the impact of transition for students.

The study is significant also because it has been framed within the context of a broader agenda for middle schooling reform in New South Wales. As stated previously, the approach taken by the Department of Education in New South Wales has been to focus on transition between primary and secondary school since transition is such an important issue due to the delineated nature of the education system in this state. According to Luke et al. (2003a), some 168 schools are currently involved in the Linkages Project. The approach adopted by New South Wales lies in contrast to other education departments within Australia that have instigated a variety of projects to address middle schooling reform. Some examples include projects that focus on pedagogy and curriculum, professional development for teachers and building parental partnerships (Luke et al., 2003a). The current study draws upon the transitional experiences of students from New South Wales and, for this reason, is examining a research area deemed relevant to middle schooling reform at the State level.

To date, there has been very little research that has used phenomenology to investigate students' experiences of transition. After an extensive review of the literature, only one phenomenological study was located that focused on student experiences of transition. This was the work of Akos (2002) who conducted a longitudinal study of student experiences in the United States. Akos used Giorgi's (1985a) phenomenological approach to arrive at themes relating to transition as a first stage of his analysis process before using a quantitative approach in the second stage to analyse his findings further. His study is briefly reviewed here.

Akos' (2002) study elicited students' perspectives during transition in four stages over a period of one year, which constituted the last six months of primary education and the first four months of secondary education. This study showed that students were predominantly concerned about school rules and procedures. Akos found that there was a generalised or overall persistent level of worry for most students in transition, and that students were most worried about older students. The positive aspects of transition included use of lockers, new friends, freedom and classes. This study suggested that transition yields more positive experiences for some students than negative.

While there has been quite a number of quantitative and qualitative studies on transition (Akos, 2002; Cotterell, 1982; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003; Dockett et al., 2002; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1995; Yates, 1999), none of this research has looked at the lived experience of transition or used a phenomenological psychological research methodology with the exception of Akos (2002) as aforementioned.

Some of the significant findings of the studies conducted by Cotterell (1982), Green (1997), Hatton (1995), Johnstone (2002) Kirkpatrick (1992) and Yates (1999) verify that transition is an important process whereby students experience the problem of re-identifying themselves; find the physical size of high schools too large and complex, the uncertainty of the new environment and a new curriculum cause for anxiety; and note that older students pose a substantial concern for them. Unlike the current study, all these studies collected data from students retrospectively, through interviews, questionnaire and diary responses. In these studies, transition was viewed as a challenging issue confronting students. For this reason, it is an area worthy of further investigation. Thus, my substantive research question is, “What are students’ experiences of transition into high school?” This study aims to make a pertinent contribution to the literature by learning about students’ experiences of entering high school, an important transitional point, for the first time.

### **Research Question:**

This study has the following overarching research question:

- What are students’ experiences of transition into high school?

Adolescent students participating in the study have been asked the specific research question:

- Describe your experiences of being in high school for the first time

## **Objectives:**

The objectives of the study are:

- To comprehend student experiences of transition as they enter high school for the first time
- To arrive at an understanding of high school transition by turning to the lived experience of a group of first year high school students; and
- To investigate what students constitute as pleasant/interesting and unpleasant/difficult/disappointing/traumatic experiences during transition into high school

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

As indicated previously, this study aims to investigate what it is to be a student experiencing transition into high school in order to explicate a phenomenological description of the findings. It aims to find out about the experience while it is lived. There is a need to examine student experiences as they live through it, as previous studies by Green (1997), Hatton (1995), Johnstone (2002), Kirkpatrick (1992) and Yates (1999) have not focused solely on this aspect of transition but on the retrospective aspect of transition, that is students looking back on their experiences. There is a need, therefore, to place students' experiences of high school transition at the centre of the research project so that the meaning of high school transition can be discovered. The aim of the study, then, through the process of phenomenological analysis, is to abstract essential structures<sup>2</sup> presented by the reflections of students while they experience the event.

## **PRACTITIONER RESEARCH**

The Doctor of Education degree addresses the need for a higher degree oriented towards the enhancement of professional practice and is designed to focus on an applied investigation and problem solving in response to the changing patterns in research activity (Pearson, 1999; Queensland University of Technology, 2005). This

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<sup>2</sup> In this study, essential structures are meanings necessary to understand the experience of transition into high school.

degree provides real opportunities for those “seeking to engage more deeply with their own fields of learning” (McWilliam, 2002, p. 2) who can make a contribution to policy, management and professional practice in education. The aim of the current study is to focus on students’ experiences in the researcher’s workplace to enable a better understanding of these experiences for students and their teachers in that context. As is the focus of practitioner based doctorates, this study emerged from the researcher’s work context and developed in response to an issue that she observed in her school environment. The researcher, a teacher in an all girls’ high school where the study was conducted, was concerned with the issues facing adolescents who enter high school for the first time. As a Year Adviser to Year 7s, (first year of high school in New South Wales), the researcher realised that transition could be a very challenging time for adolescents. Having had first hand experience in this area by informally observing adolescents over some years, the researcher firmly believed the issue of transition required a more formal investigation. It was important that this investigation should take place while students were living the experience.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

The remainder of the thesis will be developed in the following way:

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on transition into high school. It is divided into five main sections. Section one defines transition. Section two considers the stages of schooling and their relationship to human development theories and implications for adolescents. The third section reviews gender based educational policies, as the study is conducted in a girls’ school. Section four examines the literature on the relationship between discontinuity and transition and also investigates the challenges facing transition into high school. This section amplifies the issues concerning transition. The final section, section five, examines the literature pertaining to the role of transition programs introduced in schools to address the issue of transition.

Chapter 3 discusses phenomenology as a theoretical perspective and outlines the research methodology. The work of phenomenological psychologist, Giorgi (1985a, 1985b), is highlighted. This chapter also outlines the data collection and data analysis process.

Chapter 4 reports on the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings and relates the findings to the literature review.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter and includes a summary and conclusions.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The growing body of literature concerning student transition from primary school to high school seems to be based mainly on academic and practitioners' views on childhood development and developmental needs of children. That there is limited empirical work in this field investigating adolescents experience of transition while they undergo it, demonstrates a need for further examination of this area. All students experience transition at least twice in their school lives (McKnight, 2000): at the beginning of primary school and then secondary or high school. Transition into high school is a significant phase (Legters & Kerr, 2001) because it coincides with adolescent developmental changes. It has a major effect on students since they undergo cognitive, emotional, physical, social and psychological developmental changes at this time.

The central focus of this chapter is an argument for the importance of studying students' experiences of transition into high school utilising a phenomenological methodology. Four main bodies of literature are examined. They address in turn the implications of developmental theories for transition, gender based educational policies, the challenges of transition and existing programs for transition.

The chapter commences with an examination of what is understood by transition. It then considers the relevant theories of human development and their implications for adolescents and schooling. As the study in question is conducted in a girls' school, some attention is also given to the area of gender based policies for schooling. Following this is a discussion of the discontinuities and challenges - social/peer, curriculum, physical, geographic and organisational - experienced by students during transition. The final section discusses the approaches used by schools that have implemented transition programs.

## **TRANSITION**

### **What Is Transition?**

Transition is a process of moving from the known to the unknown (Green, 1997). Students go through transitions when they start school, when they leave their primary school to go to high school and when they leave school to go to tertiary institutions or to the work place. Transition is, therefore, experienced by all students.

Starting school is one of the major challenges facing children in their early childhood years. A successful transition, particularly in the early years, has been demonstrated to be a criterion for determining academic achievement (Department of Education and Training, 2005b; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Sanson et al., 2002). Since 1999, Dockett and Perry have conducted several studies in New South Wales on transition to primary school and the implications for children. Their studies (1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003) reveal the importance of these transitions for students' success in later life. Dockett and Perry (2003) suggest that children who made a smooth transition between home and primary school, and experienced early school success, tend to maintain higher levels of social competence and achievement. These important outcomes have been supported by Early et al. (1999), who cite many studies pointing to the period of early schooling as of unique significance in children's lives (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Eccles et al., 1993; Ladd & Price, 1987). They claim that "the transition to kindergarten is a pivotal time in a child's development" (Early et al., 1999, p. 26) because a child's transitional experience will affect their future success at school and in life. Alexander and Entwisle (1988, 1993) have also reinforced the importance of transition from home to kindergarten as a critical component of long-term school success. Based on their longitudinal studies of Grades 1 and 2 students in Baltimore primary schools, in the US, the authors noted that children's long-term academic and non-academic success was affected by their transitional experience into school.

Transition from primary to high school is also considered to be a key milestone. While experiencing adolescence, children undergo more developmental changes

than at any other time in their lives except for infancy (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Stowell et al., 1996). These changes include physical, cognitive, emotional and psychological changes which have been captured by a number of key psychologists. Their perspectives are considered in the next section which focuses on the three main stages of schooling and the link to key theories of adolescent development. At each stage of schooling children experience different developmental changes. For this reason each stage of schooling – infant, primary and secondary – which coincide with some of the developmental changes facing a child – is discussed. This is followed by a discussion on adolescence as a transitional state and the various developmental changes associated with this stage of adolescents' lives.

## **STAGES OF SCHOOLING, DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES AND ADOLESCENCE**

Schools in New South Wales have been divided historically into infants, primary and secondary/high school sections (see Table 1, p. 2) to cater to the needs of children at the different stages of their lives. Each stage of schooling is defined and can be linked to a stage of development as experienced by children. The theories of development propounded by both Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson explain developmental changes in stages. In the section that follows, these stages of development are related and linked to the three stages of schooling – infants, primary and secondary.

Development theorists attempt to explain children's and adolescents' development and learning in a variety of ways and through several theoretical frameworks. Some of the key developmental theorists - Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Abraham Maslow - whose work has implications for adolescence as a stage of development are highlighted in this discussion.

Jean Piaget, a renowned biologist, who originally studied molluscs, moved into studying the development of children's cognitive understanding. According to Piaget's (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) theory of cognitive development, "the

development of thinking and the organising systems of the brain” (Lythgoe, 2002, p. 1) children’s thinking does not develop smoothly; it takes place in stages. This view is also referred to as Piaget’s stage theory of development. Piaget posited that children develop in four stages, which they always do in the same order, although the time to move from one stage to another might vary (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1968; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Pulaski, 1971; Ratliff, 1980). Piaget’s theory is based on the insight that as children develop, they build structures or mental images to understand and respond to the physical experiences around them. The four developmental stages and processes by which children progress, as identified by Piaget, are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations and formal operations (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). In the sensorimotor stage, which is approximately from birth till about two years, the child interacts with the environment physically and builds a set of concepts about reality and how it works while in the preoperational stage (about seven years of age), the child is still not able to conceptualise abstractly and the child needs a concrete physical situation for conceptualisation. The third stage, concrete operations, exists till the age of around eleven where physical experience accumulates, a child starts to conceptualise, creating logical structures that explain his/her physical experiences. Finally, the formal operations stage begins at ages eleven to fifteen. It is this last stage, which coincides with the time of puberty and high school transition.

While Piaget (1958) theorised children’s cognitive development as taking place in four stages, Erikson (1995) posited eight psychosocial stages of development over a person’s life span. Like Piaget, Erikson held that a person moved from one stage to the next after having mastered each previous stage. Erikson (1995) further proposed that specific developmental tasks must be learned and mastered at each stage before proceeding to the next. His eight stages are presented in Table 2 and the researcher has superimposed the four stages of Piaget’s cognitive development theory into the same table to show how they overlap to a certain extent. In each stage of Erikson’s model, there is a crisis that has to be overcome successfully in order to achieve continued positive development.

**Table 2: Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development and Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory** (adapted from Erikson, 1995, p. 245)

	* 1		*2		*3		*4 (*Piaget)		
Maturity (60+)									Ego Integrity Vs Despair
Adulthood (35 to 60)								Generativity Vs Stagnation	
Young Adulthood (18 to 35)								Intimacy Vs Isolation	
Puberty and Adolescence (12 to 18)							Identity Vs Role Confusion  *Formal Operations		
Latency (6 to 12)					Industry Vs Inferiority  *Concrete Operations				
Locomotor-genital (3 to 6)			Initiative Vs Guilt  *Pre-operational						
Muscular-Anal (1 to 3)		Autonomy Vs Shame, doubt  *Sensori-motor							
Oral Sensory (Infancy)	Basic Trust Vs Mistrust  *Sensori-motor								
Stages	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

**Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development**

The first five of Erikson's eight stages have been highlighted because of their implications for adolescent development and their relevance to the current study. Piaget's four stages are in blue to distinguish them from Erikson's. As can be seen from the table, Erikson's eight stages begin from infancy and go up to maturity (60+). At each age in this model (see vertical axis on the left), humans experience different types of psychosocial development. For example in stage 1, which coincides with infancy, the developmental task that takes place in an individual is developing trust. At puberty, stage 5, adolescents experience identity and role confusion. In Piaget's cognitive development theory most humans may experience the four stages of cognitive development. This is indicated on the top axis in Table 2 which corresponds to stage 5 in Erikson's stages, which is indicated in the bottom axis. While a child experiences Erikson's first 2 stages of psychosocial development

s/he may also experience the first stage of cognitive development as shown in Table 2. These two theorists' work has been tabulated together to show that children undergo several types of development at the same time.

These theorists - Piaget and Erikson - and the implications of their work for child and adolescent development are now discussed in relation to the three historical stages of schooling – infant, primary and secondary schooling. The discussion here focuses only on the first five stages of Erikson's psychosocial development theory because these have relevance and implications for childhood and adolescent development.

### **The First Stage of Schooling - Infant**

The first stage of schooling in New South Wales is the Infant or Pre-Primary Stage. It is also the first year of schooling which is referred to as the kindergarten year. Although traditionally the kindergarten year has been physically located in the same grounds as the second stage of education - primary - these students tend not to be part of the primary school as their school times and system varies from the primary school due to their needs and developmental stages being different from their primary counterparts.

The first developmental stage and process by which children progress as identified by Piaget is the sensorimotor stage which is approximately from birth till about two years (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). In this stage, the child is not at kindergarten yet, and has not started formal schooling. Here the child interacts with the environment physically and builds a set of concepts about reality and how it works. According to Erikson (1995), basic physical and social needs must be provided for an infant to develop a sense of trust in the first year of life.

The second stage of development according to Piaget (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) is the pre-operational stage. This stage is when children are up to about seven years of age. In this stage the child is still not able to conceptualise abstractly because they are mainly in the pre-logical level of understanding and need a concrete physical situation for conceptualisation. There is a tendency for most children in the first

stage of schooling to be at this stage of cognitive development. According to Erikson (1995), the second stage is a time for developing autonomy. A child needs to explore, experiment, make mistakes and test limits in order to be independent. In the third stage, a child needs to achieve a sense of competence and initiative by being given the opportunity to freely select personally meaningful activities. On successful completion of the first three stages of development a child will bring trust, autonomy and initiative to preschool or kindergarten which will assist him/her in learning new skills at school. Children attend pre-school being able to trust strangers, learn autonomously and have the initiative to learn and cope in the new environment.

The first three stages of Erikson's psychosocial stages of development theory form the basis for children entering kindergarten while Piaget's cognitive development theory states that kindergarten children are in the pre-operational stage of cognitive development and children need a concrete physical situation to conceptualise. Since these children are at a distinct stage of development, their education is also at a distinct stage of schooling.

### **The Second Stage of Schooling – Primary**

At this stage of schooling children are in primary school and enter Primary 1. This stage goes from Primary 1 to Primary 6 in New South Wales. Again this stage is distinct from the other two stages in terms of the developmental changes that children experience at this point in their lives.

The developmental stage and process by which children progress in primary school as identified by Piaget (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) is the concrete operations stage. This stage exists from about seven years till about eleven years of age. In this stage as physical experience accumulates, a child starts to conceptualise, creating logical structures that explain his/her physical experiences. The child, however, is still operating at the concrete level of cognition. Here schooling needs differ from kindergarten because children are moving towards creating logical structures, thus schools must provide opportunities for students to have physical experiences of concrete situations so as to provide them with the possible opportunities to

conceptualise and create logical structures. At this stage the child is able to take another's viewpoint and also take into account more than one perspective, therefore opportunities must be provided in schools for these to be realised during this stage of schooling (Sandwell, 2003).

In Erikson's theory, primary school children are in the fourth stage of psychosocial development. Their needs differ from preschoolers and adolescents. In the fourth stage according to Erikson's theory (1995) a child needs to set and attain personal goals. The school at this stage needs to provide opportunities for primary students for this to take place to avoid failure for these young children and to ensure future successes.

In summary, this group of children are at a distinct stage of schooling from preschooler and adolescents; their developmental changes and needs differ from that of preschoolers and adolescents.

### **The Third Stage of Schooling – Secondary/High School**

The third and final stage of schooling is secondary. Students enter high school in New South Wales at this point although other new structures have evolved in the last five to six years. These new structures take the form of middle school, junior secondary and senior college which together form the high school. High schools span Years 7 to 12 in New South Wales. Year 7 is also the year where students experience transition from primary to high school. This is the stage that is of most interest to the researcher and the current phenomenological study explores students' experiences of transition into high school. The third stage of schooling coincides with the developmental changes of adolescence. In this crucial phase of their lives, they are faced with two major issues: transition into high school and adolescent developmental changes.

According to Piagetian theory on stages of cognitive development, young adolescents from the age of 12 are at the beginning of the formal operations stage, the last stage of cognitive development (Atherton, 2002; Brown, 1970; Lythgoe, 2001). "During puberty, the intellectual nature of a child undergoes transformation

and becomes more and more like an adult. Thus, early adolescents are in a transitional intellectual state between child-like (concrete) thinking and adult-like (formal) thinking” (Caissy, 1994, p.102). Children in this stage are capable of thinking logically and abstractly, reasoning theoretically (Boeree, 2000; Caissy, 1994), and have the ability to think about their thoughts. That is, they are capable of reflective thinking (Shelton, Elkind & Farel, 2001). It is at adolescence, therefore, that they move from the concrete to the abstract realm of understanding (Education Queensland, 2001b; Kruse, 2001; Sutherland, 1999). Development of skills during this stage determines future success or failure at school and work as well as the ability to form meaningful, lasting relationships (Gattis, 1995; Green, 1999). However, not all adolescents move from the concrete to the abstract realm at the same rate, which could affect some of their learning abilities and in turn could cause emotional and psychological problems. Students who are not coping with school work because of their differing cognitive rate of development will fall back in their work. This would affect their school performance not only academically but also socially since poor performance can affect students’ self-esteem (Kaplan, 1996; Pinnell, 1998). This last stage of cognitive development coincides with the time of puberty and high school transition making this a very important stage of development to the researcher.

Piaget considered this the ultimate stage of development because children’s way of thinking is as powerful as it can get (Sandwell, 2003). Children also have the capacity to conduct deductive reasoning (Atherton, 2002). According to Piaget, up to this stage, the development of intelligence is mainly concrete, concerned only with reality, now formal thinking becomes possible (Piaget, 1968). Personality becomes constructed at this stage. Personality cannot be constructed prior to adolescence because it presupposes formal thought which only takes place in the last stage (Piaget, 1968).

Piaget’s (1968) theory of cognitive development has implications for teaching and learning and these implications with respect to adolescents are considered here. During transition into high school, young adolescents move into the formal operations stage and personality formation takes place. Teachers play a critical role at this point by ensuring that the pedagogy used in classrooms allows children the

opportunity to move beyond the concrete level of thinking to allow for abstract thinking to begin. Some students at this stage can examine academic and social criteria of learning through a methodology that allows them to experiment and discover learning (North Carolina State University, 2001) because some are now capable of thinking abstractly and not just at the concrete cognitive level. Based on this premise, teachers should provide a more stimulating and interactive classroom environment that develops the ability to form opinions, make decisions and draw conclusions. There is a need for teachers to provide adolescents with a learning environment that can encourage them to “fuse together prior knowledge and new experiences to problem solve [to] develop cognitive abilities” (North Carolina State University, 2001, p. 1). “Educators must plan a developmentally appropriate curriculum” (On Purpose Associates, 2001, p. 2) while teachers must provide relevant and appropriate experiences for adolescents to promote the building of cognitive structures of thinking for these students to move to a higher level of thinking at the abstract level. Teachers need to promote higher order thinking skills through their learning activities for students to achieve an abstract level of thinking which would in turn promote feelings of success at high school and make transition successful for many.

The psychological needs of adolescence are also different from those which govern childhood. Erik Erikson’s theory (1995) of psychosocial development stresses that every stage of life is marked by a particular psychosocial conflict. The third stage of schooling, the entry into high school, coincides with the fifth stage of Erikson’s psychosocial development theory. At this stage, children undergo confusion as to who they are and what their place is in the world. This is a time of transition from childhood to adulthood and it is a time of searching for appropriate roles to pursue. According to Gattis (1995), this stage can sometimes result in role confusion for adolescents because they do not know who they are in this new environment. This is understandable as it is during this time of their life that young adolescents are confronted with the myriad of developmental changes while at the same time, in many cases, they enter a new learning environment (i.e. high school), facing further challenges. Being the youngest in high school adds to the role confusion because in the previous year in primary six, these same children were the oldest, role models and leaders of their school (Barratt, 1998; Elias, 2002; Kaplan, 1996; Yates, 1999).

Since children face a number of such issues during transition into high school besides experiencing developmental changes at this point in their lives, this study is worth undertaking to better understand how to support these students during this stage of schooling.

During adolescent years the need for status and acceptance especially from peers may be more important than parental acceptance (Kruse, 2001; Shelton et al., 2001). Adolescents ask themselves who they are and to whom they belong as they search for an individual as well as a group identity (Burns, 2003; Erikson, 1963; Kaplan, 1996). The peer group acquires much power and it establishes criteria for social acceptance and rejection. To go against the peer group, a member risks being ostracised or ridiculed (Mitchell, 1978). The need for independence and to assert oneself also peaks; and there is now a need for achievement and role experimentation (Kruse, 2001; Mitchell, 1978; Shelton et al., 2001). Thus, during adolescence, adolescents have to establish an identity and become socially accepted and therefore the necessity to resolve identity issues emerges. Many adolescents experience conflict between the growing need for independence and security in personal relationships (Schools Council, 1993).

For this study of students' experiences of transition into high school, the most important stage in Erikson's psychosocial development theory is the fifth stage. In this stage, as noted previously, children undergo identity and role confusion. Teachers have a role to play by providing students with opportunities to develop autonomy and initiative and therefore reduce role confusion. Building their self-esteem (Eccles et al., 1983) is also seen as a means of helping to alleviate transitional difficulties (Yates, 1999). The desire for autonomy in students can be destabilising in the new environment (Eccles, et al., 1983; Elias, 2002) if this need is ignored by teachers. Teachers, therefore, need to look at ways to build students' self-esteem and provide experiences for students to find themselves in this new environment (Hine & Fraser, 2001; Kaplan, 1996; Walker 2002).

Both Piaget's and Erikson's theories on development have implications for the teaching and learning of children at the secondary school stage because they experience changes in their cognitive, emotional and psychological development

which allows them to think abstractly and foster the need to re-identify their role in the new environment. Transition into high school and adolescent development coincide at this stage of schooling making it an area that needs attention.

Piaget's cognitive theory of development and Erikson's psychosocial theory of development have not been without its critics. Piaget's theory has been criticised because he examined the behaviour of "the average child", and did not allow for any exceptions (Edwards, Hopgood, Rosenberg & Rush, 2000; Powell, 2005). For example, Powell (2005) stated that "[n]ew research has shown that infants follow some of the stages at a much earlier age than Piaget theorised. As an example, the concept of object permanence has been observed at an earlier age than Piaget predicted. Furthermore, infants have been found to conceptualise at an earlier age" (p. 2). Gardner (1979) also critiqued Piaget's theory for overlooking mental and environmental factors in shaping a child's behaviour. Many contemporary theorists (Gelman & Baillargeon, 1983; Meece, 2002; Shaffer, 2002) believe that Piaget underestimated younger children's ability due to the research methods he used because the method required sophisticated verbal skills, therefore it was possible although children could perform at a higher level their verbal skills prohibited this. Only a small minority of adolescents are said to reach the formal operational stage, and, as a result, the universality of Piaget's theory has been questioned and may be mastered in different orders by different children (Case, 1992; Case & Okamoto, 1996; Shaffer, 2002).

Some theorists (Meece, 2002; Rogoff, 1990) claim that Piaget's research was limited because it does not consider the role of culture in developing thinking skills. For example, research conducted by a group of British and Brazilian researchers found that 10 to 12 year olds in Brazil had little difficulty in making large number computations in the context of selling on the street yet could not carry out the same task in written form. The results of this research according to Rogoff (1990), underscore the importance of considering the cultural context in which thinking skills develop. Cross-cultural research (Ceci, 1990; Meece, 2002; Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2001) has also made evident the significant role of culturally defined experiences in developing cognitive thinking.

In recent times, other theories have emerged that have sought to consider cultural influences in explaining human development. Sociocultural theory seeks to “explain the growth of individual knowledge, development and competencies in terms of guidance, support and structure provided by society” (Berger, 2001, p. 51). This theory explains human development in terms of the interactions between the developing persons and their surrounding culture. The culture of a person is considered as having an impact of a person’s development as posited by Rogoff (1990) earlier. Culture here is an integral part to development according to Cole (1996). Sociocultural theorists like Vygotsky (1978) according to Berger, point to the way children learn from teachers, parents and peers as well as their learning is shaped by the beliefs and goals of their community.

Vygotsky (1978) was a social constructivist who argued that all cognitive functions originate as products of social interactions and learning is more than an accumulation of new knowledge. To Vygotsky learning is knowledge of community. Piaget, he said, failed to understand that learning is a collaborative process and he overlooked the essentially social nature of learning (Shaffer, 2002). Vygotsky’s theory of social development helps one to understand that cognition and learning is a social collaborative process with others (Rogoff, 1990). More knowledgeable adults and peers play a role in transforming cognitive functions of learning for children to a higher level (Vygotsky in Meece, 2002). However, Vygotsky’s theory is not without its criticisms since it puts little emphasis on physical maturation and innate biological processes than other developmental theorists. He also does not explain the cognitive processes required to allow the development in a child to move from assisted reader to independent reader (Meece, 2002). Vygotsky’s theory has been criticised for neglecting to consider the role of genes in guiding development (Berger, 2001). For example, Vygotsky did not consider the neurological maturation in mental processes. The influence of genetics which was not considered by other developmental theorists led to the epigenetic systems theory. This is the “newest developmental theory which builds on established bodies of research” (Berger, 2001, p. 55). This theory seeks to explain development on the basis of humans having powerful instincts and abilities that arise from biological heritage; it is believed the timing and pace of certain developmental changes are genetically

guided. This theory informs us that inherited forces affect each person's development within their particular context.

Another pertinent theory worthy of mention here was proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) who created ecological systems theory, later renamed the bioecological systems theory. According to this theorist, the development of a child is viewed as a combination of biological disposition and environmental forces. Unlike Piaget's contribution, this theory places much importance on environmental factors in shaping human development. Of the theories identified in the aforementioned discussion, it is evident that each has offered an explanation of human development and how it is shaped by internal (genes, the intellect) and external forces (i.e. culture, the environment). The contribution of these emergent theories is that they have offered another interpretation and highlighted other dimensions of how to study human development. According to Berger (2001), it is likely that most developmentalists "will continue to take an eclectic perspective (i.e., choose what seem to be best, or most useful, elements from the various theories, instead of adhering to one single perspective). ...[N]o one single theory fully explains the behaviour of humans" (p. 65).

Regardless of the criticisms directed towards Piagetian theory, it appears that children tend to conform to his stages of development even if the stages occur at an earlier or later age. "Piaget has taught us that children do not see and think about the world as adults do" (Meece, 2002, p. 149). According to Powell (2005), without the underlying basis of Piaget's cognitive theory we would treat the learning process of a child the same as the learning style of adults. Piaget's contribution therefore, has a place in understanding children's cognitive development. Despite these and other criticisms by thinkers (Flavell, 1985; Meece, 2002; Powell, 2005; Rogoff, 1990; Shaffer, 2002) in the field, Piaget is said to have captured significant milestones reflecting children's development.

Erikson's theory has been criticised as being more applicable to boys than girls and has paid more attention to infancy and childhood than to adulthood (Cramer, Flynn, & La Fave, 1997). Furthermore, his theory which emphasises autonomy and independence are not necessarily goals that all cultures would encourage for their

young people (Meece, 2002). For example, according to Meece, “parents of Asian, Mexican and African-American heritage are more likely to encourage ... interdependence and family obligations while European American parents encourage ... less interdependence in their children” (p. 381). Another criticism directed at Erikson is that his work has been viewed as “a descriptive overview of human social and emotional development which does not explain why or how this development takes place” (Shaffer, 2002, p. 44). Yet, despite these criticisms, Erikson’s theory does provide a useful framework for understanding psychological development and points to the need for both stable and caring relationships in early development. Therefore, it is argued here, that it has potential for understanding development of adolescents and the search for identity in adolescence. In summary, both Piaget’s and Erikson’s theories help explain the cognitive, emotional and psychological development of adolescents and their value to education – teaching and learning – should not be ignored.

The next part of the discussion considers the work of Abraham Maslow whose motivation theory can be applied to help determine the needs of adolescents to reach their future potential.

### **Maslow’s Motivation Theory/Hierarchy of Needs**

This part of the discussion considers the work of Abraham Maslow, another developmental psychologist who proposed a third model of stages of human development. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs can be applied at any stage of schooling because for a person to fulfil the need at a higher level, lower level needs must be first fulfilled. It is also possible, when the environment changes for the worse, that the individual’s needs differ so that they fall back to a more basic lower level of needs which must be fulfilled before they can move to a higher level once more.

Maslow propounded a theory of motivation based on a hierarchy of five human needs (Figure 1). These needs in ascending order are physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970, 1987). According to Maslow, personal growth is contingent on the sequential fulfilment of these needs.

He contends that as humans meet their basic needs, they seek to satisfy higher needs that occupy the hierarchy (Norwood, 1999).



**Figure 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs – the original 5-stage model** (Source: Huitt, 2004)

Physiological needs refer to the most basic needs for food, sleep, air and warmth. When physiological needs are met a person then turns to his or her safety. This need is important especially when children go into a new environment and feel the need to fit in and feel connected (Walker, 2002). In the pre-primary stage of schooling, a child needs to feel safe, yet even after this has been fulfilled, when entering the third stage of schooling, which is a new environment, some children feel threatened by the thought of older students in high school, when they are the youngest (Hatton, 1995; Green, 1997). It is possible that when young adolescents leave their safe and familiar primary school environment to attend a new high school environment, the need for feeling safe is paramount. An important message for high schools is that they ought to consider students' needs for safety when they are in a new environment. Studies (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Hatton, 1995) indicate that students fear for their safety in their new high school environment. Next in the hierarchy is love/belonging.

According to Maslow (1970, 1987), a person needs to feel that they belong in their particular settings. It is no secret that human beings need to belong to a group, need

to be loved and accepted. This notion has an important implication for students who are entering school for the first time and again for students experiencing transition into high school; it is likely that they will need to feel they belong to this new environment, that they are wanted by others and that they have a place in the school.

The next stage in Maslow's (1970, 1987) hierarchy of needs is esteem. Esteem refers to the need for recognition and acceptance by others as well as self respect. Students who leave their primary schools and enter a new high school environment will find they are no longer the oldest and have lost the recognition and acceptance as the seniors and role models of their schools. These students have to re-establish themselves in the new school environment besides coping with other issues (Barratt, 1998; Elias, 2002; Gattis, 1995; Kaplan, 1996). They need to be recognised and accepted in order to be part of the new environment.

The final level of the hierarchy, self-actualisation, requires that a person has progressed through the other levels of the hierarchy. Some theorists have adapted this five-level model to include other needs. For example, the 1970's adapted hierarchy of needs model, included cognitive and aesthetic needs as the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> need respectively, while the 1990's adapted hierarchy of needs included transcendence needs as the eighth need. However, all of these are arguably included in the original five-level model under self-actualisation need (Chapman, 2005). Self-actualisation is the need of the human to make the most of their abilities. Self-actualisation is a basic force which drives the person forward and onwards. It is about personal growth and realisation of potential (Norwood, 1999). In order for children and young adolescents to reach this level, they must ensure that other needs are met and the environment is conducive for student learning to reach their potential. The right environment becomes very important as it enables a person "to actualise his [sic] own potential" (Maslow, 1999, p. 179). Thus, an important implication for teachers and educators is that careful attention should be paid to creating rich learning and social environments for students so they can develop fully, achieve self-esteem and eventually self-actualisation. To arrive at this level of self-actualisation, a student's transition experiences need to be conducive to fulfil the other needs, making transition into high school an important issue for all educationists because of its long term impact on children.

Like Piaget and Erikson, Maslow's theory has also been challenged and critiqued in recent years. In fact, work by Envision (2005) contradicts the order of needs specified by Maslow's model. For example, some cultures may appear to place social needs before any others. Maslow's hierarchy also has difficulty explaining cases such as the "starving artist" according to Envision (2005) in which a person neglects physical needs in pursuit of aesthetic needs or spiritual needs. Finally, there is little evidence to suggest that people are motivated to satisfy exclusively one need at a time. Even though Maslow's hierarchy lacks scientific support, it is well-cited and often the first theory of motivation to which many people are exposed. Modifications have been made to this theory by others such as Alderfer (1972) who developed a needs-based model by re-grouping the five levels of need into three – existence, relatedness and growth. However, all the changes made have been an adaptation of Maslow's five-level needs model showing it as a starting point for a needs theory. Maslow's theory till today has been used as a basic model to explain motivation.

The three theories of development reviewed in this paper have clear implications for adolescents. Adolescents experience the need to belong (Maslow, 1970), to redefine their roles in society (Erikson, 1995) and form personalities (Piaget, 1968) at this stage of their lives. The third stage of schooling, secondary schooling, coincides with adolescent development, making transition into high school an important area of concern for all dealing with first year high school children. The chapter now turns to the other two developmental changes – physical and emotional – confronting young adolescents in the third stage of schooling, making adolescence itself a transitional state.

### **Adolescence as a Transitional State – Physical and Emotional**

During adolescence, children undergo many changes in their lives. Adolescence can be described as a transitional state because adolescents experience more changes at this stage of their lives than at any other time (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). The changes they experience include physical, cognitive, emotional and psychological changes. Besides cognitive, emotional and

psychological changes which were discussed in the previous section, adolescents experience physical developmental changes which affect their emotions as well.

Physical development takes place throughout every phase of human development. During early adolescence these changes have a greater impact because young adolescents undergo puberty at this stage of their lives. Puberty is defined as the biological and physical changes of adolescence (Caissy, 1994; Steinberg, 1993). As a result, young adolescents experience three kinds of physical changes (Shelton et al., 2001). First, they go through the adolescent growth spurt, the “accelerated rate of increase in height and weight that occurs during early adolescence” (Coleman & Hendry, 1999, p. 58). Their body size and shape changes and girls also experience height spurts considerably earlier than boys. Second, they develop primary sex characteristics, which are the maturing of the reproductive system. And finally, adolescents develop secondary sex characteristics during this stage as well, which are the visual signs of the body maturing such as the growth of body hair, girls develop breasts, voice changes (in boys) and increased body odour (Huebner, 2000; Ozretich & Bowman, 2001; Shelton et al., 2001). At this stage adolescents increase their body weight in terms of girls adding on body fat while boys develop muscles. Many girls experience menarche, their first menstruation, during the first year or two of high school. The rate of physical development varies between individual adolescents and there can be as much as a six year span between a slowly developing boy and a rapidly developing girl (Shelton et al., 2001). As a result of these physical developments these young adolescents are sensitive to their physical changes and may be confused about their emerging sexuality. There tends to be a general preoccupation with the body, with the way it looks and how it feels, and this affects most young adolescents (Huebner, 2000). These adolescents also try to incorporate their bodily changes into their own self image (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). To them their body image, being fat, thin, pretty or ugly, defines who they are.

Emotions are also at a transitional state because young adolescents also experience emotional development during this stage of their lives. Emotions common to the young adolescent age group are many and varied. They can be best described as “unstable, unpredictable, and extreme” (Caissy, 1994, p.33). Most young

adolescents worry about what others think about them, have increased desire for privacy and experience frequent mood swings (Caissy, 1994; Fenwick & Smith, 1994; Ozretich & Bowman, 2001; Shelton et al., 2001). They also have many fears and worries and one of their fears is about being bullied at school (Akos, 2002). They also have concerns about their physical appearance and the academic and social aspects of school. Anxiety is another common emotion experienced by them. Feelings of inferiority are common and they are related to a lack of self-confidence, insecurity and low self-esteem (Burns, 2003; Kaplan, 1996; Kruse, 2001). Caissy (1994) maintains that “the early adolescent remains insecure throughout his/her emotional evolution” (p. 63). For this reason, it is imperative that young adolescents be given opportunities to build their self-esteem since self-esteem is related to academic achievement (Kaplan, 1996).

According to North Carolina State University (2001), adolescent learners stay engaged when their emotional, social, physical and intellectual needs are being addressed. The implication for teaching is that teachers should aim to meet these needs by individualising their teaching to meet these needs. For example, schools that offer transition programs and integrated curriculum to meet the needs of their students (Manning, 2000) are endeavouring to meet adolescents’ emotional and physical needs. An integrated curriculum will approach learning through multi-disciplinary teaching teams, thematic units and student negotiation of the curriculum according to Barratt (1998). Subjects are therefore integrated in terms of a common theme across the curriculum areas instead of subjects being taught as discrete units. Other strategies used by schools include appointing student mentors (Elias, 2002), Year Advisers, organising orientation days and school visits to the primary feeder schools (Cotterell, 1982; Elias, 2002).

Students who enjoy learning if their needs are being met will be more productive (North Carolina State University, 2001), which in turn should further reduce the problems faced by adolescents. Children who are entering transitional stages of education require a setting in which their needs are supported each step of the way. Therefore, it is important to provide a predictable environment that validates students’ experiences.

In addition to having to cope with these types of developmental changes, young adolescents are also expected to undergo transition from primary to secondary education. Transition into high school is an important issue because its success or lack thereof could have academic and social implications for an adolescent's future life (Sanson et al., 2002). Successful transitions into high school can help students make lasting attachments to school and increase the likelihood of graduating from high school because they are able to continue their education and remain at school due to positive school experiences (Legters & Kerr, 2001; Riley, 2003).

### **Summary**

This section examined the developmental theorists Piaget, Erikson and Maslow and the developmental changes faced by children from entry into preschool to adolescence and during transition into high school. The changes facing adolescents include cognitive, psychological, physiological and emotional changes. The section also examined the link between some of these changes and the stages of schooling and implications for the teaching and learning of young adolescents. The section uncovered the impact of developmental changes on young adolescents and schooling.

Transition into high school coincides with adolescent development making this study important. As the focus of this study is in a girls' school where the researcher teaches, the next section provides an overview of gender based policies for schooling.

### **GENDER AND EDUCATION POLICIES**

There have been many policies both at the Federal and State levels based on education and gender. Some have been introduced to address the inequalities between the genders while others have aimed to ensure equal opportunities for both genders. The current study draws on girls' experience of transition into high school. For this reason, the following discussion traces some of the key gender based

policies at the national and state levels relating to the schooling of girls in Australia is deemed important.

### **National and State Gender Education Policies**

Every feminist movement has demanded better and improved educational opportunities for girls and women and the Australian feminist movement has been no exception. In the mid 1970s, during the ‘second wave of feminism’, sex inequality emerged as an educational issue (Yates, 1990). An important watershed in the education of girls in Australian schools was the introduction of *The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* in 1987 which recognised the educational needs of girls.

The National Policy was designed “to overcome educational inequalities between the sexes, while recognising the entitlement of every individual to the conditions for successful schooling” (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p. 15). This policy was significant because it was the first of its kind in Australia dedicated to bettering the outcomes of girls in schools. It acknowledged that girls’ needs were not being addressed by schooling; women in Australia generally had lower educational qualifications than men, earned a lower income and were more likely to be dependent on welfare benefits than their male counterparts (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987). Thus the focus of that policy was on encouraging and equipping girls and women to participate more fully in all aspects of public and private life (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987), while aiming to overcome educational inequalities between the sexes. In line with the National Policy, the New South Wales Department of Education implemented a non-sexist education policy ‘Girls Technology Strategy’ in 1987 to increase girls’ participation in technology related areas, to broaden girls’ career options and to support girls as learners (Department of Education and Training, 1989). The aforementioned policies at both levels of government only considered curriculum opportunities for girls by providing a wider base of subjects. These policies, however, failed to recognise that the needs of girls for future success were not only based on academic opportunities but also on the fulfilment of social and psychological needs.

An important aspect raised in the National Policy was the inadequate provision of physical facilities in schools to meet the needs of young adolescent girls. It was found that schools fell short of providing a range of suitable physical facilities such as “the number and quality of girls’ toilets accommodation, sanitary disposal units and the availability and access of emergency supplies of napkins” (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p. 34). The policy also stated that “Inadequate provisions lead to both embarrassment and anxiety, and a lowering of self-esteem likely to cause a withdrawal of girls from school” (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p. 34) which affects the support for girls during puberty and adolescence. The National Policy strongly recommended that their needs be met as a priority since poor facilities can have a negative impact on adolescent girls’ self-esteem and their regular school attendance. Transition into high school was made that much harder for some girls due to these poor physical facilities and also since many of them experienced menarche (Huebner, 2000) at this stage.

*The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-1997*, grew out of the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools (Australian Education Council, 1987). The Plan focussed on schools taking the responsibility to contribute to the achievement of equality between the sexes and improving the conditions of life for girls. Schools were to ensure what was taught and learned was equally valuable to boys and girls (Australian Education Council, 1993). This document raised the issue that girls were not a homogenous group, that girls came from different backgrounds and circumstances and did not all have the same academic ability, interests and capacity to learn. This Plan did little to focus on high school transition. The Plan, as in the previous policy documents, focused on achieving equality between the genders through the academic aspect of schooling and paid scant attention to other dimensions and challenges facing girls such as issues of transition and the challenges transition brings.

Yet the literature on transition has shown that students who do not feel they belong will not be focusing on the academic aspects of schooling (Kaplan, 1996). Other work has shown that girls especially find peer relationships during transition most stressful unlike boys (Akos, 2002), and that they need friendship (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001) and peer support. Moreover, poor transition can lead to failure in

school and future life both at the primary and high school level (Barratt, 1998; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003; Early et al., 1999). For these reasons and others, it is important that effective transition programs be put in place to support girls during this stage of their lives.

Since the 1980s there has been a significant improvement in the results of female students in high school (Barron, 2003; Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005a, 2005b; O’Doherty, 1995). However, this has not translated into success in later life in terms of long term achievement in the workplace by them holding positions of authority (Ailwood & Lingard, 2001). It is an established fact that women continue to be under-represented in positions of power throughout the world.

The push towards girls’ education in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in more girls enrolling in male-dominated mathematics and science courses, girls remaining longer at school and an increase in tertiary enrolment for girls as well. Girls at all income levels have also succeeded in outperforming boys in all literacy related activities (Barron, 2003) which has now resulted in boys being considered the new ‘disadvantaged’ and a call for their rights to be reinstated signalling the end of a girls’ education policy and a movement towards one more fully inclusive of boys (Butorac & Lyman, 1998). This led to the “Inquiry into Boys’ Education” in 1994 and was a landmark for Australian education to address the problems boys face in schools (O’Doherty, 1995). *Gender equity: A framework for Australian schools* (Ministerial Council, 1997) is a more recent policy document that has been described as the “marker of the endgame for national girls’ educational policies” (Ailwood & Lingard, 2001, p. 9). This was no longer a girls’ only education policy with the movement towards assisting both genders, therefore it was the beginning of the end of the girls’ education policies. The Australian Government is committed to raising standards in education for all students. Boys’ education, however, has fallen short of girls’ and to improve boys’ educational and social outcomes the government is allocating more funding for this purpose due to boys having lower literacy, numeracy and school retention rates than girls of the same age (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005a). The Boys’ Education Lighthouse Schools Project which aims to identify the best practice in boys’ education is funded till

2007. This project aims to ensure improved learning experiences for boys to close the gender gap in education (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005a). The focus today is on equity in education for both genders, no longer only on girls.

New South Wales has followed the national direction, by paying attention to the needs of boys' education as well as that of girls. *The Girls and Boys at School: Gender Equity Strategy* (2004) builds on this by addressing gender as an educational issue in the best interests of girls and boys alike. The aim of this policy is to "give particular attention to girls and boys who most require support if they are to benefit from schooling" (New South Wales Department of School Education, 2001, p. 3). This document seeks to ensure that girls are not disadvantaged in any manner through a gender equity education policy. The assumption here is that equal educational opportunities will result in equal academic results for both genders. Interestingly this policy makes no mention of the need for greater support to be given to girls and/or boys during the transition to high school even though past research has shown that the impact of transition can affect high school retention rates and future success (Barratt, 1998; Firstcall, 2002; Legters & Kerr, 2001).

According to Gurian, Henley and Trueman (2001), girls begin puberty with a more complicated hormonal picture than boys, and at the same time they have to undergo transition into a new educational environment resulting in them having more changes to cope with than the boys. A study by Akos (2002) found that girls were more affected than boys during transition into middle school. Girls worried more about peer relationships and being bullied by other and bigger students more than boys did. This makes it relevant to conduct a study on girls and transition into high school. Adolescence has also been found to be a disturbing time for self-image, and females have been identified as being most vulnerable, as high school transition is more likely to coincide with significant physical developmental changes for girls than boys (Simmons, Blyth, van Cleeve & Bush, 1979; Meece, 2002; Nottelmann, 1987) and therefore it is considered more problematic for girls than boys. Girls have to cope with these impacts on their self image as well as to the new academic and social challenges, according to Meece (2002), Nottelmann (1987) and Rosenberg (1986). Therefore, the effects of physical changes on self concept are likely to be exacerbated over the transition into secondary school. Girls also appear to be more

vulnerable than boys to symptoms of depression and hostility that emerge during early adolescence and since girls reach puberty and start dating sooner than boys they also experience heightened stress during high school transitions compared to boys (Meece, 2002; Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Slee, 2002). In reviewing both the state and national gender education policies it is evident that this aspect – developmental changes and transition – was not evident as an important part of promoting girls' education.

### **Summary**

In reviewing the policies on girls' education and gender equity at the national and state level there seems to be an emphasis on academic opportunities for girls (and more recently for boys) but little mention is given to adolescent developmental needs. Yet, as alluded to previously, an ineffective transition into high school for girls (and boys) can have significant negative implications for their educational performance. For students to perform academically effectively, their social, psychological and emotional needs must be supported. During transition into high school, adolescents need to feel safe in the new environment in order to perform to their full potential. At the age of high school transition children face a myriad of challenges. An educational policy aimed at achieving academic success must consider other factors that affect learning and not just consider the promotion of academic opportunities. According to Kenway (1997), "nothing in the policy literature prepares gender reformers to expect or to deal with the emotional impact" (p. 333) of schooling. Adolescents face many challenges during transition into high school. These key challenges are now discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### **KEY CHALLENGES DURING TRANSITION**

There is a mismatch between the cultures of primary and high school (Eyers, Cormack, & Barratt, 1992; Luke et al., 2003a; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Yates, 1999) and the consequent discontinuity is a key problem for students when moving from primary to high school (Akos, 2002; Education Queensland, 2001a; Green, 1997;

Meece, 2002; Wiles & Bondi, 2001). These students experience discontinuity in several ways (Green, 1997; Perkins & Gelfer, 1995). They can experience physical discontinuity, discontinuity in teaching staff and discontinuity in peer relationships (Elias, 2002; Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal, 2003). These discontinuities can also put an additional burden “for even the heartiest individuals” (Akos, 2002, p. 339) to cope with the new learning environment. The differences between the old and new school environment can add to the pressure of being an adolescent. When transitions are not managed properly, children can suffer from academic, social, emotional or behavioural problems (La Rue et al., 2003; Riley, 2003). Hence, it becomes incumbent on educators to be aware of the particular types of challenges confronting students in a range of forms when they move into high school. Drawing on empirical studies investigating areas of transition as well as practitioners’ viewpoints based on their professional observations, these issues are now discussed.

### **Discontinuity and Transition**

Physical discontinuity can make the transition from primary to high school more difficult (Akos, 2002; Cotterell, 1982; Elias, 2002; Hallinan & Hallinan, 1992; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992). Students are used to having a home room throughout primary school. When students enter high school, they move from one classroom to another throughout the day for each lesson. This enforced geographic mobility between classes, traversing across the campus, has been identified by Pletsch, Johnson, Tosi, Thurston and Riesch (1991) as one of the three major sources of stress faced by students during transition. This sudden lack of continuity and not belonging to a physical space represents a change of routine for students. When students move from class to class in a high school, they also have to juggle with their books, lockers and being punctual to class, all of which is new (Hatton, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Schumacher, 1998; Walker, 2002; Weldy, 1990).

The discontinuity in the teaching staff between primary school and high school can add another difficulty for students in making a successful transition. In high schools teachers are subject specialists. This can result in students having as many as ten teachers (Cotterell, 2002; Vines, 2002; Weldy, 1990). In primary schools, students

usually have one teacher who is responsible mainly for their education with the exception of relieving teachers and some specialist teachers. Making the move to high school places children in an unfamiliar academic and physical environment with multiple teachers each teaching a specialist subject (Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Mizelle, 1999; Yates, 1999).

Discontinuity in peer relationships also affects some students entering high school. The friendship based on a whole class system in a primary school tends to change as children move to high school. Students are regrouped for different subjects and this can cause anxiety about maintaining their peer relationships (Elias, 2002; Hinebauch, 2002).

The various discontinuities described above affect children by exposing them to many teachers, a new physical location, movement between lessons and making new friends, also imply a mismatch between the cultures of primary and high schools (Eyers et al., 1992; Luke et al., 2003a; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Yates, 1999). Further challenges include the social, curricular, geographic, physical and organisational aspects of the high school (Cotterell, 1982; Hatton, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Wiles & Bondi, 2001; Yates, 1999) These issues are now discussed.

### **Social-emotional/Peer Challenges**

During transition many students experience stress because of social and peer challenges. These students fear being bullied by senior students or fear that they will not be accepted by others and that they might have problems making friends. In a study conducted in the United States over a period of two years about students' views of entering middle school, Akos (2002) and Simmons and Blyth (1987) found that girls experienced peer relationships as most stressful during transition. They worried about being bullied by other and bigger students more than boys did, whereas boys found peer relationships, conflict with authority and academic pressures as equal stressors (Akos, 2002). Kiloh and Morris (2000) along with Akos (2002) reported that bullying is an issue for both boys and girls during transition, and more so with low achieving students. Arowosafe and Irvin (1992) interviewed students leaving primary school in the USA about their stressors; they reported that

students were stressed about safety concerns in the new school. Similarly, studies by Cumming and Cormack (1996), Hatton (1995), Mizelle (1999) and Mizelle and Irvin (2000) have found that students seemed concerned by bullying and intimidation by older students when they enter high school.

Some students have expressed concern about making friends when they move to high school. Social bonding is an important factor for school success. For example, in their study, Brown and Theobald (1998) found socialisation was an important part of secondary schooling. “More than transmitters of knowledge, [secondary] schools came to be regarded as agents of socialization” (Brown & Theobald, 1998, p. 124). The role of the school therefore, is critical in meeting adolescent needs. Students who have problems making friends and with the socialisation process during transition are more likely to have problems succeeding in school (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). This concern has also been raised by Green (1997) and Hinebauch (2002). Yet, in a study conducted in an American high school by Letrello and Miles (2003), students expressed that the easiest aspect of moving to high school was making friends. In their interviews there were two major recurring themes of transition – social interaction and activity involvement. The findings of their study, then, revealed the importance of social interaction with peers during transition.

Green (1997) conducted a study using interviews, observations and documents with 58 participants on the shift from primary and secondary school in Victoria, Australia. This study started with a focus on literacy but then expanded to include social and psychological aspects of transition. It demonstrated that these students found high school transition problematic. Although students did look forward to transition into secondary school, they faced social problems in adjusting to the new school and making friends. In a longitudinal study of students’ experiences of shifting from primary to secondary school in Victoria, Yates (1999) noted that the “sea of unknown faces was worse than students had first anticipated” (p. 28). Indeed, the socialisation process was seen to be an even bigger problem for those students who came from a primary school with a smaller enrolment. It appears that problems related to socialisation during transition will arise until students feel secure in their new school and they begin to feel secure when they start to make friends (Green, 1997).

Students moving into high school have to re-establish their own identity (Barratt, 1998; Elias, 2002; Gattis, 1995; Kaplan, 1996). They have to redefine, understand and come to terms with who they are in the new environment. When primary students are in Year 6 (the final year of primary school in New South Wales), some students hold key positions of responsibility in their schools. Others who do not hold key positions are still in a position of power as they are the oldest in the school and the group that sets an example for the juniors. When students enter high school this position of power is reversed. They are now the juniors. They have to reconsider their identity and sometimes this process can be destabilising (Elias, 2002). In Yates' (1999) study of four Victorian schools, students in transition reported they go from "being the oldest and most expert to the youngest and most neophyte" (p. 32) and "it is common for teachers apparently to treat them as younger and less independent than they have been treated in Year 6" (p. 33). Yet, early adolescence has an increasing desire for autonomy and places great importance on it (Eccles et al., 1983; Kaplan, 1996; Walker, 2002). Students who have had autonomy in their primary schools and continue to do so in their high schools have increased satisfaction in the new school environment (Yates, 1999). These students have positive transitional experiences. If they are able to re-establish their identity in the new environment very quickly they face fewer social challenges during transition (Hatton, 1995; Hine & Fraser, 2001; Yates, 1999). However, change in status (i.e. moving from an autonomous position to a less autonomous one) can affect a student's self esteem and confidence and can be destabilising for them in this different environment.

While undergoing the process of searching for a new identity, students are also experiencing other social challenges. Adolescents have an intense need for a sense of belonging, a need to fit in, and to be connected to the place (Kaplan, 1996; Walker, 2002). Hine and Fraser (2001) maintain that students express greatest satisfaction in classrooms characterised by more affiliation and autonomy. It is, therefore, important that students feel they have some autonomy in their new learning environment to ease this transition.

In summary, students face social/peer challenges during transition into high school. Peers, friends and siblings can make the transition easier for some students. The

socialisation process is an important aspect of all transitions. As students try to fit in socially they also face academic requirements that can be daunting and often lead to feelings of alienation and self-doubt and ultimately disengagement from school. Yet, successful transition into high school can result in students finding school a satisfying experience, increasing school retention rates, acquiring the necessary competencies for life after school and coping better with future transitions to the workplace.

### **Curricular/Academic Challenges**

Students entering high school face a number of curricular and academic challenges that have an impact on transition. The changed curriculum to which the students are exposed when they enter high school can be a source of anxiety (Education Queensland, 2001a; Meece, 2002). Students now learn more subjects than previously, subjects tend not to be inter-disciplinary but compartmentalised, the amount of homework is intensified and given more frequently (Beane, 1991; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Urdan, Midgley, & Wood, 1995) and sometimes external examinations are conducted which have an impact on students' future.

The high school curriculum in most schools in New South Wales has at least ten subjects (Board of Studies, 2002), some of which are unlikely to be part of the primary school curriculum. As Cotterell (2002) indicates, high schools favour a subject-based curriculum compared to a thematic, inter-disciplinary approach adopted in primary schools. In an Australian study of first year high school students conducted by Cumming and Cormack (1996), the subjects taught were not related to each other and were seen by the students to be disconnected and discrete. Similarly, Green's (1997) investigation of high school transition showed that students move from subject to subject without any integration in the curriculum between subjects. Students find this lack of integration between subjects and the compartmentalisation of subjects/knowledge an additional challenge because, since the primary school curriculum is often integrated, they have little experience of subjects being taught as discrete units (Beane, 1991, 2002; Cumming, 1996).

Most high schools in New South Wales also have a “Homework Policy”, emphasising its place in the curriculum (Department of Education and Training, 2002a). Homework is another new academic challenge for students in transition. While homework is given erratically in most primary schools (Johnstone, 2002), in high schools it is given more frequently and in greater amounts, so that students may experience difficulty coping with these new demands. Some students also find the academic demands of homework too rigorous and too challenging (Elias, 2002; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). Hatton (1995) interviewed students from Years 6 to 10 in a rural private girls’ school in New South Wales about organisational structure and middle school. In this study the Year 7 students discussed their experiences of transition into high school in response to the structured questions of the researcher about the high school organisational structure and transition. Her findings showed that students were unaccustomed to doing a great deal of homework and found that it placed considerable demands upon them academically. Students do not always have the necessary skills to undertake homework and should be taught these skills at high school (Akos, 2002). The lack of skills to complete homework affects students during transition because it is an additional issue that they have to overcome. Besides academic and curriculum challenges, students during transition have to get used to a new location, new school environment and organisation.

### **Geographic Challenge**

Students when entering high schools go to institutions that are of a larger physical size than their primary schools. They very often move to a new geographic location, experience new school rules and a new organisational structure. An exception here is the K-12 school where kindergarten, primary school and high school can be found on the one campus. Some independent schools in Australia have one campus for pre-school, primary school and high school. By and large in New South Wales however, primary schools and high schools are located on different campuses. Students now have to learn to travel by public transport to their high schools unlike their primary schools which were in many cases walking distance away. They may also now have to take both a train and a bus to get to school.

It is common for many schools in New South Wales to house each faculty in a different staffroom or study so that students need to go to the various study rooms to see their teachers. Getting to know the physical location of the school could cause some difficulty for students particularly in the early stages of entry to high school (Yates, 1999).

### **Physical Challenge**

Apart from geographical location, many primary schools in New South Wales have a relatively smaller school enrolment than high schools with the majority having fewer than 400 students compared with the average high school having 700 students (Department of Education and Training, 2003). The reality is that students moving from primary to high school have to get used to a larger physical size of a school. Students fear being late to class, being lost and not being able to find lockers, canteens and classrooms. Studies conducted by Cotterell (1982), Green (1997), Johnstone (2002), Simmons and Blyth (1987) and Weldy (1990), reported that students are also anxious about organisational and geographic aspects of the new school. As an example, in a study by Cotterell (1982), 102 new students' reactions to events in the first three weeks of high school in Brisbane were examined. Students displayed continued anxiety concerning organisational aspects of the school. "The business of finding one's class, reading the timetable, and negotiating the school grounds successfully" (Cotterell, 1982, p. 299), were recorded by students as causing a continuing source of anxiety. Although these students in Brisbane were a year older than students entering high school in other States in Australia they still expressed the same amount of anxiety which clearly indicates it is not so much related to age as to the unfamiliarity of the environment. Similarly, Hatton's (1995) study of Year 7 students in NSW found that students were anxious about the size of the school. Hatton suggests that school sizes should be reduced to remove this anxiety. Following Hatton, Cotterell (1982) has suggested 'mini-schools' as a solution to reduce anxiety. It seems that organisational and geographic challenges identified in some studies can make it difficult for students to make the transition into high school (Cormack, 1991; Cumming & Cormack, 1996; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992). Mizelle's (1999) work also found that problems can occur for students due to the sheer size of the new school environment.

## **Organisational Challenge**

Students entering high schools are introduced to more complex organisational structures than those of primary schools. As noted previously, high schools are organised according to key learning areas with specialist teachers and students have specialist teachers for each of their subjects. They are exposed to many teachers, with different expectations and standards.

High school teachers teach a number of classes each day and a large number of students. Each subject has a limited number of hours each week allocated to it. As a result, teachers spend only a specific amount of time with each class. This issue of being one of many students sometimes concerns students as they make the transition into high school. For example, Green's (1997) qualitative study of transition into high school found that students worry that their secondary teachers do not know them as well as their primary teachers. These students have less contact time with each teacher due to the organisational structure of high school and this has led them to believe that teachers are not always available when they are needed.

As well as the experience of feeling isolated and anonymous, students sometimes find high schools unfriendly and bureaucratic environments. Based on the literature reviewed, Legters and Kerr (2001) concluded that the large bureaucratic nature of most high schools offers little support for incoming students, especially those with weak social and academic preparation. Transition into high school can be made more difficult for some students when they are faced not only with an unfamiliar new environment (Tonkin, 2003) but also a less intimate and larger environment.

## **Summary**

This section reviewed the discontinuities experienced by students as they leave their primary school and enter high school. The discontinuity which is the result of the mismatch between the cultures of primary and high school (Eyers et al., 1992; Luke et al., 2003a; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Yates, 1999) causes students to experience physical, staffing and social discontinuities. The section then examined the challenges faced by students as they enter high school. Students have been shown to

face academic, social, geographic, physical and organisational challenges as they enter high school.

Based on evidence of studies conducted and teachers' viewpoints, transition is sometimes more difficult because of social, peer, curriculum, academic, physical, geographic and organisational challenges facing many students as they enter high school. In the light of these challenges, educators and educational institutions have responded by looking at ways and methods to ease the transition into high school.

## **TRANSITION PROGRAMS**

The importance of transition into high school during adolescence has been recognised by education departments and institutions in Australia. In keeping with this recognition, State and Territory governments have reviewed current developments in secondary education and their implications. The Northern Territory government initiated a Ministerial Review in 1991. One of the recommendations made was that "secondary schools and feeder primary schools should develop strategies and approaches that facilitate the movement of students from primary to secondary education" (Schools Council, 1993, p. 17). Similarly other States – Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria - have initiated forums in recognition of the needs of adolescents during this stage of their lives, with Queensland forming a Middle Years of Schooling Association in 1999. In an attempt to support students and resolve challenges faced by them during transition, schools and education departments have developed transition programs. The aims of transition programs are now discussed.

### **Aims of Transition Programs**

A transition program is ideally a set of activities, strategies and/or resources proposed by an institution to ease the passage of students during transition. The aim of transition programs/activities is to ensure that the passage is made easier for students and to help them overcome the emotional, social, intellectual and physical

challenges by reducing apprehension and increasing students' sense of belonging (Fields, 2002; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997; Schumacher, 1998).

Legters and Kerr (2001) examined the types and effects of practices aimed at promoting ninth grade success in their American study. They found that schools that had little emphasis on ways to ease transition had higher failure and dropout rates than schools that had specific programs to ease transition. Their study highlights the importance of transition programs and other interventions such as anti-bullying programs and affiliation between feeder primary schools and high school which are designed to assist and facilitate the transition to high school.

### **Types of Transition Programs**

Orientation Day is a day often organised by high schools in New South Wales for primary six students attending the high school in Year 7 to spend a few hours getting to know the new school. This is a strategy used by many high schools to ease the process of transition and student anxiety about the new environment (Cotterell, 1982; Elias, 2002; Green, 1997). Studies by Cotterell (1982) and Chapman and Sawyer (2001) suggest that Orientation Day should be unstructured, allowing incoming students to have access to the school to ask questions relevant to their needs. However, students need explicit statements about rules and procedures to be better equipped when they arrive at the new environment (Akos, 2002). Although students want to know about the rules of the new environment, Weldy (1990) found that schools tend not to touch on these on Orientation Day because they might look authoritative and punitive. One way of achieving this is to give out handbooks to incoming students on Orientation Day (Weldy, 1990).

Induction programs are another strategy used in some schools. These programs which take place at the end of Year 6 allow students to partake in the daily activities of the high school by shadowing high school students. Some schools have this activity for a day while others have it for up to three days. Some of the senior students are also used in the program to assist incoming students hence reducing their anxiety of being a junior. It also reduces the fear of being bullied by a senior because the seniors become their mentors instead (Kneisler, 2001; Mizelle, 1999).

A school-wide Anti-Bullying Program is sometimes used in conjunction with other transition programs to assist in reducing anxiety when students enter high school. This is conducted by high schools at the beginning of the year. Seniors once again are used to assist new comers to ease anxiety and the fear of being bullied (Akos, 2002; Elias, 2002; Kneisler, 2001).

Affiliation is the process of primary schools integrating with high schools and sending information to them about incoming students. Affiliation between primary and secondary schools is important for a successful transition according to Hine and Fraser (2001). Similarly, other studies (Department of Education and Training, 2001, 2002b, 2005a; Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson, & Drawdy, 2001; Schumacher, 1998; Weldy, 1990; White-Hood, 2001) support this process. The two levels must share information, visit each other and work together in making the transition easier for students. High school teachers by visiting primary schools and holding discussions are able to plan a program specific to the needs of new students (Fields, 2002; Potter et al., 2001). However, many schools have difficulties forging this type of relationship because of time and financial constraints. Schools, therefore, depend on the goodwill of individual teachers to make this relationship for a successful transition (Department of Education and Training, 2001).

An ideal Transition Team is made up of parents, teachers from both the sending and receiving schools and counsellors from both schools to help reduce stress by assisting students understand the academic rigours and co-curricular options at high school (Green, 1997; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997, 1998). Counsellors can assist students most at risk even before they arrive (Green, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Umphrey, 2001; White-Hood, 2001) in the new environment through the visits of the Transition Team. However, the reality is that, due to other commitments, few parents want to be involved in transition programs. This is unfortunate, in that studies show that the home environment can sometimes add fear and anxiety to high school transition because some parents have had negative experiences during high school transition (Johnstone, 2002; Measor & Woods, 1984). By including parents in the program, schools can then hope to assist students and parents overcome this problem (Akos, 2002; Chapman & Sawyer, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b; Mizelle, 1999; White-Hood, 2001).

The Linkages program is a transition program that was initiated and funded by the New South Wales government to assist transition of students from primary to high school. In New South Wales, the Department of Education recognised firstly, that there was a divide between the primary and secondary curriculum. This gap between primary and secondary curriculum added an extra dimension to the issue of high school transition making transition more problematic for many. Secondly, it is characteristic in the state of New South Wales for many primary schools to feed into a local secondary school (Luke et al., 2003b). This can sometimes be problematic to a receiving school when students come with differing levels of competencies. To overcome this issue, the Linkages program was introduced in 2000 “to create links between primary and secondary schools through better continuity of learning literacy and numeracy from Stages 3 to 4 (Years 7 to 8)” (Luke et al., 2003b, p. 33).

While transition programs, such as the one described above, can help reduce problems and challenges facing adolescents, they cannot resolve or eliminate them completely (Johnstone, 2002). Since these programs do not always meet the needs of all students, Middle Schools have been introduced in some parts of Australia as an alternative to transition programs. The underlying philosophy of reform in the middle years revolves around the “provision of a seamless transition from primary to secondary schooling leading to more effective student learning, positive experiences in adolescence and a desire and capacity for lifelong learning” (Luke et al., 2003a, p. 25). A seamless transition is seen by educationalists as a stepping stone to positive learning experiences for students.

The middle years of schooling have been recognised as important years in education (Barratt, 1998; Riley, 2003) by both policy makers and educationalists, giving rise to schools specifically designed to meet developmental changes and the needs facing young adolescents during this period of their lives. In some parts of Australia and in the United States, the middle schooling concept and middle schools have been introduced to address these developmental needs of young adolescents (Chadbourne, 2001). Middle schools have been seen by educators as a system for assisting students to meet their needs when facing the culture shock of entering high school which is a larger and more complex educational organisation (Doherty, 2002; Oerlemans, 2001). Here the curriculum and co-curricular activities are designed to

meet the needs of students' development at this age. Some schools in New South Wales have a middle school as part of their existing high school structure, where Year 7 and 8 students are treated differently from the rest of the school to meet their developmental needs but are part of the same campus. However, other schools in New South Wales have a separate school for K-6, 7-9 and 10-12. As a result of the recent introduction of middle schools designed to meet the development needs of young adolescents in some parts of Australia, some school systems have created another transition for students entering senior school. Although these structural changes to the school system have meant that students may undergo an additional transition in their school life when they go into senior school (Doherty, 2002), their aim is to better meet the needs of particular groups of students, whether they are in their middle years of schooling or senior schooling.

“Middle schooling reform first emerged in the USA in the mid 1960s and developed through the 1990s” (Luke et al., 2003a, p. 29) to deal with the “growing concern of student alienation” (Oerlemans, 2001, p. 4). In the US literature, “Middle Schooling is seen as a pedagogical approach and philosophy with clear links to educational progressivism” (Luke et al., 2003a, p. 30). John Dewey believed that the curriculum should revolve around the student (Bowen & Hobson, 1987). According to Wiles (2002), in Dewey's educational progressivism schools cater to a child-centred curriculum and instruction is tailored to facilitate the development of the individual. Here, “[t]he word ‘progressive’ became associated with forms of declaring the individual as the most important feature” (Wiles, 2002, p. 1).

The middle school philosophy is based on the premise that we need a different structure to meet the changing needs of these young adolescents (Cotterell, 1982; Hatton, 1995; Pitton, 2001) and middle schools can provide a more personalised environment to address the many issues associated with student alienation. An original theme that characterised the need for middle years of schooling was that of transition and the mismatch between the cultures of primary and secondary schools. For this reason, the focus of middle schooling concerns a supportive school environment, flexible school structure, effective pedagogy and negotiated curriculum (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Walker, 2002) to meet the changing needs of these young

adolescents. Transition is therefore, recognised as an issue of importance, here, and since there is limited research about transitions while young adolescents experience it (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001; Doherty, 2002; Luke et al., 2003a; McKnight, 2000), further examination and research about this transition is necessary.

This interest in the middle years of schooling in Australia and its accompanied reform has been based mainly on the premise that young people in this stage of their lives (during adolescence) form an identifiable and separate group with common characteristics and needs (Catchpoole, 2002). This group of students is no longer seen as existing between early childhood and senior school but a distinct category that requires its rightful attention and place in education (Scott, 1994). At the heart of the reform lies the belief that students between the ages of ten and fourteen have special needs and characteristics both as a group and as individuals. In practice, however, not all schools have embraced the middle schooling notion either structurally or conceptually. In these schools, which continue to constitute the norm, students have had to make a very considerable transition from primary to secondary school.

The aim of middle schooling therefore, is to overcome the problems of transition by adapting the curriculum to the needs of students whilst supporting their emotional, social, cognitive and physical needs. The Australian focus on middle schooling is guided by strong emphasis on the philosophies around adolescent development such as cognitive, social and emotional development (Chadbourne, 2001; Hill & Russell, 1999). An integrated curriculum, taught in themes, is introduced to overcome the discrete, compartmentalised nature of high school subjects (Manning, 2000). Integration of curriculum requires that teachers work in a team with a particular group of students, allowing these students to feel a sense of belonging. An effective transition program, therefore, “will focus on developing a sense of community among participants, a sense of belonging, acceptance and adventure [sic] to promote education and well-being of children” (Dockett & Perry, 1999b, p. 13).

How long does transition last? How long should transition programs continue for? There is no research in this area to date to answer these questions and it is hoped that this study might shed more light in this area by asking students about their

experiences in the first ten weeks of high school. Many schools in Australia have transition programs for the first term of school (ten weeks). Akos (2002) suggests it should be ongoing in the transition year, while others (Cotterell, 1982; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Umphrey, 2001) report that transition programs should be designed in stages to assist students as they undergo the transition process.

## **Summary**

This section began by examining aims for having transition programs. The main aim was to ease transition into middle/high school. This section of the chapter then went on to review the programs schools have introduced to ease transition. Some of the programs include orientation day, induction program, anti-bullying program, affiliation between primary and secondary school and a transition team. The concept of a seamless transition was reviewed through the introduction of middle schooling. The aim of this as a different school structure was to overcome transition problems by providing the support necessary for adolescent development.

In summary, it can be said that the uncertainty associated with transition can be reduced through effective transition programs within a supportive learning environment (Measor & Woods, 1984; Pinnell, 1998; Walker, 2002). Even so with the transition programs which include activities organised by schools and the middle schooling concept, transition can be still challenging for some (Walker, 2002; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997). It is important, therefore, for educators to become more aware of students' lived experiences in order to understand what they are experiencing when they enter high school for the first time. These insights are likely to be very valuable not only for teachers but also those charged with the planning and coordination of transition programs. The next section of this chapter examines the reasons for a study on transition into high school by utilising a phenomenological approach in light of the literature reviewed.

## **THE NEED FOR STUDYING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS DURING TRANSITION INTO HIGH SCHOOL**

It is significant at this point to review the major findings of the literature on student transition. Students' experiences during transition influence their educational success (Barratt, 1998; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003; Early et al., 1999). This in turn affects their lives after school in terms of their future career paths and being lifelong learners. The middle years of schooling are crucial to the lives and futures of Australia's youth (Hearfield, 2003). Poor transitional experiences for students entering high school can lead to a lack of success at school which then affects future lives of young adolescents. Events occurring during adolescence influence behaviour patterns that are sustained into adulthood. These include moral, cognitive as well as the social development of the individual which carries on to adulthood (Stowell et al., 1996).

The middle years of schooling, then, represent a critical phase of development in the lives of young adolescents (Kruse, 2001). In this phase more physical, social, intellectual and emotional changes take place than in any other period of their lives except infancy. Piaget noted that early adolescence is the time when children move from concrete to formal operations. It is at this time that students are moving into high school and their cognitive ability develops further. They are not all necessarily reasoning at the concrete level but some are moving towards higher order thinking at the abstract level. That is, some of them are moving from reasoning about real people, situations and objects to reasoning about abstract ideas, principles and laws (Education Queensland, 2001b; Stowell et al., 1996). The young person is now more reflective at this stage of his/her life. Not only are adolescents developing cognitively, they are also experiencing physical changes at the same time. They are now often concerned with their physical appearance and social image in addition to adapting to a new learning environment and making new friends. They also experience emotional and social changes as well. They may feel insignificant in the greater scheme of things because they are the youngest at school now (Barratt, 1998). The first year of high school therefore, could represent the onset of

adolescence which brings with it a multitude of developmental changes and experiences all taking place at the same time while entering high school.

Early adolescence has also been described as a phase of struggle between identity and role confusion where adolescents question who they are and what they want to do with their lives (Erikson, 1963). Making new friends and the socialisation process associated with a new learning environment has been described as more stressful by some than others (Fleming, 1993; Kaplan, 1996; Pinnell, 1998; Pollak, 1995; Potter et al., 2001; Walker, 2002).

There is evidence that there is a mismatch between the developmental needs of young adolescents and the environments of some of the schools they attend (Baer, 1999; Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal, 2003). It is important for teachers to pay special attention to these needs so that the new environment reduces anxiety and learning is maximised (Pinnell, 1998). This study aims to examine student experiences during transition while it is being experienced and seeks to identify important issues and challenges faced by students. It is anticipated that the study may make a contribution to a better understanding of young adolescents in transition by using a methodology not yet used in studying experiences of transition into high school.

Many researchers now define young adolescence no longer as a transitory phase between childhood and adulthood but as a “distinct phase in its own right with its own youth culture, social mores and emotional and biological complexities” (Scott, 1994, p. 44). Yet, Hatton (1995) describes adolescents as “the ‘Cinderella’ student group or forgotten component of schooling” (p. 17). This group is considered distinct by some, yet is forgotten by others. Thus, there is a need to examine young adolescent experiences, to identify what their reflections are about schooling during this important phase in their lives using a different methodology, phenomenology which focuses on a human lived experience.

Work done in Australia about middle school reform is heavily weighted with case studies and opinion-based documents stemming from forums largely represented and controlled by adults (Luke et al., 2003a). Yet, there is a lack of empirical

evidence about the impact of transition on young adolescents and their experiences while they live through it in the first term. Luke et al. (2003a) are concerned that the significant growth in official reports that are not based on empirical evidence could risk reform in the middle years of schooling being driven by an economic and political agenda which could be misrecognised as reform. This lack of empirical evidence using students' experiences of transition requires urgent attention and a study such as this would inform educationalists of the impact of transition for students.

Finally, there is limited research evidence on students' experiences during the period of their transition. While there have been some quantitative and qualitative studies (Akos, 2002; Cotterell, 1982; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992) exploring transition for students, none of this research has used a phenomenological psychological research methodology, a methodology used specifically for studying a lived human experience. An exception here is the work of Akos (2002) who conducted a longitudinal study of student experiences in the USA, using a mixed method study. Studies conducted in Australia (Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003; Green, 1997; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1995; Yates, 1999), however, have not looked into the lived experiences of students as they experience transition. The argument posed in this literature review chapter has concerned the need for research focusing on student experience of transition while it is being lived by these young adolescents. Past studies have examined transition over a longer period of time of up to two years and none have focused on the experiences faced by students during the first few weeks of entering high school and obtaining immediate feedback on transition. However, they have obtained information on transition after the event instead. This study is unique and relevant as it is not only using a research methodology not previously used to study transition; it is also focusing on the initial few weeks of transition. It is possible that the findings of this research may have implications for educational institutions to become more aware of transitional issues and in some cases provide more relevant programs and educational experiences which would enhance the development of their social and cognitive skills of young adolescents.

It is envisaged that this study conducted in the researcher's school with a small group of students from that school, will provide insightful data particularly relevant to the teachers and administrators of the school. It is possible that the findings generated from the study might also have some relevance and value to other school sites which are interested in students' experience of being in high school for the first time. Therefore, a phenomenological psychological methodology provides an excellent framework for the study in that it attempts to study human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and to obtain descriptions of experiences under investigation (Ehrich, 1998). The aim of phenomenology is to examine and clarify human situations, events and experiences "as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life" (von Eckartsberg, 1998, p. 3). Phenomenology has been used successfully in studying a whole range of lived experiences by researchers: the experience of anger (Stevick, 1971), the experience of learning (Giorgi, 1975a, 1975b, 1985a, 1985b), the experience of internalised homophobia among homosexual men (Sorenson-Englander, 2000) and the experience of religious transformation (Subandi, 1993).

In this study, it is the descriptions of students' experiences of transition into high school that are of importance. Phenomenological psychological methodology will provide an approach that helps to illuminate the lived experiences of people in a manner that offers a deeper understanding, 'verstehen', of this type of human experience (Ehrich, 1997; van Manen, 1997).

In summary, the lived experiences of students in transition are important to all educators and policy makers. Past research has examined transition from the viewpoint of students and other key personnel (teachers, educators, counsellors, academics and policy makers) via many different methods. Most of these studies have found high school transition challenging in a number of aspects for students. To date there appears to be evidence that transitional experiences can be both negative and positive. Because there is a dearth of empirical research that considers students' experiences of transition, the current study is important as it will offer insights into adolescent experiences of transition that may contribute to new ways of thinking about transition into high school contexts. A phenomenological approach will be used to help illuminate this experience.

## SUMMARY

From the literature reviewed in this chapter, an argument was made that adolescents undergo physical, cognitive, emotional and psychological changes in their lives and many of these changes coincide with the time they arrive at high school. Some theories of human development linked to stages of schooling with implications for adolescents were reviewed that demonstrated that adolescents have special needs during this phase of their lives. For example, they have the need to belong, to feel safe and loved before they are able to feel comfortable and perform in a new environment. To achieve self esteem, the other needs must be first fulfilled for students to achieve their full potential. The theories of development reviewed here also showed that during this time, adolescents will question their identity and place in the world and role confusion and identity may occur. Adolescence is also a time when personalities are constructed. All of the challenges awaiting students indicate that transition into high school is more than simply adapting to a new environment; in many ways, transition to high school parallels transition to adulthood and the challenges that adulthood brings.

As the study in question draws upon the experiences of transition for girls in one high school in NSW, this chapter devoted some discussion to gender based educational policies introduced over the last twenty years. Some of these early policies stressed that girls' needs were not being met by schooling and much more had to be done to encourage girls (and women) to participate more fully in both public and private life and to meet some of their specific needs. More recent gender based policies have directed attention to boys' special needs. Since the needs of girls are not identical to boys, some research based studies (Akos, 2002) have shown that girls find peer relationships more stressful than boys during transition. A study that explores girls' experience of transition into high school becomes an important one.

The literature indicated that students undergo some positive and many negative experiences during transition into high school. For example, students undergo physical, social, peer and teaching discontinuities when they enter high school because often the culture of the primary school does not always match with that of

the high school. As a result, students experience social, peer, curriculum/academic, geographic, physical and organisational challenges as they struggle to adapt to a new environment.

The review of transition programs showed the middle schooling concept as a way to overcome some of the problems faced by adolescents by ensuring a curriculum that will ease the path of transition as a form of a transition program. In other literature reviewed schools have adopted different programs to ease transition.

The contribution of this study is timely since limited research has been carried out that focuses only on the experiences of students as they enter high school for the first time in the first few weeks. As far as the researcher is aware, no study has used a phenomenological psychological research methodology to study students' lived experience of transition into high school, which in itself is a contribution to education and to the literature. For this reason, there is a definite and urgent need for a study of this nature to be carried out. The next chapter considers the research methodology that steers the direction of the study.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The major purpose of the study was to investigate students' experiences of transition into high school. This investigation was undertaken from within a qualitative framework, specifically drawing on phenomenological understandings.

This chapter begins by briefly outlining the term 'qualitative research' and the types of qualitative research available to researchers. It then proceeds to discuss how phenomenological psychological methodology is appropriate for this study. In so doing, it examines the concepts of phenomenology and some of the different versions of phenomenology. As phenomenological psychology was considered the most appropriate approach for this study, Giorgi's (1985b) methodological procedure is investigated. This chapter also examines participant selection, data collection method, data analysis, validation and possible limitations of the current study.

#### **QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY: WHY THIS APPROACH FOR THIS STUDY?**

Qualitative inquiry covers a range of interpretive methods used to describe, decode and translate a phenomenon (Smyth, 1994). Qualitative methodology is also defined as any procedure that does not use statistical means or quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative research methods are aimed at giving real and stimulating meaning to a phenomenon, while looking at the phenomenon as a total and complete context (Taylor, 2000). In short, qualitative research uncovers the essential meaning of the experience being investigated (Burns, 2000). Qualitative methods are interpretive,

portraying a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever-changing (Glesne, 1999). Qualitative forms of investigation tend to be based on recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential 'lifeworld' of human beings, describing the experiences of people in-depth (Patton, 1980). According to Burns (2000), there has been a greater acceptance of qualitative methods in educational research since the 1970s.

Qualitative approaches do not provide easy, quick answers to the complex issues that confront us but they do offer a viable alternative. Qualitative research tends to explore issues and questions rather than generate and test hypotheses. It draws from a range of methods. A qualitative research strategy is inductive (Patton, 1980) in that the researcher attempts to make sense of the situation instead of trying to impose pre-existing expectations on the situation.

Since qualitative research describes the in-depth experiences of people, the data collected consists of detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviours (Patton, 1980). Major sources of qualitative data constitute interviews, observations (Creswell, 1994) and open-ended narrative writings (Patton, 1980).

One type of qualitative methodology that has been successfully utilised in the nursing research field and psychology and to a smaller extent, education, is phenomenology. Phenomenology is the interpretive study of human experience. According to von Eckartsberg (1998), the aim of phenomenology is to examine and clarify human situations, events and experiences "as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life" (p. 3). In phenomenology, one studies a phenomenon, the way it appears in experience or consciousness. Phenomenological methodology owes its roots to phenomenology, the philosophy that dates back to the work of Husserl (Wilson, 2002).

The phenomenology of nursing is concerned with the lived experiences of nursing, focusing on interpersonal techniques such as empathy and on the concepts of crisis, motivation, stress and perception. Since phenomenology attempts to study human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), that is while a person is undergoing

that experience, it is commonly used in research conducted in nursing. Similarly, in education, the experience of students is essential for educators to understand in order to better assist students. Phenomenological investigations have been used in education studies by researchers such as Fetterman (1988), van Manen (1997) and Ehrich (1997). Phenomenological research aims to obtain descriptions of the experiences that is being investigated/studied, thus it is appropriate to use this method to study students' experiences since it is important to know what they experience during transition. The researcher wanted to hear the voices of students in this study while they were experiencing the event and this method provided the best opportunity for this investigation for this reason.

Phenomenological possibilities are so vast that “any object, event or experience that a person can see, hear, touch, smell taste, feel, intuit, know, understand or live through is a legitimate topic for phenomenological investigation” (Seamon 2002, p. 3). Thus, this study of transitional experiences of students in the first year of high school is a legitimate topic for a phenomenological investigation. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) states, the aim of phenomenology is to describe experience as it is lived. In this instance, it is the description of students' experiences of transition that is of interest to the researcher. A discussion justifying this approach with reference to how the methodology has been used in similar studies will be provided.

This chapter discusses phenomenology as the methodology chosen for this study and argues the case for using a phenomenological psychological methodology.

## **THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD**

### **The Basic Concept of Phenomenology**

Phenomenology represents the effort to describe human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962); therefore, it is not concerned with explanation of the phenomenon i.e. the reasons behind a phenomenon (Ehrich, 1997; Røseth & Brendryen, 1998) but with a description of it. Phenomenology investigates for the very nature of phenomenon, “it asks what something ‘is’, and without which it

would no longer be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p. xv). Phenomenology investigates what something is and not why. According to van Manen (1997), from a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world.

Phenomenological research is the study of the ‘lifeworld’ – *Lebenswelt* (van Manen 1997, p. 182). The idea of the lifeworld – *Lebenswelt* - as the world of experience is derived from Husserl (1970a). Husserl describes *Lebenswelt* as “the world of immediate experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 182), the foundation for reflection of thought (Subandi, 1993) and, in this way, the lifeworld is independent of knowledge, the starting point for all knowledge (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). One does not need prior knowledge for ‘lifeworld’. This includes the routine and the unusual, the mundane and the surprising (Seamon, 2002). Lived experience is therefore, what is real to an individual in his/her own life.

The methodology of phenomenology emerged from a philosophical framework (van Manen, 1997). This framework is important to consider since it has shaped the way phenomenology has been used as a research approach. The phenomenological method as an inquiry first appeared in the writings of philosopher William Brentano in the last part of the nineteenth century (Spiegelberg, 1976), and was further developed by Brentano’s student Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

Phenomenologists cannot be placed under one unified school of thought due to the variations in approaches used. However, common amongst the approaches is the search to uncover the meanings of humanly experienced phenomena through an interpretation of subjects’ descriptions. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), the phenomenological method embraces four main common themes: description, reduction, essences and intentionality. Spiegelberg (1975) endorses these four themes. These themes are uncovered further in relation to their significance for phenomenological research later in this chapter.

Phenomenology can be described as the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning of structures of the lived experience (van Manen, 1997). Examples of phenomena studied in phenomenological research investigations include the experience of pain during childbirth (Lundgren & Dahlberg, 1998), the

experience of learning (Giorgi, 1985a), the experience of anger (Stevick, 1971), the experience of internalized homophobia (Sorenson-Englander, 2000), principals' experience of professional development (Ehrich, 1997), and persisting in change (Kraynie, 1985).

The next section discusses some of the different variations of phenomenological philosophy and then specifically addresses the phenomenological research approach used within this study.

### **Variations of Phenomenology**

There are different types of philosophical phenomenology. These include Transcendental Phenomenology (Husserl, 1971), Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962) and Existential Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Each of these is briefly outlined before focusing on Phenomenological Psychology (Giorgi, 1985b), which is a movement that married phenomenological philosophy to psychology. It is this later variation to phenomenology that is used in this study.

#### ***Transcendental phenomenology***

Phenomenology emerged from the philosophy of Husserl, a late nineteenth century German mathematician and philosopher (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1985). Transcendental Phenomenology (Husserl, 1971) uses the terms 'transcendental' and 'phenomenology' interchangeably. Husserl devised a philosophical and phenomenological psychology. A key slogan of Husserl's was returning 'to the things themselves' (Husserl, 1970b, p. 252). This means a turning away from science and returning to the things or the phenomena under investigation. The aim of Husserl's phenomenology was to describe phenomena, such as objects, experiences, or thoughts.

Another important aspect of Husserl's transcendental philosophy was the 'reduction'. Husserl used 'epoche', 'bracketing' and 'reduction' interchangeably. 'Epoche' refers to the suspension of beliefs in order to understand the phenomenon fully (Ehrich, 1999, p. 25). Husserl used the special method of "eidetic reduction" to describe the phenomenon. In "eidetic reduction," one needs to see past or through

the particularity of lived experience and how it makes the world appear as it precedes every cognitive construction (van Manen, 1997). While ‘epoche’ suspends natural attitude, ‘eidetic reduction’ makes sense of what remains (Ehrich, 1999). Therefore, the two elements work together.

All Transcendental Phenomenology is a “phenomenology of consciousness and all conscious awareness is intentional awareness, and all consciousness is consciousness of something” (van Manen, 2002, p. 1). Transcendental Phenomenology is therefore a phenomenology of consciousness and according to Husserl “meanings are constituted in and by consciousness, or the *cognito*” (van Manen, 2002, p. 1). In order to arrive at this consciousness another reduction must be done – transcendental reduction - which suspends the judgment of everything in world including the ego. Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology influenced the thinking of later phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Sartre (Turner, 2000). Husserl’s notion of “transcendental subjectivity was, however, seen as idealistic by Heidegger, his follower” (McCall, 1983 pp. 62-63). This criticism led Husserl to focus on Lifeworld or Lived World, *Lebenswelt*. To Husserl, lifeworld is the everyday world we experience. *Lebenswelt* linked Husserl’s phenomenology to existential philosophy. Both the hermeneutic and existential phenomenologists built on the concept of “lived world and being in the world” (Ehrich, 1999, p. 26).

### ***Hermeneutic phenomenology***

Phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when its method is taken to be interpretive because it claims that there are no such things as un-interpreted phenomena (van Manen, 1997, 2002) and every form of human awareness can be construed. Heidegger (1962) argues that the fundamental mode of human existence is not detached knowing but, rather, engaged activity. Therefore, everything one does is interpreted activity. Hermeneutic phenomenology is linked to prominent philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur (van Manen, 1997). Ricoeur, who studied Husserl’s work and ideas, argues that meanings are not given directly to us; they must be inferred.

For Heidegger, a human being is a ‘Dasein’ which means “being in the world” (Subandi 1993, p. 41). ‘Being in the world’ refers to the “way human beings exist,

act, or are involved in the world” (van Manen 1997, p. 175). Heidegger disagreed with Husserl’s notion of ‘transcendental phenomenology’ since he “believed that subjectivity is not transcendent because it does not illuminate ‘being’” (Ehrich, 1999, p. 27). To Husserl everything is purely described while Heidegger disagrees with this as for him everything can be interpreted. He argues that meanings are not given directly to us but require interpretation. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger does not see that consciousness constituted (created) the world (Ehrich, 2003). He also does not believe it possible to bracket private experience. While some authors have labelled Heidegger’s work as fitting the category of ‘existential phenomenology’ (Schmidt, 1985; Seamon, 2002; Spinelli, 1989), others have described his work as fitting more within the category of ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’ (Barritt et al., 1985).

### ***Existential phenomenology***

Existential phenomenology had its origins in the nineteenth century while, in the twentieth century it was cemented to phenomenological method (Ehrich, 1999). It builds on Husserl’s concept of lifeworld of everyday experience. It aims at “describing how phenomena present themselves in lived experience, in human existence” (van Manen 1997, p. 184). Heidegger’s work is viewed as being aligned to existential phenomenology. Thus, for Heidegger (1962) phenomenology is ontology – a study of the modes of “being in the world” of human being (p. 184). Merleau-Ponty (1962), says “phenomenology is the study of essences” (p. vii). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology is existential, oriented to lived experience; the embodied human being in the concrete world. The purpose of phenomenological analysis for Merleau-Ponty (1962) is not intuition of essences but rather it is concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world (pp. vii-xxi). To Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological method resembles more of an attitude than a psychological research (van Manen, 2002). Existential phenomenology has also been described as a “combination of the phenomenological method with the importance of understanding man [sic] in his existential world” (Entrikin, 1976, p. 623). Therefore, it is concerned with being, human existence and a person’s concrete way of thinking (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990) while transcendental phenomenology is concerned with knowledge and consciousness and hermeneutic is interpretive (Seamon, 2002).

Existential phenomenology shares a common element with the other philosophical phenomenologies, in that “experience should be a central concern of phenomenology” (Ehrich, 1999, p. 28). Thus, in existential phenomenology, the way to study human life is to examine experience as found in the everyday world (Stone, 1979, p. 2).

Transcendental, hermeneutic and existential phenomenology are philosophical in nature. None of these philosophies was meant to be used as a research approach. An important movement that emerged in psychology in the 1960s was phenomenological psychology (Giorgi, 1970). This approach aimed to marry some of the insights of the philosophy of phenomenology to psychology. It is to this I now turn.

### ***Phenomenological psychology***

Phenomenological psychology is a perspective that acknowledges the reality of the realm of meaningful experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1989). One of its key assumptions is that human behaviour is an expression of meaningful experiences rather than a mechanically learned response to a stimulus (Polkinghorne, 1989). The aim of phenomenological psychological research is to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience, recognising that consciousness is different from the objects of nature (Polkinghorne, 1989). Phenomenological psychological research differs from other types of qualitative research in that it focuses on the subject’s experienced meaning instead of the descriptions of their overt actions or behaviour (Polkinghorne, 1989). This study aimed to look at meaningful experiences by using descriptions to find the essences of the experiences. Essences are the general structures of an experience which are context related (Giorgi, 1985a) and this makes a thing what it is. For example the essence of poetry means that, in some respects, poetry has certain qualities or properties that make it distinguishable from other literary forms such as novels, plays, or essays (van Manen, 2002).

Amedeo Giorgi is one of the leading interpreters of phenomenological thought for the human sciences and one of the pioneers in developing qualitative methodologies

for psychological research (Giorgi, 1970, 1985a, 1985b). In an interview (Røseth & Brendryen, 1998), Giorgi points out that the essence of phenomenological psychology is to try to understand ‘consciousness’ and all its objects. In other words, the aim of phenomenological investigations is to experience any phenomenon which one is able to experience and, because experience is a phenomenon, it is worth studying in its own right.

Giorgi (1970) questions whether the aspects that are amenable to the natural scientific conception reveal the humanness of human beings in an adequate way. This doubt led him to investigate another conception of psychology, that is, phenomenological psychology. He argues that it does justice both to the “phenomenon of human as person and to the practice of science” (p. 2). Giorgi argues that psychology should be conceived as a human science, and not as a natural science. Therefore, appropriate methods must be derived for this perspective on psychology (Giorgi, 1970). The phenomenological method, as activated by Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Spiegelberg (1975), draws essentially on theoretical and philosophical approaches. For this reason, Giorgi translated aspects of phenomenological philosophy into a concrete method of research (Ehrich, 1997). Giorgi’s phenomenological psychological methodology is built upon the basic concepts of phenomenology, as discussed by Merleau-Ponty (1962) and other philosophical phenomenologists such as Husserl (1970a), and Spiegelberg (1975).

Building on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962), Giorgi (1985a) explores the four themes of phenomenology:

1. Description. According to Giorgi (1985a) when one “moves from philosophy to psychology one moves from self to others” (p. 47). The descriptions therefore for the study would come from the subjects. The data collected should be read as it was given by the subjects for its meaning and not change the meaning to include the researcher’s opinion.
2. Reduction. The researcher must suspend his/her beliefs, theories, presuppositions of the experience under investigation in order not to

contaminate the experiences through pre-existing prejudices (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The aim of reduction is to re-achieve direct contact with the world by suspending prejudgments. Reduction required the researcher to be attentive in a reflective manner (Giorgi, 1985a). For example, in the case of this study if the researcher's opinion was that students would have a trying time adjusting to the new environment, those thoughts would be suspended and only the data that was provided by the subjects would be used to work with, without any of the researcher's own biases and beliefs influencing the data about what it is to be a Year 7 student.

3. **Essences.** This is what makes a thing what it is. In Husserl's writings essence refers to *the whatness* of things, as opposed to *their thatness* (i.e. their existence) (Giorgi 1985a). On this point, van Manen (1997) says, "it is the inner essential nature of a thing and therefore essence makes a thing what it is" (p. 177). In phenomenological psychology the researcher seeks general essences or the general structures of an experience which are context-related, rather than universal truths which are sought in phenomenological philosophy (Giorgi 1985a).
4. **Intentionality.** The behaviour of an actor is seen as intentional and always directed towards a situation. Individuals are always conscious of something (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Intentionality indicates that there is an inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world (Giorgio, 1985a, pp. 50-51).

Giorgi proposes a step by step method to conduct research in the area of lived experiences. This method has been used to conduct research across a number of fields, such as nursing (Andre, 1985; Berg & Dahlberg, 1998; Kraynie, 1985; Lundgren & Dahlberg, 1998; Parse, Coyne, & Smith, 1985), psychology (Andre, 1985; Giorgi, 1975a, 1975b 1985a, 1985b; Stevick, 1971; Subandi, 1993) and education (Ehrich, 1997; Giorgi, 1986a). Some examples in nursing include women's experiences of pain during childbirth (Lundgren & Dahlberg, 1998) and the experiences of women in complicated childbirth (Berg & Dahlberg, 1998). In the area of health, studies include the experience of anger (Stevick, 1971), the experience of learning (Giorgi, 1975a, 1975b, 1985a, 1985b), the experience of

internalized homophobia among homosexual men (Sorenson-Englander, 2000), the lived experience of persisting in change (Kraynie, 1985), the lived experience of reaching out (Andre, 1985) and the lived experience of health (Parse et al., 1985). This methodology also has been used successfully in education to study principals' experiences of professional development and their response to teachers' professional development (Ehrich, 1997), and to study the experience of the verbal learning tradition (Giorgi, 1986a).

The next part of this chapter describes the application of a phenomenological approach to the current study, and discusses the method of selecting the participants and research sites, the method of collecting data and the method of analysing the data.

## **SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH SITES**

Subjects are an important part of any empirical study (Polkinghorne, 1989). Thus, the selection of subjects has to be done carefully and, in this case, the methodology being used should prescribe the selection process for identifying subjects.

Subject selection can be done in a number of different ways. Random sampling is a common method of subject selection in quantitative studies. Systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, stage sampling and opportunity sampling are other methods of subject selection in quantitative studies (Burns, 2000). However, these approaches are not appropriate in qualitative studies because qualitative investigations tend to be based on recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential 'lifeworld' of human beings. As such this study uses purposeful sampling to gain insight and understanding into a particularly chosen phenomenon (Burns, 2000). As Patton (1990) states, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in-depth" (p. 169). Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of research. Therefore, it was important for this study to select subjects who provided a rich source of data.

In conducting a phenomenological study, researchers aim to study the specific experiences of individuals and/or groups involved in actual situations and places (Seamon, 2002). The inquiry could not be carried out on a random sample of individuals. Some individuals were more appropriate than others because of their situation in relation to the phenomenon being studied, or because they were more perceptive and thus were able to articulate their experiences better (Seamon, 2002). In this study, which was concerned with transition to high school, only students who were experiencing their first year of high school were suitable for the study.

In phenomenology, researchers use subjects to generate a fund of possible elements and relationships that can be used in determining the essential structure of the phenomenon (Valle & Halling, 1989). The point of subject selection was to obtain rich descriptions. The researcher needed to choose individuals who could describe specific experiences of the topic being explored (Polkinghorne, 1989). Thus, subjects who were able to participate as informants by providing rich descriptions of the experience being investigated were selected.

Subject selection in a phenomenological study can be done in several ways. According to Polkinghorne (1989), the first requirement for selection is that a subject must have had the experience on the topic of the research. The second requirement of selection is that a subject has the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions under examination. Colaizzi (1978) concurs with Polkinghorne (1989) that subjects require experience of the phenomenon in addition to the capacity to articulate that experience. In this study it was determined that the participants would be proficient in written skills because the state-wide English Literacy and Language Test has shown that the students who enter the site of the study year after year fall within the proficient category.

Another researcher, van Kaam (1969), proposes six skills that are required of subjects. Subjects must first have the ability to express themselves linguistically with relative ease. Second, they must have the ability to sense and express inner feelings and emotions without shame and inhibition. Third, subjects require the ability to sense and express organic experiences that accompany these feelings. Fourth, the experience of the situation under investigation must be relatively

recent for the individual. Fifth, subjects must have a spontaneous interest in their experience. Finally, the subjects must have the ability to report or write what was going on within them (van Kaam, 1969). This last skill requires an atmosphere in which subjects can find the necessary relaxing environment to enable them to put sufficient time and orderly thought into the reporting or the writing of the phenomenon under investigation.

The purpose of phenomenological research, then, is to describe the nature of an experience and not to describe the characteristics of a group who have had the experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). It also seeks to uncover the meaning of humanly experienced phenomena through the analysis of subjects' descriptions (Parse et al., 1985).

The researcher asked for volunteers from students in feeder primary schools who would be entering the high school, the site of the study and were in transition from primary into high school to participate in this study. Following the suggestions of Polkinghorne (1989), Colaizzi (1978) and van Kaam (1969), another important criterion for selection was that the participants would be articulate and could express their experiences. Thus students' linguistic ability was important.

The number of subjects for a phenomenological study varies considerably and depends on the nature of the phenomenon explored. Tesch (1984) argues that between 10 and 15 participants is usual for a phenomenological study. However, other researchers have used far fewer subjects. For example, Andre (1985) using Giorgi's method of data analysis, used two subjects to investigate the phenomenon of '*reaching out* as a lived experience'. Kraynie (1985) too, following Giorgi's method, used only two subjects to investigate the lived experience of '*persisting in change even though it is difficult*'. Lundgren and Dahlberg (1998), used nine subjects to study women's experiences of pain during childbirth; Berg and Dahlberg (1998) used ten subjects to study the phenomenon of women's experiences of complicated childbirth, while only seven participants were used in another study (Subandi, 1993) on experiences of religious transformations. Parse et al. (1985), applied van Kaam's (1969) method of analysis, a variation to Giorgi's (1985a) method of analysis, used four hundred subjects in investigating the phenomenon of

‘the lived experience of health’. Stevick (1971) applied Colaizzi’s (1968) method of data analysis, using thirty subjects to investigate the experience of anger. In using this research methodology the number of participants was therefore not the key issue. Instead, the phenomenon being investigated was of prime importance.

The nature of the phenomenon being studied determines the sample. It was anticipated that a sample size of between 10 to 15 students would be sought in this study and would achieve the rich data required since that accounts to ten percent of the student population in Year 7 at the site of the study. This data would be collected from high school students over the first 10 weeks of transition into Year 7.

The first ten weeks of the first term of the school year was selected as the optimum to capture the students’ initial experiences of transition. Kirkpatrick (1992) collected her final data on students’ experiences of high school after students had completed the first ten weeks. Yates (1999), on the other hand, interviewed students twice in the first year of high school to examine their experiences. (It is important to note, however, that Yates’ study was longitudinal.) Cotterell (1982) examined students’ experiences over the first three weeks of high school. Other researchers (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000) have identified support being given to students during transition into high and middle school over a six week period which is considered insufficient as a time period of transition. It appears that research to date has not reported on an optimum timeframe to capture transition. It is argued that the first ten weeks would be adequate as a timeframe for this study as it represents the first term of high school which is a crucial time for new high school students.

According to Glesne (1999), researchers are required to address a number of questions when determining a research site. Two key questions are:

1. where to conduct the study? and
2. who will be the study participants?

In regard to *where to conduct the study* (Glesne, 1999), the subjects who were invited to participate in the study came from one high school in Sydney, NSW. This is the school at which the researcher teaches in the Human Society and Its Environment Faculty. The site was chosen as students would know the researcher as

a teacher in the school but not as their own classroom teacher. This was to allay some of their initial fears of working with an unknown person - an outsider, and reduce the issue of power to a certain extent. This school is in the Northern suburbs in Sydney. It is a single sex (girls) state school in a middle class suburb. The majority of the students are of Anglo Saxon background. It is assumed that these students would most likely fulfil the criterion of having the linguistic ability to articulate their experience as their ELLA test scores are above the state average (Annual Report, 2004).

*Who will be the study participants?* Students entering Year 7 (the first year of high school in New South Wales) were targeted to participate. As discussed previously, students needed to be articulate and expressive and willing to write about their experiences. Having considered the participants in the study, the next section now examines the data collection methods.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

The purpose of data gathering in a phenomenological study is to collect naïve descriptions of the experience under investigation (Polkinghorne, 1989). This represents the researcher's data. In phenomenological studies, there are different types of data that can be used. For example, van Manen (1997) states that there are different approaches to 'collecting' or 'gathering' lived experience material. These may take the form of protocol writing, obtaining experiential descriptions from others, interviewing and observing, diaries, journals and logs. However, according to Stone (1979), there are three main sources in a phenomenological study. These are in-depth interviews, documentary evidence and case study analysis. Data can also be used by the researcher experiencing it as a participant (Patton, 1990), that is, the researcher would also be the subject of the study. Interviewing is used to a great extent in phenomenological studies. Another data source that is used widely in phenomenology is asking participants to record / write down their experiences of a phenomenon (Parse et al., 1985).

Research carried out by Parse et al. (1985), which followed Giorgi's data collection methods, asked subjects to write a description of a situation in which they experienced a particular phenomenon that the researchers were investigating. This particular data collection method was most appropriate for this study as it enabled the subjects to have the freedom of writing without inhibition, compared to being interviewed. Interview as a method used by researchers in phenomenological studies was not appropriate in this instance for a number of reasons. First, as subjects in this study would be 12 or 13 year olds, it might be difficult to conduct multiple interviews during or after school time due to curriculum needs and transport issues. Second, the interviews conducted in a phenomenological study can be time-consuming, for example, between thirty and ninety minutes per interview (Berg & Dahlberg, 1998; Ehrich, 1996, 1998; Lundgren & Dahlberg, 1998; Pilkington, 1992; Subandi, 1993). These students could only be interviewed during school time due to transport constraints and interviews could only be conducted outside class-time. This would make it difficult to conduct interviews satisfactorily.

Third, interviews could be intimidating and it may be less intimidating for students to write their experiences in a journal. It was possible that these young subjects might not be comfortable speaking openly in front of a teacher especially where the interviews were being audio taped or video taped.

In a phenomenological study the research questions posed are usually open-ended and broad. The research question posed in this study was, "what are your experiences of being in high school this year?" which participants were asked to respond to by writing their experiences as a journal entry. They were asked to: "Describe an experience that happened today or this week while at high school".

The following can be used by the participants to help them in their writing:

- To help you describe the experience as fully as you can, you might like to think about what happened, when it happened, why it happened, who was involved, how it happened, how you felt. (These experiences may be pleasant, unpleasant, interesting, worrying, and so on.)

- You may also write about your experiences by using some or all of the following stems to guide you:
- High school is like .....
  - What I discover during high school is .....
  - High school feels like .....
  - I recognise high school as being .....
  - What comes to light when I focus on high school is .....
  - High school seems to be .....
  - What is uncovered when I focus on high school is .....
  - The metaphor(s) that best conveys high school is (are) ...
  - What I see in high school is .....(Crotty, 1996, pp. 279-280)

The use of journals to collect data in a phenomenological study has been used successfully by researchers including Parse et al. (1985), Andre (1985) and Kraynie (1985). In the current study, students were asked to write about any of their experiences (either positive or negative) regarding being in high school for the first time. The subjects were asked to write at least three diary entries per week for the first six weeks. This time frame is important as a critical period of transition (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000) as it covers the first term of school where most transitional experiences are most likely to occur. Thus, there was no need to conduct the study beyond Term 1 as the study was aimed at finding out the initial transitional experiences of students and *not* how students' experiences of transition changed over time.

Any Year 7 student entering the school in question was a potential subject for this study. In order to facilitate this process, the researcher visited several local feeder primary schools, and spoke with Year 6 students in Term 4, who would be attending the high school that was the site for the study. A letter was sent to the parents explaining the study (see Appendix A). Students who volunteered were enlisted before the beginning of the school year (2005) so that they could start making journal entries from the first day of school. Year 6 students and their parents visited the high school during the last week of Term Four in 2004 as part of Orientation. During that visit the researcher discussed the study with the potential volunteer

subjects and their parents to further clarify and inform parents about the study and prepare the students for the study on the first day of high school.

The researcher facilitated the writing process by providing the journals and writing materials for all of the student volunteers. As an incentive in taking part in this study, these students were rewarded with a stationery set as well. Following this description of the data collection method, the next section presents the approach to data analysis used in this methodology.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

As the study was guided by phenomenological psychological methodology, data analysis required that the researcher abstract essences from descriptions made by subjects and translate the data from concrete statements provided by the subjects to the language of psychology (Parse, 1989). In phenomenology, there are no perfect descriptions, only adequate or inadequate ones (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Adequate descriptions are capable of yielding distinctive structures of the phenomenon and inadequate ones cannot be used as data. If descriptions are too vague, they cannot be used as data. The researcher might then need to ask for clarification about particular statements. The method is also descriptive in the sense that the end result of the analytical process is a description of the structure of the experience provided by the subjects (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). At the conclusion of the project the researcher returned to the subjects to ask how the general description compared with their experience.

There are three major processes involved in phenomenological analysis. They are intuiting, analysing and describing (Parse, 1989). These processes are consistent with the fundamental presuppositions of phenomenological research articulated by Giorgi (1970, 1975a, 1975b). Intuiting means that the researcher comes to know the phenomenon as it is described by the subject. The idea of intuiting is to grasp the unique nature of the phenomenon by openly looking, listening, and feeling (Spiegelberg, 1976). Therefore, the researcher is first required to remain faithful to

the phenomenon as described by the subject in the context of the situation as it emerges in everyday life (Parse, 1989).

In phenomenological research, analysing is the second operation in the process of investigating a phenomenon. The attempt here is to uncover the constitutional elements of the phenomenon in order to know the whole of it, to shape its meaning as a lived experience (Parse et al., 1985). The researcher here searches for the meaning through rigorous adherence to the rules of phenomenological analysis (Parse, 1989), which are discussed next.

Describing is a vital part of phenomenological analysis; it is the method used in collecting data and reporting findings (Parse, 1989). However, the different phenomenological methods do analyse the data in different ways. For example, there are two approaches to analysing participants' descriptions provided by van Kaam (1969) and Giorgi (1985a, 1985b). The researcher used Giorgi's (1985a, 1985b) method of analysing the data in this study which is described later in this chapter.

When using van Kaam's (1969) method, the researcher elicits descriptive expressions from the subjects. The researcher then looks for common elements in the descriptive expressions. A descriptive expression is a statement that completes an idea of a lived experience while a common element is an abstract statement naming a major theme which surfaces from the descriptive expressions (Parse et al., 1985). The next step is to synthesise the common elements into a hypothetical definition of the phenomenon and finally a description of the phenomenon surfaces (Parse et al., 1985).

van Kaam's method uses scientific explication by listing and classifying data into categories and the final listing must be agreed upon by expert judges. Inter-subjective agreement at the various stages is required in this method by all expert judges, unlike Giorgi's method, where experts are not required for verification purposes. In this method validity lasts until other cases are presented that do not correspond to the necessary and sufficient constituents in the final listing (Omery, 1983). The researcher is a key figure in Giorgi's method which does not require experts to validate findings and does not rely on expert inter-subjectivity.

The main steps proposed by Giorgi (1985b, pp. 10-19) are similar in some ways to van Kaam's model and the steps are summarised as follows:

1. *Sense of the whole*

The researcher reads through the entire description of the experience to get a sense of the whole experience written by the participants.

2. *Discrimination of meaning units within a psychological perspective*

The researcher reads the descriptions again more slowly, identifying transitions or units in the experience, called constituents, to divide the script into natural meaning units. A meaning unit is described as words and phrases which express clearly a meaning which distinguishes it from other meanings.

3. *Transformation of subject's everyday expressions into psychological language with emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated*

The researcher eliminates redundancies in the units, clarifying or elaborating the meanings of the remaining units by relating them to each other and to the whole. The researcher then states as simply as possible in his/her language the meaning that dominates the natural unit. The researcher interrogates each meaning unit and its theme in the specific topic of the study by transforming it into general categories.

4. *Synthesis of transformed meaning units into a consistent statement of the structure of the experience being investigated*

The researcher works to synthesise and tie the meaning units together into a descriptive statement of essential, non-redundant psychological meanings using two steps:

- a. The first step involves the researcher developing a situated structural description for each experience; and
- b. An additional step is required to produce a single general structural description that represents the total experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi 1985b, pp. 10 - 19).

Colaizzi (1978), another phenomenological psychologist, has suggested a similar set of procedures for analysing data. An important step Colaizzi identifies that builds on the work of van Kaam (1969) and Giorgi (1985a, 1985b) is that the researcher returns to the subjects to ask how the description compares with their experience.

The three researchers Giorgi (1985 a, 1985b), van Kaam (1969) and Colaizzi (1978) are similar in that they employ a common series of steps and these can be summarised as:

- a) the original protocols are divided into units
- b) the units are transformed by the researcher into meanings that are expressed in psychological and phenomenological concepts and
- c) these transformations are tied together to make a general description of the experience (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 55).

As phenomenology is the search for the essential structures of a phenomenon (Valle & Halling, 1989), the main aim of this study was to identify the essential themes and structures of the subjects' experiences of being in high school for the first time. For this purpose, the method of data analysis designed by Giorgi (1985a, 1985b) suited the current study. By inviting the subjects to write their experiences and applying Giorgi's systematic procedure for data analysis, the researcher learnt about students' experiences of entering the first year of high school. At the same time, Colaizzi's (1978) last step by returning to each subject was integrated into the study by asking how the general description compared with their experience. The researcher went back to the subjects to ensure the final analysis was validated by the subjects themselves. The final validation was facilitated through a discussion with each of the participants informally. During the discussion the researcher read out the general description for the participants to validate if this reflected their actual experience. This discussion helped the researcher to determine if the description that was arrived at, was based on their experiences. The participants were in agreement with the general descriptions, therefore, acting as the final validators of the analysis process.

This section now focuses on the validation of data collection, analysis and the study by looking at trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the study as a whole.

## **VALIDATION**

The validation section examines the trustworthiness which includes validity issues and reliability concerning various aspects of the current study using a phenomenological psychological research methodology.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is an important concept in qualitative research. Trustworthiness refers to research validity and reliability; it is an issue that is considered during the research design process as well as during data collection (Glesne, 1999).

Trustworthiness can be established through spending sufficient time at the research site and by focusing in detail on the elements that are imperative to the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is of particular importance in phenomenological studies.

Polkinghorne (1983) presents four qualities to help readers judge the trustworthiness of phenomenological interpretation. These four qualities are: (1) vividness that draws a reader in; (2) accuracy, in other words, the believability of readers recognising the phenomenon in their own life-world; (3) richness referring to the depth and quality of the description; (4) elegance referring to the descriptive economy and a disclosure of the phenomena in a graceful manner. These four qualities are said to ensure trustworthiness of the data (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Ultimately the most significant test of trustworthiness is to draw the reader into the researcher's discoveries allowing the reader to see his/her own world in a new and deeper way (Seamon, 2002).

### ***Validity Issues***

The concept of validity ordinarily refers to the notion that an idea is well-grounded and well-supported and thus one can have confidence in it (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Validity issues are of great importance and need to be considered in a research proposal (Glesne, 1999). For a phenomenological study, validity concerns the question of whether the general structural description provides an accurate portrait

of the common features and structural connections that manifest in the examples collected (Polkinghorne, 1989). In other words, has the raw data been analysed and transformed into a general statement in a way that it reflects the subjects' experiences of the phenomenon being investigated?

Colaizzi (1978) invites the subjects to ask how the description he has produced compares with the experience. This was one way the researcher validated the findings of the study. This notion is supported by Silverman (2001), who states that the researcher would probably want to validate the research findings by taking them back to the subjects to evaluate whether they conform to their own 'experience'. Reason and Rowan (1981) argue that good research goes back to the subjects with tentative results, and refines them in the light of the subjects' reactions.

The question of validity for a phenomenologist researcher should be confronted at the very beginning of the study through 'bracketing' or reduction. 'Bracketing' reduces the need for empirical judges in a phenomenological study (Giorgi, 1989). In phenomenology, taken-for granted assumptions and presuppositions about the phenomenon must be temporarily suspended by the researcher (Ehrich, 1996). In order to understand a given phenomenon, one attempts to suspend one's biases by using the process of bracketing (Omery, 1983; Valle et al., 1989). The aim of bracketing, therefore, is to awaken a profound sense of wonder about the phenomenon in which one is interested (van Manen, 2002). In other words, bracketing is a matter of peeling away the layers of interpretation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Reduction also means that the researchers lay aside what they think they already know about the lived experience under investigation. In other words, they bracket their views on that experience to view the experience freshly (Giorgi, 1986b).

Validity also depends on whether the researcher has influenced the contents of the subjects' descriptions; whether the transcription is accurate and in the analysis the researcher has to consider whether there are conclusions other than what the researcher has arrived at (Polkinghorne, 1989). It is important for the researcher to accept the subjects' descriptions as they appear and this is in itself a factor affecting validity. In this study written descriptions were used which ensured that there was

no opportunity for making mistakes when transcribing, as may happen in the case of data collected through interviews.

Phenomenological research approaches validity from a more general perspective – as a conclusion that inspires confidence because the argument in support of it has been persuasive (Polkinghorne, 1989). Finally, the tests of validity in phenomenological studies are based on the aim of phenomenological description to guide the reader to his or her own experience of the phenomenon (Oiler, 1981). If the reader is able to relate to the descriptions through his/her own experience of the phenomenon, then the study is said to be valid (Oiler, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1983; Seamon, 2002).

### ***Reliability***

Reliability refers to the “degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions” (Hammersley, 1992, p. 67). Reliability in phenomenological studies is based not on a predefined scale of measurement (Seamon, 2002). Reliability can be achieved through inter-subjective corroboration. That is, can other people who are interested in this phenomenon find in their own life and experience what the phenomenologist found in the study (van Manen, 2002)? The chief point to be remembered with this research approach is not so much whether another position with respect to the data could be adopted but whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoints as articulated by the researcher, can see what the researcher saw (Giorgi, 1975a). This, according to Giorgi (1975a), is a key criterion.

Phenomenological psychological research as a methodology seeks understanding for its own sake and addresses the question of *what?* Not *why?* (Polkinghorne, 1989; Spinelli, 2000). This methodology suited the study as it answered the research question which asked what it was to be a student in transition and did not ask for an explanation of the reason for feeling the experiences of transition.

The next section focuses on the ethical considerations of the proposed study as well as its limitations.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Glesne (1999) states that, “ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday interactions with research participants and with your data” (p. 113). To ensure the study was ethical the researcher recruited the students from their primary schools before they began at the high school and therefore they did not know the researcher. In that way the participants would not feel obliged to volunteer because the researcher was a teacher known to them if they were recruited in Year 7.

A further concern was the student-teacher relationship. For this reason, the researcher did not teach this cohort of Year 7 students. This avoided other problems that could arise, for example, familiarity with the subjects, and the resulting assumptions that the researcher knew what they were experiencing, or the possibility of influencing journal entries.

Privacy and confidentiality are important aspects in any research. Confidentiality involves a clear understanding between researcher and subject concerning the use of the data provided (Burns, 2000). Subjects were informed that confidentiality would be maintained at all times and anonymity preserved. Parents were informed before the study started so that any subject wanting to withdraw knew that she has the right to discontinue at anytime. Research participants must have sufficient information to make informed decisions and they must be able to withdraw from the study without penalty (Glesne, 1999). Participants were therefore made aware that participation was voluntary and they could stop at any time (Diener & Crandall, 1978). Consent was obtained in writing from participants and parents/caregivers, prior to involvement in the study (See Appendix B). Participants had access to the results of the findings of this study.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Whether a study is of a quantitative or qualitative nature, there are limitations inherent in each paradigm. By the end of the 1970s, scholars began to realise that both approaches – quantitative and qualitative - were needed, since no one

methodology can answer all questions and provide insight on all issues (Burns, 2000). The possible limitations of this study were its small sample size, the subjects chosen were of one gender, journal writing was the single source of data collection and the potential issue of researcher bias. Each limitation and how each limitation was handled is discussed next.

Between ten and fifteen subjects were anticipated to be involved in the study. This might be considered a limitation as the sample size is small. However, the aim of qualitative studies is not quantity and, “quantification [sic] is not the only means of achieving precision” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 258). According to Omery (1983), a small sample size can be adequate for a phenomenological study. In phenomenological studies as few as two (Andre, 1985) subjects have been used to investigate an experience successfully.

In keeping with practitioner research, students from the researcher’s school became the focus of the current study. As alluded to previously, the school in which the researcher works is a single sex school and for this reason only girls participated in the study. This enabled the study to be focused, containable and pertinent to the researcher’s work context. While utilising the experiences of one gender only may be viewed as a limitation, the researcher believes there is sufficient justification for doing this. Many girls experience menarche during transition and find peer relations most stressful compared to boys. Girls also find the physical facilities such as toilet facilities and sanitary disposal units inadequate in many schools thus making transition that much harder which signals this as a worthwhile study.

Another possible limitation was that the study used only one source of data collection – written descriptions. These were written descriptions by the subjects as journal entries. Whereas in interviews, the interviewer could seek clarification when the statements of subjects are ambiguous, this cannot be done where data are collected through written descriptions. This was overcome by collecting the journals every week so that clarifications could be sought immediately. Since journals were collected regularly this eliminated these problems as they presented the researcher with the opportunity to seek clarification of statements. Some students returned

journals to the researcher the next school day with clarifications which provided immediate and prompt feedback for the researcher.

Another limitation was the issue of researcher bias. One way that this can be addressed is through the notion of 'bracketing'. The researcher, from the very beginning, must put aside all beliefs and presuppositions of the phenomenon (Wilson, 2002) and lay aside what she already knows as well as any past theories about the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi, 1994; Oiler, 1981). The researcher overcame this limitation by diarising her presuppositions and personal beliefs regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Uljens, 1993; van Manen, 2002). This made the researcher more aware of personal beliefs towards the phenomenon and offered opportunities to overcome researcher bias by not imposing her views of transition while analysing the data and writing the specific and general descriptions. The researcher also made sure she read only the general descriptions which were based on their descriptions of the experience to the students while verifying them without imposing her views

The teacher-student relationship or inequality of power could be a limitation. The researcher tried to overcome this by not teaching any of the students involved in the study which reduced the power of the teacher-student relationship. Although the teacher-student power relationship was reduced by the researcher having no other contact with these students except as a researcher the fact that the researcher is a teacher in the school and therefore in a position of power in relation to the participants cannot be denied and was a limitation of the study.

No one method of research will fulfil all requirements of a study without having any limitations. The important aspect was to be aware of the limitations of one's study and be conscious about it and overcome it where possible.

## **SUMMARY**

Phenomenological psychology was an appropriate research methodology for the study as it provided an approach that helped to illuminate lived experiences of people in a systematic manner. Since this study aimed to investigate students' experiences of transition in the first year of high school, a phenomenological psychological approach was deemed relevant as it provided a method of deeper understanding, 'verstehen', of human experience.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This study investigated students' experience of transition into high school by analysing the experiences reported by these students in the first ten weeks of high school. The analysis was conducted using a phenomenological methodology.

This chapter provides some background information about the participants including the frequency of data writing and the number of experiences of each participant. It then briefly describes the process used in analysing the data collected which is based on the methodological chapter, Chapter 3. Finally the findings are presented. The findings are made up of a specific or situated statement representing each experience, a validation process which shows how the researcher moved from tentative themes which were derived from the specific statements, to essential themes, and then a series of general statements representing all of the experiences guided by the essential themes.

#### **PARTICIPATION OF SUBJECTS IN THE STUDY**

There were sixteen students who participated in this study. All of them were females attending the same state high school in the Northern suburbs of Sydney. Students came from five primary schools. The students were invited to participate in the study while they were in their final year (and final month) at primary school and all were unknown to the researcher. The researcher visited each of the five feeder primary schools and discussed the study with the students and asked for volunteers. Eighteen students volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher decided to include all of them in the study although the original intention was to enlist between ten and fifteen students. The reason to enlist more students was in the event that some students decided to attend a different high school or in the event of withdrawal

during the study. Another reason the researcher accepted a larger pool of candidates was that she did not want to select some students and exclude others. Furthermore, the researcher did not want the subjects to be selected by their primary school teachers in case they were selected for their academic ability or for some other criteria set by their teachers. Since the researcher wanted subjects to be purely voluntary and interested in participating, it was not possible to determine their linguistic ability. However, based on past ELLA test scores (Annual Report, 2004), it was highly likely the students would be proficient therefore linguistically competent for this study. The final subject pool for the study was sixteen since two of the eighteen subjects attended another high school and were no longer eligible to be involved in this study. These sixteen participants were from five Year 7 classes in the school in 2005.

**Table 3: Weekly Journal Entries of Participants in Term 1**

SUBJECT	NUMBER OF EXPERIENCES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A	24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
B	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓
C	12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	ABS	ABS	✓	✓
D	3	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓
E	8	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓
F	6	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓
G	3	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓
H	5	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓
I	8	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓
J	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓
K	7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
L	20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
M	20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
O	21	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P	34	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>207</b>										

✓ = entries made that week; ABS = absent; - = no entries made that week

In Term One, participants entered their experiences of attending high school for the first time in a journal which was provided by the researcher. At the end of each week the journals were collected, photocopied and returned on the same day to them. The

ticks (✓) in Table 3 indicate the weeks during which the subjects made journal entries. The subjects in this study were given alphabetical letters (A-P) for the purposes of anonymity. In Weeks 7 and 8 Subject C was absent from school and this is indicated by 'ABS' on the Table. The dashes (-) in the Table indicate that subjects did not make any Journal entries that week. Each Journal entry was treated as an experience and the number of experiences by each subject has been recorded in Table 3 under the heading 'Number of Experiences'. As illustrated, some subjects recorded more experiences than others. This was unsurprising given that students had different interests, abilities and personalities, and some were keener to write about their experiences than others. Some students (e.g. G and H) seemed to lose interest in the study as indicated by the lack of journal entries that were submitted during several weeks. All students were reminded in Week 9 to return the Journals to the researcher at the end of Week 10, which was the end of the data collection period. Surprisingly, some subjects who had stopped making entries (for example, most notably I and F) actually made entries during Weeks 9 and 10 and others for Week 10 (for example D).

## **FINDINGS**

In this study essential structures of the phenomenon of students' experiences into high school were sought from these journal entries. Giorgi's (1985a) phenomenological research methodology involving four key steps was used in the analysis within the context of this investigation. An additional step was included to assist in the validation of the essential themes of students experiences of transition into high school.

In the first step the researcher collected data from the subjects through journal entries and read the data to get the sense of the whole. The researcher then examined each of the student's experiences individually. Table 3 above, summarises the number of experiences that were included in the journal entries for each subject in the study. As stated earlier, some subjects in the study for example A and P communicated more experiences than others (e.g. D and G).

Each experience relevant to being in high school for the first time was used in the analysis. Where experiences were not related to high school they were not used in the analysis. In phenomenology, there are no perfect descriptions, only adequate or inadequate ones (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Inadequate ones cannot be used as data.

The next step, Step 2, involved the researcher reading the descriptions more slowly to identify transitions in the meanings in order to break down the whole text into manageable parts. Here meaning units, which were phrases or words expressing a meaning about the experience, were identified and rewritten. In this step the researcher utilised the language adopted by the subjects. Step 3 involved these meaning units being transformed into more psychological language (psychological meanings lived by the participants) while at the same time redundancies were eliminated. Here the researcher transformed the meaning units into meaningful language to express subject's high school experience. These transformation units were written by the researcher with the intention of moving from the concrete descriptions of the subjects based on journal entries made to a more general category. In this step the researcher therefore transformed the meaning units which were still in the language used by subjects in the journal entries into meaningful language which revealed their experiences of high school transition.

For example A1:

**Meaning Unit 1:** Today was A's first day of high school, she was so excited that she woke up early and was keen to start the day.

**Transformation 1:** A was excited to attend the first day of high school.

Following Giorgi (1985a), the fourth step was made up of two parts: part one was the development of specific statements emerging from each of the experiences and part two was the arrival of the general statements. To aid in the movement from specific descriptions to general statements, an intermediate step was introduced. This involved the compiling of a list of tentative themes emerging from the specific description, meaning units and transformation units for each specific experience (for example A1). From all of the tentative themes, the researcher identified a set of essential themes which represented the most general findings of the study. A new step, a validation process, was introduced at this point whereby each of the tentative themes for each specific description were cross checked against a set of essential

themes. The tentative themes which did not coincide with the essential themes were discarded and not used as essential to the experience of transition. For example the tentative theme “A broken mobile telephone upset E” (found in E3) was not identified as an essential theme, because no one else experienced this and it was not one of the essential themes therefore was discarded. The validation process which involved the cross checking of tentative themes against essential themes was tabulated. Table 4 (see Appendix C) demonstrates the validation process for students’ lived experience of transition into high school. An example of Giorgi’s step by step procedure for analysing a specific journal entry which involved moving from journal entry to meaning units to transformation units and finally to specific statements (Step 1 to 4a) of an experience is provided in Appendix D.

Finally the second part of Giorgi’s (1985a) methodology (Step 4b) involved the researcher developing a single general structural description or statement that represents the total experience of the phenomenon. To fulfil this step the researcher moved on to write the general statement of the experience of high school transition around the seven essential themes that were arrived at through the validation process. Using these common experiences based on the essential themes the general statement or structural description was arrived at that describes the experience of being in high school for the first time. The general descriptions of students’ high school experience during transition showed the seven essential themes as common experiences among the subjects in the specific descriptions.

In this study there were a total of two hundred and seven specific descriptions of students’ high school experiences of transition. From these specific descriptions tentative themes emerged. The seven essential themes which generated the general descriptions in this study were finally confirmed by cross checking them against tentative themes. They reflect the general structures which follow from this study. The next section focuses on the specific descriptions which emerged from this study based on journal entries, meaning units and transformation units.

In the specific description that follows each subject in this study was given a letter of an alphabet after ‘specific description’ for anonymity as well as a number after the letter to represent the number of the experience for the subject (for example,

specific description A1 reflects experience 1 for Subject A). The specific statements of students' experiences of transition into high school are presented below. Table 4 (see Appendix C) was used in the validation process to identify essential themes to this study.

## **SPECIFIC DESCRIPTIONS FOR STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITION INTO HIGH SCHOOL**

### **Specific Description for Participant 1 – A**

#### **Specific description A1**

A was very excited to attend her first day of high school. Her mother came with her and stayed till the introductions and welcome speeches before she left. When A arrived she saw her friends from primary school and was happy to sit with them. In their speeches, the Principal and Year Adviser made A feel welcome and safe. A received a Diary and Journal which was explained as the day proceeded. When A received a timetable she was confused about it but her teachers later in the day explained more about it which made A feel comfortable. A was delighted to find her good friend in her class. A attended a number of classes where she got to know more about other students in her class and the primary schools from which they came. She also learnt about the subjects she was studying. Her teachers made it possible for A to get to know more information about her new classmates. A spent recess and lunch with her friends from primary school discussing the experiences of school that day. A enjoyed her first day of high school and was looking forward to the next day.

#### **Specific description A2**

Today A had to find her own way to her classes. She went around with her good friend and she did not mind getting lost because she had her friend with her and they could sit together in their classes. The Music teacher played two games that helped A to get to know others in the class and make new friends. A made a new friend who is very much like A. A loves her new school and finds the teachers kind, helpful and fun.

**Specific description A3**

A had a good day at school although there have been better days. She attended a number of classes. A had fun in French because the work was easy. However, A did not enjoy History as her teacher was too strict. A was upset when two older students swore at her class for not knowing their way around the school. A would like to be treated better as Year 7s were new in the school and were still finding their way around.

**Specific description A4**

A attended a number of classes and was pleased not to have any homework for the first time in History. Although she did not understand how to draw in Visual Arts she had fun and in the other subjects she learnt more about the content. The best part of the day for A was Dance Club where she learnt a new dance with her friends. She was not good at the new dance but she had fun laughing with her friends about her performance.

**Specific description A5**

A enjoyed having a guest speaker who spoke about Science. A had her Science lesson in the Computer Room where she had the opportunity to use the internet. In Design and Technology A learnt about the use of the shopping trolley and facts about recycling. A was pleased to have the opportunity to learn more about her new friend during Health. A loves high school and never wants to leave it.

**Specific description A6**

A finds some lessons interesting while others are boring. History lessons were boring because A found the work dull. She enjoyed her Design and Technology classes as her teacher was really nice. In English A had fun learning about friendship. A found out how she learnt best during her 'learning to learn' lesson which she found interesting. A worked on a puzzle. A enjoyed the day and was looking forward to the next day of school.

**Specific description A7**

A was pleased to start the day with Peer Support as she knew the leaders and considered them great since they made her feel safe and happy. In assembly A learnt

some great tips on how to survive the Higher School Certificate year from Year 12 students who graduated in 2004. This was a useful assembly for A as it allowed her to understand the senior years better. A attended other lessons that day which involved doing practical work like weeding the garden in Science. A had another great day at school because there were only two periods of work.

### **Specific description A8**

A enjoyed her Science class as she worked in the garden with her class. She was very pleased to see how efficient the class was when they worked collaboratively. A is looking forward to sharing her garden with her good friend. A and her class read the timetable wrongly and brought the wrong work for the last lesson. This upset the teacher. A found the teacher mean and not sympathetic towards the class. A also felt the teachers treated students as 'stupid' since she taught them the simplest concepts. A hopes the teacher is kinder the next time.

### **Specific description A9**

A enjoyed the swimming carnival as she was with her friends. She participated in a couple of competitions and was pleased her team did so well. Being among excited people made A have fun and be happy at the carnival. A hopes her house wins the competition this year as the winner gets rewarded by a visit to Luna Park. A hopes they will win because of the fun she will have with her friends. The heat did not affect A's great day at the swimming carnival.

### **Specific description A10**

A enjoyed school and had a number of lessons. She learnt about different types of bullying and played a few games at Peer Support. Time passed very quickly till Lunch time. A learnt content in Visual Arts and made up a jingle with a friend in Music. During lunch A attended Year 7 dance club where she and a group of friends created a dance. A had great fun doing this. A did not find Maths enjoyable. Her teacher does not explain the concepts to A's satisfaction and rambles on which annoys A.

**Specific description A11**

A attended a few classes and found Maths boring. However, she enjoyed lessons which were practical based like Science and Design and Technology. She was worried about her spelling in her Language test. When A's Health teacher got the class to discuss changes in their lives and what they had been through, A felt comfortable that she was not alone. A loved the environment, subjects and teachers in high school and thinks it is great.

**Specific description A12**

A was informed by the teacher that she would be using a textbook for history. She was concerned it was going to be too heavy to carry around. A learned the elements of design and the important considerations that need to be made when creating a design. A enjoyed English in the Library because she had the opportunity to work on the computers, looking for books with her friends. She wrote a poem and made a bookmark. In English she was given her first assignment. During lunch A worked out a dance routine with her group but felt embarrassed to perform in front of the other groups whom she felt were better. A was annoyed with her History teacher who scolded her for colouring in the Diary. A wanted to have a pretty and colourful diary to look at rather than a dull and boring one. When A went to the next lesson, her Maths teacher encouraged her to colour in the worksheets so that it would make her happy to look at them again. A now knows the names of all her teachers and also who she likes and dislikes. She feels great that she knows her way around the school most of the time and also the names of her classmates.

**Specific description A13**

A was relieved when she found the literacy based test easier than expected. A relaxed in her Design and Technology class because she found the subject easy. A decided to participate in the talent competition with her friend. Although, she was nervous about participating, she hoped to do well.

**Specific description A14**

A learnt content in many subjects today. She was pleased that her peers were supportive of her ability to play volleyball. She enjoyed being recognised as the winner of the game. A participated in a talent competition with her friend. A was not nervous once she started competing. Every competitor was good but she felt that she should have won as she and her friend had worked really hard. A was tired when it was time to go home that day.

**Specific description A15**

A was annoyed with her substitute Languages teacher for not giving the class sufficient time to complete copying the board. In Science, A was disappointed that by following her teacher's instructions she ended up with the worst research topic. A is happy to do homework, however, she finds there is too much homework given in History even though the teacher stresses its importance. She also finds it boring and tiring to have the same subject twice in a day. A enjoys being in the same group as one of her friends for dance and likes the others in the group and hopes to meet new people. The timetable was still confusing and A was getting the subjects mixed up. A enjoys working on the computers.

**Specific description A16**

A attended a number of lessons. In History she was pleased that her teacher was in a good mood and nice to them. When everyone's work was passed around the class in Visual Arts, A's class loved her work. They wanted her to draw for them and this made her feel good. She was proud to be noticed by everyone in her class for once. She felt she had achieved their recognition. A enjoyed listening to a special speaker at the women's day assembly. In Peer Support A participated in an activity where everyone in the group wrote down nice things about her and the others. This made A happy, feel liked and made her feel good about herself. Finally, she had Maths that day, which did not go too well. Her teacher had given her too much homework and she did not understand his explanations so that left A with a feeling that she had not learnt anything in Maths that day.

**Specific description A17**

A enjoyed activity and practical based lessons including Design and Technology, Science and Languages. She found Maths boring and the revision exercises not challenging enough. A liked her Science teacher as she was nice and helpful. A is happy to have a strict teacher if the lesson is fun. A cannot understand why her class did not take the video on puberty seriously as it is something that everyone will experience.

**Specific description A18**

A saw a large crowd at recess and wondered what it was until her friend Q informed her that it was about choosing the cabins for the Year 7 Camp. Although A was pleased she could share a cabin with her friends at the Year 7 Camp she would have preferred if her teacher had created the opportunity for her to meet other new people. A would have liked her teacher to allow them to choose only one friend for the cabin and then allocate four others to the cabin. A liked meeting new people and making friends so she joined other activities like the Dance Club, A made her friend join the dance club as well. A had fun dancing in the dance room and was sure that she would enjoy the dance performances.

**Specific description A19**

A ran the cross country with a partner and they both won the race. A was so pleased that they were rewarded with a merit award. A was proud of her achievement in cross country.

**Specific description A20**

A was disappointed with a girl from school who rang her and used her to complete a survey without informing her about it. A wondered if others would read the survey and was not sure if the girl could be trusted.

**Specific description A21**

When A arrived late for Science her seat was taken up and she felt she should not take this the wrong way as she herself has done this in the past. A then had to sit at the only table available which was up in the front and all by herself. She felt like a loner and wished someone would sit with her. She did not care who sat next to her

as long as she was not alone. A little later her two friends moved up and sat with her and she was so relieved not to be by herself again. A considered these two girls as her true friends for helping her out of an uncomfortable situation.

### **Specific description A22**

A realised that her teacher she used to complain about was actually a nice person who helped them a lot. She realised this because she could compare her with a substitute teacher who came when her teacher was unwell. She wished a speedy recovery for her teacher. In Music A was disappointed with her group as they were disorganised and were not co-operative. A would rather work with a more co-operative group like the other groups in her class.

### **Specific description A23**

A was very happy with school and proud of her achievement in Languages. She was one of the top three in her class. She felt very intelligent when her teacher praised the top three students for their exceptional work. A felt a sense of achievement for having done well in a subject in high school. A was excited about her dance group and she and her group worked collaboratively to produce a dance item. She had most of her friends in the dance group and was pleased that she had joined it. She looked forward to the next practice.

### **Specific description A24**

A enjoyed her experiences at the Year 7 Camp. She loved the outdoor activities and the food was to her liking except for the dinners. The only thing that A did not enjoy about the camp was the amount of swearing among the girls. A felt they were seeking attention as well as thinking they were great. A was disappointed with this aspect of the camp. A also had a few more unpleasant experiences in the cabin. Another girl called R, was put there till a cabin was allocated to her. While R was there another Year 7 girl called S in the cabin called R by a swear word and in return R scratched S's CD on the wall. One of A's friends, T confessed that she was depressed because she broke up with her boyfriend. T also revealed that she had previously tried to take her life. A and her close friend, Q informed their Year Adviser about T. They also told S about who had scratched her CD. A and Q felt they had helped their friends, S and T, and felt good about that.

## **Specific Description for Participant 2 - B**

### **Specific description B1**

B found the roll call rooms confusing. She was not sure where she was to go and ended up in the wrong room. She assumed that she and her sister would be on the same roll but after going to the room B realised only her sister's name was on that roll. B's name was not on that roll but on a different roll. Because B did not arrive at the correct classroom, she was worried about being marked absent for the day by the other roll call teacher.

### **Specific description B2**

B enjoyed her time at school when she had fun lessons like Physical Education, Science and Design and Technology. In Physical Education she enjoyed gymnastics and games. She found her other lessons – Science, History, Maths and English – quite boring.

### **Specific description B3**

B's friend U, did not speak to her. Instead she was giving B dirty looks. On the way home one of B's friends V, told U that her dress was up and laughed. B joined in and laughed as well and this upset U. U gave B dirty looks again. B was upset because the look was only meant for her and not V, who started the laughing. B indicated that she did not start it and therefore her friend should not be offended by her. B indicated that everyone hated her because she was getting dirty looks, even though she had not done anything wrong. B was upset that U was taking her friends away from her because she was jealous of B. Not long after, U said hello to her then ignored her for the rest of the day. B decided not to care about U as she did not appreciate her. B's other friend, V, made her feel good and warm. When U started to talk to B again, B was happy although B never stopped being her friend.

### **Specific description B4**

B's friend, W, was angry with her because she said that B spoke in an angry tone to her. B did not think she was being rude to W. Because W was angry with B, B was not able to get her books out of the locker. B could not understand the reason her friend was always angry with everyone. B found that annoying. B was busy in

Physical Education and did not pay attention to her friend which angered W also. B was relieved when her friend, W, finally was not angry with her anymore although she found W's behaviour difficult to understand as well as annoying. B was tired of having a friend who was always angry.

### **Specific description B5**

B found the work including home work and projects to be very challenging. She liked some subjects because they were interesting and fun. B was disappointed that she kept forgetting to submit her work. These were Physical Education and Multimedia where she got the opportunity to use a computer. B found it tiring moving around from class to class for lessons instead of staying in the same room. The positive thing about that was B could catch up with her friends in the corridor. There were many teachers teaching B who were nice. Not having to spend the whole day with one teacher was particularly good since not all teachers were nice. The teachers only taught for just one period. B had problems finding her way around the school and was still getting lost.

### **Specific Description for Participant 3 - C**

#### **Specific description C1**

C found the first day of high school a bit scary because she did not know many people. C made three new friends in the first period. At recess, C was pleased to catch up with her friend from primary school but was disappointed that they there were not in the same class. C was looking forward to her first lesson in Multimedia because she liked the subject. However, she was disappointed with the lesson since all they did was talk. Her Christian Studies teacher was funny and she enjoyed the lesson because of the teacher as well as her new friend who behaved in a funny manner. C enjoyed her first day at school and was looking forward to the next.

#### **Specific description C2**

C compared high school to a shopping centre. She spent the day running around and looking for the correct rooms. She and her two friends lost their way to the roll call room and C felt stupid about it. C was once again not sure whether she had recess or assembly. Later on in the day C did not know where to go for her lesson. C and

some of her classmates were in the wrong room before they realised where they had to be. As a result C missed half of her favourite lesson, PE, before she got to the right location. C was very disappointed about that.

### **Specific description C3**

C had good and bad experiences today. She found some lessons were easy while some others were more challenging. C was late in getting to her class as some students led her in the wrong direction to her classroom. She did not mind that experience although it annoyed her a little bit. C was getting used to the high school environment and was not as scared as she was in the first week. In the first week she did not know where to go and with whom to sit. But now she found it easier. C finally compared high school to clothes shopping because she was running around from room to room.

### **Specific description C4**

C had a good day until her fourth lesson. One of her friends, K, was annoying and the other friend, A, treated her like an idiot and teased her because of the name C chose for her cat. A made C feel stupid and that made C angry. C was quite upset and did not do any work after that. Not long after, C was happy when she made three new friends. This was much better than lesson 4.

### **Specific description C5**

C had fun in Health playing games and was pleased that homework given was easy. In English a guest speaker gave the lesson which meant C missed out on the normal lesson. C's French teacher could not pronounce her or the other students' names which C found initially funny but after two lessons she found that annoying. Her Maths lesson was held in the Laboratory which confused her and her teacher had an accent. C had a new subject called Learn to Learn and everyone thought it was funny as they knew how to learn. C did not enjoy her second week of high school. She hoped it would improve.

### **Specific description C6**

C found this week was better than the last. One of her teachers was being mean because he did not listen to anyone and would not let anyone speak. C and the other

Years 7 and 8 students sat for a state-wide Literacy test. C found it easy and completed it ahead of time. So did the other students in her class. School improved for C when activities day arrived. She visited the Powerhouse Museum and enjoyed playing with the display. C found high school better than primary school.

**Specific description C7**

C was surprised to see girls giving Valentines Day gifts to each other. She found the practice strange. C was late for class a couple of times during the week. Another incident that C found weird was an unknown girl coming up to her to ask her telephone number.

**Specific description C8**

C had a great time at the swimming carnival. She participated in seven events and she was pleased with all her results. C got sunburnt and it hurt when she jumped into the pool, yet she still had a fun time.

**Specific description C9**

C is still having a problem interpreting the timetable. Even though she knew the day she still packed the wrong books to school. C felt very silly bringing the wrong books to school.

**Specific description C10**

C thought high school was good today because all of the Year 7 students were treated to a sausage sizzle at lunch. Some of the Year 7s had to wait the whole of lunch break to get the food and acted crazy. C thought high school was great this week.

**Specific description C11**

C was happy to be back at school after being away for a few days. She found that she had a lot of missed work to catch up. She enjoyed meeting her friends in Multimedia. She found it difficult to catch up on the subjects.

### **Specific description C12**

For C some days of high school were fun while others were bad. C was scared when she arrived on the first day as she felt lost and out of place in the big environment. There were many teachers; some were nicer and better than others so it did not matter to C if she did not like some of them. C enjoyed Maths and Science and all the new subjects she was studying. She loved Science because it was a new subject and some of the lessons were held outside the classroom in the garden and the laboratory, although she found the subject a challenge. High school was fun as C got to meet many new people, new teachers and faced new experiences even though day one was scary. C found homework hard to begin with. But over time she got used to it and found it to be easier than it was. Once C got work she said she worked on it immediately otherwise it would accumulate. It was important to be organised enough to get the work done immediately to make homework less of a chore.

### **Specific Description for Participant 4 - D**

#### **Specific description D1**

D had mixed feelings about her high school experience. She found certain aspects harder than primary school such as the number of classes and the timetable. Reading and understanding the timetable was a challenge in itself. D found it easier to meet more people in high school compared to primary school and she has met many people in high school.

#### **Specific description D2**

Catching a train was a scary experience for D. Fortunately her neighbour (a Year 11 student) helped her with what she had to do. D found the trains were very crowded particularly after the first couple of days of school when many other students caught them.

#### **Specific description D3**

D expected to be bullied and was surprised that she was not because everyone had warned her about it. She found the senior students and Peer Support leaders very helpful in showing her around the school. These students pointed her in the right direction and so did other students. D was pleased with their support especially since there were so many rooms in the school and the timetable was hard to understand.

Other challenges were finding the staffrooms of teachers and carrying around a lot of books although lockers came in handy for storing D's books. D found the homework too challenging. She found it hard to complete because her baby brother is 6 months old and cries a lot of the time. Besides homework D found the number of projects to be immense. She has 15 projects to complete, yet when she was in primary school she was given only one at a time. She was disappointed that her Science teacher asked her to submit her work on a disk. D had been doing it on a cardboard and after 4 weeks the teacher had given this new instruction. D was disappointed she lost her friend. They no longer do things together as they did in primary school. Her friend has found other new friends. D herself has made new friends at the Year 7 Camp. D finds it hard to remember the names of all of the teachers because there are so many of them. The advantage of having so many teachers is some are nice and D does not have to put up with the bad ones all of the time.

### **Specific Description for Participant 5 - E**

#### **Specific description E1**

E was nervous when she first arrived at school. However, as soon as she saw her friends she felt she was alright. E had so much fun on the first day of high school and attended a number of classes. She could not believe that she was actually in high school as it did not feel like it. E was looking forward to the subjects she had the next day at school as she had her favourite subject, Music. When E went home that night she covered her school books and continued to feel excited.

#### **Specific description E2**

E had fun looking for her classes on her own without the teacher's guidance. She was very proud of her achievement in receiving a merit award in Science. E sat a test in Maths which she did not enjoy since she likes Maths the least of all her subjects. E was looking forward to the next day when she had Visual Arts because she loved Art and Photography.

**Specific description E3**

E was unhappy when her telephone broke. The day improved though as she had fun in Visual Art and learnt to draw without looking at the paper and without removing the pencil from the paper. She had fun looking at the funny pictures she drew.

**Specific description E4**

In English, the teacher asked the class to write about their friends. E wrote about two of her closest friends. She found the task very challenging. In Physical Development E engaged in forward rolls repeatedly and as a result felt dizzy. E thought about the next day when she and her friends were going to Westfield Shopping Centre to celebrate one of her friends 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. She expected it to be a fun time.

**Specific description E5**

E had fun after school because it was her friend's birthday. She went shopping at Westfield with six of her friends. E bought 2 CDs and a shirt. After three of her friends left for the day, E remained with the remaining three friends. She had heaps of fun with them.

**Specific description E6**

E was pleased to have missed two lessons (i.e. Maths and English) in school today because there was a guest speaker from TV who visited the school. E found out that her friend had broken off with his girl friend and this saddened her. It happened two weeks ago but she just learnt about it.

**Specific description E7**

E was disappointed that she had to sit through sport because she forgot her sport uniform. That afternoon, E went to a shopping centre and bought a nice shirt for the forthcoming disco and anticipated it would be fun. E was not happy to have to participate in the photograph sessions although she realised she had no choice. On mufti day (a day when students need not wear school uniform) E did not wear her school uniform to school and when her friends from the boys' school saw her they assumed she was truanting. E was annoyed that her friends did not know her better because she liked school so there was no reason to truant.

**Specific description E8**

E was pleased with school and found herself to be doing well at most things. E enjoyed the camp. She made friends easily with her classmates and others from different classes. E liked her teachers at high school although she found some were stricter than others. E liked not being stuck with one strict teacher. E was happy that the subjects were not too difficult. She liked the uniform too. She was able to complete all the homework although there was a lot of it. She was used to doing a lot of homework when she was in primary school. E liked to use the locker so she did not have to carry her books around all day. E has a boyfriend and his name is JJ.

**Specific Description for Participant 6 - F****Specific description F1**

The first day of high school was scary to F. F felt better after talking to her friends. F realised that one of her teachers was also new to the school and did not know his way around. F was pleased that she was in the same class as others from her primary school. F thought it was a good idea for the school to do that. F was once again worried during roll call because everyone was loud and she was afraid she might not hear her name. She felt relieved when she heard her name being called.

**Specific description F2**

In the first week of high school F made some friends. Unfortunately, not all them were pleasant. She found some students in her class annoying because they were noisy which made it hard for her and others to do their work. F could sometimes hear some of the students talk about her which upset F. F's friends advised her to keep away from them. She had no choice in Geography because she partnered one of them. On Friday she was pleased that her teacher was funny because he helped her to forget about the demands of homework. F was afraid of all this new homework.

**Specific description F3**

F found high school an organised place. In order to be on top of things in a high school it is important for her to be organised. She said she was not an organised person and as a result had fallen behind in her work. F's friends were upset when they learnt that there were no dances on at school. She and her friends were hoping

to get away from the all-girl environment which was affecting them. F found it was difficult to find some rooms in the school even with the use of a map.

#### **Specific description F4**

F attended a number of lessons. Some she found more interesting and less challenging than others. She enjoyed lessons which were practical and where she learnt new concepts. She also enjoyed having the senior students teaching her dance because she could talk to them. There were many teachers in the school. Many of them were really nice and F felt she could get their help without being shouted at. She did not like a subject which was taught by a teacher who was mean. F realised that in Year 7 students remained in the same class for all the subjects as part of the school program to help them in Year 7.

#### **Specific description F5**

F had fun at the camp as she got over her fear of heights and made new friends. She found it easy to make friends as it is a big school and she had the whole year of 143 Year 7 students to choose from unlike her primary school which was smaller. F enjoyed the discos because of the video clips and getting to dance with boys.

#### **Specific description F6**

F found her friendship group changing after being in high school. She has made new friends with girls from other primary schools. She found it easy to make friends because she went around and introduced herself to others. F liked to make new friends. After a while, F found it was not difficult to find the rooms in the school. F found most of the assignments were given in the first two months of school and there was homework but it was not too much. Being the youngest in the school meant that F had to learn her place and work out who the good role models were. She also felt her friends were there to support her in this new environment. High school was not as bad as F had expected; in fact it was better. She only came across one mean person and she and her friends ignored her. F liked the school uniform.

**Specific Description for Participant 7 - G****Specific description G1**

During the first week of school, G felt nervous when she had to find her own way around the school locating classrooms. She was also worried about Maths but once she saw her friends she felt better. There was a school assembly that day and the presence of Years 8, 9 and 10 scared G. It was scary for G because she now suddenly found the whole school present when there were only the seniors the previous day. G found that the homework load was too heavy.

**Specific description G2**

G found that she had problems going back to school after the weekend. Tuesday was not a problem because she met her friends at the station and had great fun. G was sick and was away from school for a day. The next day she once again was nervous to go to school. Once she was there she found that she was not organised but as the day progressed she felt much better. G met her friend Y at the station and confided to Y that she felt nervous about being at school and Y hugged her which made G feel a lot better. When G and her friend arrived at school, G felt happy. That day was a good day.

**Specific description G3**

G has found it easy to make new friends in high school. She decided to make new friends as she was separated from her other friends. She liked being given a special area for breaks by the school exclusively for the use of Year 7 students where no other students from other year levels would be there. G found the stairs in the school so tiring that she preferred to stay in one room all day instead of moving around. G liked having many subjects because she did not have any particular subject for more than 64 minutes. She found some subjects were more challenging than others. There were more teachers in high school than in primary school. There was a lot of homework given too although the homework was not too difficult. G approached the task of homework by ensuring that she completed the homework first for teachers who would be annoyed if she did not complete it.

**Specific Description for Participant 8 – H****Specific description H1**

H was scared and felt shy on her first day of high school. She felt better after she saw her old friends. She met some new people and they were pleasant to her. H felt great to be in high school because she found it very different from primary school. H realised there were many teachers at high school compared to primary school.

**Specific description H2**

The high school was noisier today because more students started school today. H was pleased that she made new friends. She found the teachers to be really pleasant to all of the students. H did not enjoy the Maths class. She got lost and could not find the right rooms because there were many rooms in the school. All in all, H enjoyed being at high school.

**Specific description H3**

H was pleased that she was getting to know the school better and her way around. H found the school to be good because people were nice to her and there were no problems she faced. H was happy to be at high school and enjoyed the experience very much.

**Specific description H4**

H liked high school except for Maths. She was praised by her History teacher and that made her morning really good. H missed the coeducational environment of her primary school although she was making new friends everyday.

**Specific description H5**

In high school H realised that you did not stay in the same room or with the same teacher all day. H had to move with the bell and go to another room for the next lesson which was taken by a different teacher. Moving around from class to class tired H at times. There were many teachers in a high school and there was also a lot of homework given by the teachers. The work itself was not difficult but there was too much of it. H found it difficult to complete her homework on time. H liked high school.

**Specific Description for Participant 9 - I****Specific description I1**

'I's first day at high school was different from what she had expected and had fun. 'I's mum dropped her off at school and she was so excited. When 'I' arrived at school she was met by Peer Support leaders who were helpful. They made her feel welcome. 'I' then met her Principal who welcomed them and he seemed friendly. A few teachers showed the students to their classes since they did not know their way around. 'I' got lost when she needed to go to the toilet. Another Year 7 girl with whom she made friends showed her the way. 'I' met a few of her teachers and found them to be really nice and she was looking forward to meeting the rest of her teachers. She found the work easy but expected it to get harder as time went by. She found it different from primary school because she now had to carry her heavy bag to all her different classes. 'I' was confused because there were many books but she was confident that she would get used to it. 'I' was pleased with all her classmates because she made many new friends. She expected it to be hard in a new school and was pleasantly surprised at the number of friends she had made. High school was great and she looked forward to the next day.

**Specific description I2**

'I' made many friends at high school. When she arrived late at school she did not know where to go and approached some seniors. She was pleased that the seniors were really nice and helpful. 'I' got into trouble for talking loudly in the corridors, however, everyone thought the teacher was unreasonable. 'I' met a girl from her primary school who introduced 'I' to her friend, X. 'I' was not comfortable spending time with X because she felt that it was taking her away from her old friends. 'I' was looking forward to her new subjects at high school. She was glad to be back at school to make more friends. 'I' looked forward to returning the next day.

**Specific description I3**

'I' had fun in her Physical Education lessons and got to know her peers through the games she played. She also got to know her teachers better. She felt she had been at the school for a long time as she has many friends and is familiar with the school.

**Specific description I4**

'I' was bullied when she was waiting in the canteen queue. Another girl approached and began bullying her. 'I' was really scared and felt like crying. She searched for her teacher to talk to her about the incident. When she could not find her, 'I' confided her story to a friend and felt much better.

**Specific description I5**

'I' got lost around the demountables so she approached the seniors to direct her to her class. They were understanding and helpful and showed her the way. 'I' felt embarrassed because she felt like a baby not working her way around the school. When 'I' arrived at her class, the teacher did not believe her lateness was due to getting lost and warned her not to disrupt the lesson again otherwise she would be in big trouble. 'I' felt embarrassed for the rest of the lesson.

**Specific description I6**

'I' and her friend had a problem understanding a concept in Maths so they waited until the class was over before approaching the teacher because they were embarrassed to put their hands up in front of their class. After class the teacher explained the concept but they still had difficulty so he suggested they get a tutor.

**Specific description I7**

'I' had a great time at camp. However there was an incident at camp that upset and affected her. One of 'I''s friend's phone was stolen and the teacher said another student had placed it into one of the other students' bags. 'I' was relieved when she got home and found the phone was not in her bag. She was upset when others were saying to her that another friend had stolen it. She felt confused and did not know whether to believe the accusation or not. Either way 'I' felt she would be hurting someone.

**Specific description I8**

'I' found high school to be very different and fun. It was better than her expectation. There were many subjects and teachers. She loved having many subjects and found the teachers were willing to help her with her work, making it easier to understand.

There was more homework because of the number of subjects. 'I' was pleased that she made friends easily and when a girl teased her the problem was resolved to her satisfaction when the offender apologised. 'I' found some aspects of high school scary because she no longer had a position of prominence in the school. She was the 'baby' in the school unlike last year when she felt like an adult in primary school.

### **Specific Description for Participant 10 – J**

#### **Specific description J1**

J wondered how to describe her experience. She expected to get some textbooks and be sent off to classes according to the timetable. Her experience of the first day was it was a mess. She wished things had been done in a better and more systematic manner. She was displeased with the timetable since it was really hard to comprehend and wished someone would print a more user friendly timetable. Although there was a space in the diary to rewrite the timetable she wanted to understand it before copying it out. The space in the diary defeated the purpose for which it was designed. After a while, J was proud that she was learning her way around. She felt weird to be at high school but she was getting used to it. She was also getting used to catching the train.

#### **Specific description J2**

J's teachers would fetch their classes from the Year 7 Quadrangle for the rest of the week. However, she was displeased that the teachers who were to take her to her classes were no longer doing that after a few days and she had to find her way just before the lesson. She found that an experience in itself. She asked three different people for directions and was given three different ways to get where she wanted to go. Although she eventually got to class she felt the school should improve its map and reduce the confusion.

#### **Specific description J3**

J felt there was room for improvements to the layout and design of the school. The school should be on one level and if it had to be on two levels there should be ramps instead of stairs everywhere. Besides the numbering of the rooms should be

improved to include all rooms, J realised that there was limited space in the school. She thought that perhaps in the future the school might change these things.

#### **Specific description J4**

J found the idea of a girls' school celebrating Valentine's Day abnormal. There was not enough information about it. She was told she could buy a rose and send it someone special. She was not sure if she could send it to another school where there were boys. J did not like any of the boys she knew at the nearby boy's school to send flowers. The whole concept of Valentine's Day was weird and confusing.

#### **Specific description J5**

J was very unhappy with the number of stairs in the school and wished there were better alternatives like ramps and lifts. She thought other students felt the same way as her. She could not understand why lockers for Year 7s were on the second floor and not near the Year 7 area. J suggested better locations for these lockers.

#### **Specific description J6**

J found the school to be a maze. It was a challenge moving around the school and finding classrooms. J found another challenge was to complete all the assignments, assessments and homework given. There was too much work given out. It was difficult for her to remember all of it although she knew the purpose of the diary was to help her become more organised. The diary did not always work as sometimes she ran out of the class forgetting to record it. She appreciated the importance of being organised now and for later in life but found there was too much work. The due dates for work often overlapped and J wished the workload was better spread out over the term.

#### **Specific description J7**

J found the books heavy to carry around in her bag, especially the Maths book. She suggested that the school follow a local school's practice and issue disks instead of textbooks. In this way her bag would be lighter and it would also reduce the problem of back pain which was the reason the local school issued students with disks. Students without computers could be given photocopies of the work required.

**Specific description J8**

Although J usually enjoyed art, she was very disappointed with the way Visual Arts was being taught in high school. She felt there could be improvements made in this area and she could be taught interesting ways to learn about texture and colour. J decided she would not choose Art as an elective if it continued to be taught in a boring way.

**Specific description J9**

J faced a few challenges in high school some of which she overcame while others remained. She found the timetable user friendly when she colour coded it. She enjoyed most subjects. She realised that by being organised and doing a little bit of homework from each subject she could cope better with the load. She liked having many teachers who were subject specialists. However, the problem of the numerous stairs remained an issue with her. She would rather have the teachers come to her than move around the school. She had to get up earlier to get to high school. She was pleased that she made friends quickly, although she did not believe it when she was told that it was easy to make friends.

**Specific Description for Participant 11 – K****Specific description K1**

K described high school as a great and challenging place where she could achieve the HSC. She found it easy to make friends here. High school is a place where everyone wants to succeed – it is like a race.

**Specific description K2**

K was pleased about making a new friend. She was shocked at the behaviour of another student, most likely a Year 9 student who bumped into K's friend and said bad things to her. This incident shocked K as nothing like that had ever happened before when she was in primary school.

**Specific description K3**

K forgot her sport uniform and got into trouble for that. Her teacher forgave her because she worked really hard throughout the lesson. K had fun playing handball with her friend during lunch.

**Specific description K4**

Although it was a fine day at the swimming carnival, K was bored because she only watched and did not participate. She had volunteered to help at the carnival and was waiting for the announcement. Unfortunately, she could not hear the announcement because it was too soft so she did not participate in any manner.

**Specific description K5**

K had one of her worst days when she had a small fight with her classmate. At lunch K was teased by Z and felt quite annoyed with her. Later Z's friend, W, approached K and warned her to stop teasing Z. W pushed K and asked her why was she teasing Z. K was embarrassed because others were listening and laughing. Later another one of Z's friends warned K to keep quiet about the incident otherwise K would be beaten up by all of the girls' friends.

**Specific description K6**

K enjoyed learning new things in her subjects. She had fun playing golf during Physical Development and winning the golf championship. She received a certificate for being the winner. K attended a number of classes and had fun. She was pleased for making a friend in Year 7 who she believed was great.

**Specific description K7**

K did not think high school was as scary as she imagined. She enjoyed making new friends, studying new subjects and having many teachers. She had problems locating class rooms but now she has overcome that. There were many assignments and subjects. She found the assignments and subjects challenging especially the ones she did not study before in primary school. K found Science and Languages very difficult. In primary school K was respected for being the oldest in the school, now being the youngest in the school affected her slightly. She only made friends with others in her Year. K found the teachers were good and some were kind. She enjoyed having many teachers because she did not have to spend all day with one bad teacher. K did not enjoy moving from class to class for her lessons. Although K found it easy to make friends and has made new friends she found her old friends from primary school were no longer friends with her.

**Specific Description for Participant 12 – L****Specific description L1**

L was very excited and at the same time nervous about her first day at school. She started the day with Peer Support; although it was only for a short while, she had an interesting time there. Students were then split into classes which disappointed L because it happened too soon and she was confident that she would make friends soon. Then L went to her lessons. Her Design and Technology teacher was really nice and made L feel comfortable and happy. Her geography teacher was quite nice but the work was not fun. The subject she enjoyed the least was English even though her teacher was extremely nice and friendly and helped her with the worksheets. His helpfulness made her feel a lot more comfortable.

**Specific description L2**

L arrived at school early and because there were not many girls there she felt lonely. Once she saw her friends she felt better. L attended a number of lessons and an assembly. She enjoyed Design and Technology because she liked her teacher. In this class, her teacher told her about the topics they would cover and they sounded interesting to L. In class, she wrote down the class rules. She was disappointed that she missed out on Languages because in its place all students attended the first whole school assembly. L found this uninteresting. She enjoyed her work in science where L listed the differences and similarities between labs and other classrooms. She learnt the names of the girls in her class in Music through some games. L had fun in Music.

**Specific description L3**

L attended a number of lessons today. She started the day with a Languages lesson. In class she learnt that she would be doing French for the first six months followed by German. In her first lesson in French, L learnt some basic words which she really enjoyed doing. L had her first Physical Education lesson in class. She and her classmates played a few games and she had fun because her team won a few times even if they had lost most of the time. In English L's teacher asked the class to write down the characteristics one would look for in a friend. In Visual Arts she had a lot of fun drawing without looking at the paper and also not taking the pen off the page. She found her friends' drawings quite bizarre. The day ended with a Music lesson

where the teacher asked the class to brainstorm music words and describe the meaning of music. L had a fun day at school.

#### **Specific description L4**

L attended a talk given by a guest speaker after roll call. Dr. Karl K, the guest speaker, spoke about science and his inventions. L found only part of the talk interesting and was pleased that she missed out on two lessons – English and Maths because of the talk. L did not find her geography lesson interesting because of the activity that she was asked to complete. Once again L found Visual Arts very interesting because she bought a Visual Arts Diary and pasted her previous work into it and worked on a perspective drawing. In Physical Development, Health and Physical Education L's teacher played Bingo with the class and she had to draw a picture with her eyes closed. L did a number of other things as well during the day but did not record them.

#### **Specific description L5**

L started the day with a Physical Development, Health and Physical Education lesson in which she completed some worksheets where she had to write a poem and about herself. L learnt to use a Bunsen burner and about the colour of flames in Science. She realised she was bored in this lesson. L paid for the Powerhouse Museum excursion. In Design and Technology L studied about plastics which she did not find to be an interesting lesson. She did not mind her geography lesson because she learnt about flora, fauna and their environments. L had a grammar lesson in English which she did not enjoy. Overall L thought the day was not a good one because the lessons were not very interesting.

#### **Specific description L6**

L started the day with peer support where she did some writing on different scenarios. During peer support she discussed survival skills and the eight things she would keep with her if she were stuck in the middle of nowhere. She liked peer support. L learnt some basic phrases in French which she enjoyed because the work was not difficult. L found Music to be the best lesson because she learnt about

rhythms and to write songs. L was excited about representing the school in water polo that night. She finds high school to be the best.

### **Specific description L7**

L was pleased to sign up for the soccer team. She encouraged her friend to join as well so that she would not be alone at soccer. She found it boring learning French using flashcards. However she had plenty of fun in Physical Education and Music. In Physical Education L had to make up a gymnastics routine task with her group within the given time. Although she found the task very challenging because of the limited time given, she still had a lot of fun. In English she had to complete a comprehension exercise. L felt great drawing the Year 7 playground area in Visual Arts. While in Music, L had fun making up rhythms using small instruments.

### **Specific description L8**

L had fun at the swimming carnival. She actively participated in seven events. She found the Year 12 race hilarious to watch because the Year 12 students were swimming a lap on inflatable toys. L also enjoyed watching the teachers joining in the Year 12's activities. L thoroughly enjoyed herself at the swimming carnival.

### **Specific description L9**

L attended a number of lessons and found some more interesting than others. She enjoyed English where she made a 'find-a-word' from her spelling list. Her teacher then asked the class to swap their find a word with the person sitting next to them and find the answers. In Maths L completed an exercise which she found to be easy. However, there were too many exercises to do and L did not find it very interesting. In Geography L made a puzzle. L had a good time in Visual Arts because she painted one of her previous artworks. Her best lesson for the day was Physical Development, Health and Physical Education where she drew pictures of her favourite sport and popular sports.

### **Specific description L10**

L had French as her first lesson for the day. She learnt French using flashcards and also played a game of Lotto which she quite enjoyed. Music was fun too for L because she was playing a game by using harder rhythms. In Science L learnt about

famous scientists. L had a great time in Visual Arts because she had a practical lesson on textures. The Maths lesson was quite easy for L although not enjoyable.

### **Specific description L11**

L participated in a state-wide Literacy Test for Year 7s and Year 8s. There were three sections to the test and she found them quite easy overall. The first section involved two writing tasks; while the second section was a comprehension activity followed by the third and last section where L had to do a spelling test. After the test L had only one lesson for the day. L had a lot of fun in Music because she worked in a group of four to make up a rap song and note voices. L had a very good day at school.

### **Specific description L12**

L had a great day at the Powerhouse Museum. She left school in the morning and had recess when she arrived at the Museum. At the museum, L put her bags through a chute before entering it. She completed some worksheets on the different display areas in the museum. She enjoyed the Kids' toys display the most and had fun there. L and the others left the museum at lunch time and had some lunch before leaving to take the transport back to school. L enjoyed lunch and had a very good day at the Museum.

### **Specific description L13**

L had an assessment in Physical Education. She had to perform a gymnastic routine with her group. In Design and Technology L did weaving with paper. Her teacher taught her to thread cotton into a sewing machine which L really enjoyed learning. L found the exercises in Maths easy but it was boring for her. In English L completed the work she started at home for homework. She also had a test where she had to write the beginning part of a story about a boy and his pet. She found that it was not a bad lesson. L finished the day with a practical lesson in Geography doing fieldwork.

**Specific description L14**

L was absent from school for the first time because she was getting braces. She chose the colours of her braces to be the same as her favourite Australian Football League team. L went shopping with her Mum for her friend's birthday present after getting her braces. Her friend's birthday was in a couple of day's time. L had a sore mouth from the braces.

**Specific description L15**

L had Language at the beginning of the day. L is bored with French because she had to do her work using flashcards. In Music L composed a rap song in a group and presented this to the class. Her group received the top mark and their song was about junk food. L had a lot of fun in Music. L enjoyed her practical Science lesson where she had the opportunity to weigh the apparatus in the laboratory. Visual Arts was quite good for L because she completed her colour wheel and learnt a new technique of drawing lines using colours. L enjoyed her Maths lesson today because she learnt to draw a line graph from a table.

**Specific description L16**

L had band practice in the morning before school started. She had been playing the flute for four years and has now started to play the saxophone. Since there were already 15 flute players in the school band, L decided to play the saxophone for the band. L learnt to sew a hem and two pieces of cloth together in Design and Technology. L thinks she is going to enjoy sewing because she loves making things and she can also show others her handiwork. L learnt in Languages to count to 10. L's class was told not to leave their bags outside the Science Laboratories because of a spate of thefts around the school. L found this concerning because she had never experienced any such incidents in the past. L decided to join the Year 7 Dance Club because she did not want to be alone at lunch. Her friends were members of the Dance Club and spent lunch there and they also kept persuading her to join it. L decided to give in to her friends and join the Club.

**Specific description L17**

L had her last Peer Support session today and the leaders were to bring food for the party but they forgot. L's group had to join another group without food while the

leaders went to the shop to get the food. In Science L had a great lesson because she went to the garden and planted seeds to grow some vegetables and flowers. L borrowed a book from the Library for her English lesson because the class has to start reading that book. L admitted that she hates reading although she had nothing against the book. L finds high school different and a lot better than primary school.

### **Specific description L18**

In Physical Education L practised for the cross country race. L did not consider the practice as cross country because her class was asked to run around the oval. L was pleasantly surprised that she was placed in the top category for the timing. She was placed in the gold category. L started making her sewing bag in Design and Technology. She had the choice of making a pull-string bag or a button-up bag. She chose to make a button-up bag. She was also very pleased with making a bag in Design and Technology because L loved making things. L did group work in Maths and completed some exercises. L was pleased that she did not get any homework in Maths. L spent lunch at the Dance Club and was glad that she had joined it because she enjoyed working out with the others about the performance on stage. At the end of the day L had a concert with the other Year 7's. L was not feeling too well so she did not enjoy the concert as much as she should have.

### **Specific description L19**

L engaged in more cross country training in Physical Education and ran around the school twice. She was placed ninth in her class. She was pleased with her English lesson because she did not have to do any work because her teacher read the book to them. L enjoyed reading the temperature of a number of things using a thermometer in Science.

### **Specific description L20**

L found high school great and also confusing and different. She found the subjects interesting, different and challenging. L found homework annoying because there was a lot of it. It was not that it was harder but that there was too much of it. L noticed that compared to the beginning of the year, the amount of homework has increased. L found it difficult to get around the school at first because it was confusing. She used to get lost quite a lot and be late for classes in the first few

weeks. She felt helpless in a new environment when she had to call upon others to show her the way. After a couple of months, she now knows her way around the school better. There are too many stairs in the school and she finds it confusing to move from class to class. In primary school L had one teacher all day. Here in high school L had many teachers. She liked having many teachers because it meant that L did not have one teacher for more than 64 minutes and some were stricter than others. L found there are many different subjects in high school and she gets to meet more teachers. L finds she could make more friends in high school because there are more students in a high school. L felt helpless that other students in high school referred to her as cute when she used to be the school captain last year.

### **Specific Description for Participant 13 – M**

#### **Specific description M1**

M attended the first day of high school and found a number of things to be confusing. There were many classes and many teachers. She got lost (even though she had a map in her diary to direct her), had difficulty locating the rooms in the school and had problems understanding the bell-times. On the first day the routine was different because M and other Year 7s did not follow their timetable which M found to be a little confusing. M found high school to be very different from primary school because she now had a timetable. M attended the Peer Support group where the leaders discussed matters with them. M then attended the roll call group before going to class for her second period of the day. After recess, M had a lesson followed by lunch and the last period for the day. At the end of the day the Peer Support leaders showed M and other Year 7s the way to the train station, helped them to take the correct train and also helped them on the train. M found the first day of high school interesting and she is looking forward to the rest of the year.

#### **Specific description M2**

M figured out the location of the classes so the day was less confusing. M's first class was French and M thought that French will be an interesting subject. She learned that she would be studying German for the last six months of the year. M likes to learn different languages. M preferred high school to primary school because there are many teachers and if she found one she did not like there was bound to be many others she did like.

**Specific description M3**

M attended a number of lessons and found them very interesting. In her first Physical Education lesson, M learnt gymnastics which was tiring and the warm-ups were quite challenging. M had fun in Languages because she had the opportunity to learn some French words. In primary school she did not learn Languages. M enjoyed the Physical Development subject and found it interesting to learn about her body. M still got lost getting around the school but concluded that soon she will overcome this problem.

**Specific description M4**

M enjoyed her different lessons in high school. M enjoyed Physical Education because they participated in gymnastics, an area which she had not experienced in primary school. M joined the Dance Club for Year 7s because she loved dancing. Visual Arts was fun for M because it was more challenging than the Art she learnt in primary school. However, M found Tuesdays, when the school is dismissed 45 minutes earlier, a problem. On Tuesdays she had to run to catch the bus whereas in primary school she never had this problem because timing of school bell coincided better with the buses.

**Specific description M5**

M did not have the first two lessons for the day because there was a guest speaker. She assembled in the Hall after roll call to hear the speaker who has appeared on television before. M found the speaker really funny and informative. He spoke about science, computers, diabetes and AIDS. M was glad that the speaker addressed the students because she learnt many interesting things. For example he talked about diabetes and M's friend has diabetes. The speaker claimed that within the next 20 years there should be a cure for AIDS and diabetes.

**Specific description M6**

M found high school had a routine with five lessons each day. There were many differences between primary and high school according to M. There was no timetable to follow in primary school and M never knew what subjects would be taught for the day. In high school there were many students moving around the

school at the one time. M found that the Year 7s were pushed around a lot in the hallways because they were the youngest and the hallways were so hot. In primary school there were no hallways just verandas so no one was jostled around.

#### **Specific description M7**

M attended a special assembly where Year 12s from 2004 addressed the students. These ex-students spoke about the stress and difficulty facing current year 12 students who will sit their HSC exam later in the year. M realised the HSC Exam sounded like a difficult exam. M thought the students gave great tips to this year's Year 12 students. The principal commended the students for their efforts by issuing them with a certificate.

#### **Specific description M8**

M had an exciting day because she studied Science. She was doing experiments with matches, Bunsen burners and thermometers. M had fun taking the temperature using a thermometer every minute for ten minutes until she burnt her finger on the tripod. M was in a lot of pain so she ran cold water over her finger.

#### **Specific description M9**

M had fun at the swimming carnival. She enjoyed watching students dive into the pool in ridiculous costumes. No-one had ever done that in her primary school. The swimming was a great experience for M because her house won the carnival. It was also more competitive than her primary school's swimming carnival.

#### **Specific description M10**

School was a routine to M. She had Peer Support which was fun but sometimes she found it uninteresting. In Peer Support M learnt about bullying and played games. M liked her two leaders because they were funny and made Peer Support interesting although the work in the booklet was rather uninteresting. The Peer Support leaders insisted that M completed the worksheets before playing games.

**Specific description M11**

M attended a disco at the local boys' school. She was pleased that everyone was singing, dancing and having a great time and no-one being rough on the dance floor. She thought the disco was great and enjoyed it.

**Specific description M12**

M was worried about the state-wide Literacy test for Year 7s and Year 8s. Her teachers gave her pointers and allayed her fears. M had fun in Music because she did group work and composed a jingle and beat to perform in the next lesson.

**Specific description M13**

M had her English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) test today which lasted for three periods. She had no difficulties doing the ELLA test, it was just like any other test for M. She had two writing tasks and a comprehension task to complete for this test. During the test M had a couple of breaks and she had a different teacher after each section of the test. She could not believe how quiet the room was. Her class is usually very noisy. M only had one period after the test because on Tuesdays the school is dismissed 45 minutes earlier.

**Specific description M14**

Today was activities day. Activities day was not interesting for M because the Year 7s went to the Powerhouse Museum in the city for Design and Technology. M had visited the museum twice before and seen the displays as well. The best part of the day for M was when her group was in the Toys Section. She had fun playing with all the toys.

**Specific description M15**

M was given her first assignment in Physical Education. She had to perform a gymnastics routine with all the skills that she had learnt and put this routine to music. Her group chose the music which in her opinion was hard because it was a very fast moving piece making it challenging to move to. In Health she watched a video about changes to her body as she got older. She enjoyed the movie because it was presented as a cartoon.

**Specific description M16**

M had fun in both her practical lessons, Visual Arts and Music. In Visual Arts she enjoyed painting on canvas. In Music M worked really hard to compose a song with a beat about her school. She believed that her routine was really good because of the funny rhyming words.

**Specific description M17**

M had fun in Design and Technology where she was learning more sewing. M learnt to sew a number of fancy stitches like zigzag. She also learnt to sew a corner and box pleats. M was asked to play rugby for the school. She was disappointed that she could not be in the school rugby team although she was interested because she had netball training and dance class at the same time as rugby training. When M received her Maths test back she was very pleased because she achieved a good result. The test was only a practice test with the real test being two days away. Her teacher advised the class to re-do the test to further improve on those results.

**Specific description M18**

M had cross country training. She ran round the school twice. She found it hard and tiring but did her best. Two days' later she participated in another cross country event. This time M improved her time. She raced against the Year 8s and they were better than her although overall most of the Year 7s beat the Year 8s. Competing in this event made her realise how unfit she was and that she needs to try harder next time. M's Physical Education lesson was cancelled because her class was asked to pack up the gymnastics equipment. M learnt to fold a trampoline.

**Specific description M19**

M and all the other Year 7s were excited because they were going to the Year 7 Camp the next day. The teacher talked to them and gave them the necessary information about the camp. M found herself with too much homework at the moment.

**Specific description M20**

M found the last week of school really difficult because she was given plenty of homework to do over the holidays. Yet, there was less class work in the last week

and the classes were more relaxed. Even in Physical Education M was surprised that there was no training for the cross country. In most of her lessons the teachers did revision except in Music where the work was still challenging. M found everyone in the playground in a relaxed mood. She decided it must be due to the fact that it was the last week of school and students were happy. M realised now that she is in high school she is forced to get up earlier to complete her homework. There is a lot of homework for M making it hard for her to participate in her after school activities. M did not find the homework difficult. M enjoyed all the new and challenging subjects she is learning now in high school. She liked having many teachers because she can get help from the good teachers even if some are bad. She found there are too many stairs and corridors in the school. The school is also much bigger with more teachers and students. M was pleased she can make more friends because there are more new people.

### **Specific Description for Participant 14 – N**

#### **Specific description N1**

The first day of high school was interesting for N. When she arrived at the school she was scared because she did not know what was going to happen. She was much happier when she found a friend. She understood what to do when she was in the Hall. She was dismissed from the Hall and met her Peer Support leaders. She made a friend when she did not know anyone and they stayed with each other until they received their timetable. Her new friend was in another class with N's other friend. N attended roll call after receiving her timetable which she found uninteresting. During recess N was pleased to be with her friends. When N attended English she had fun because she met the other girls in her class. She received her first homework on the first day of school itself in Human Society and Its Environment and also completed some work in class. She found that lunch went on for a very long time. N had a 'Learning to Learn' lesson in the last period before she assembled in the Year 7 Quad with other Year 7s. They were dismissed from there with instructions on where to go. The school made sure that the N and the other Year 7s knew where to go and how to get home safely.

**Specific description N2**

The second day of high school was better because N managed to find one of her rooms. N was two minutes late but she did not get into trouble. N made new friends and had a lot of fun with her new friends which made school more enjoyable than the previous day.

**Specific description N3**

N had fun finding all her classes today. She resented being referred to as a little Year 7 by other students because she feels like a kid. N had the best classes today because she had a lot of fun with her new friends.

**Specific description N4**

The day was similar to other days. N decided to call her friends later that day and got their telephone numbers. N attended a number of lessons which she found alright. N was given a lot of homework in English. N enjoyed her Languages lesson because she was learning to pronounce various words which were difficult. She had fun in Maths playing a game. N found Design and Technology uninteresting because she wanted to start her lesson but she had to learn the rules before she could start do that. N understands it is important to learn the rules. N had a good day at school.

**Specific description N5**

N found her Languages lesson going on forever. She was pleased to be out of the room to enjoy recess. N's teacher was away so she had a substitute teacher. She was annoyed by the substitute teacher's voice because it drove her crazy. The day got worse when N realised she had two lessons in History in the one day. She was relieved that English was in between the two periods. She enjoyed the first History lesson and English but she was bored in the second History lesson because it seemed to go on for too long.

**Specific description N6**

N was woken up quite early which annoyed her. The first class of the day was History which was boring. N had recess and after that her day improved when she had a good lesson in Visual Arts followed by Music where she had the most fun that

day. N finished the day with Maths which she found uninteresting. She was pleased that the day had ended.

#### **Specific description N7**

N was bored in Maths and Design and Technology. N wanted to skip Maths but decided against it. She attended and it was boring. Design and Technology was boring also because N wanted to participate in practical work and make something but this did not eventuate. N's favourite lesson was PE and she wished she could have more lessons of it. During recess N met a girl whom she found funny and hyperactive but cool. Lunch, however, was too long and she was bored as a result. She had an internet lesson in Science in the Computer Room.

#### **Specific description N8**

N attended a special assembly and wished she did not have to be there. As it turned out, it was uninteresting. The only good thing about the assembly was N missed out on Maths. During recess N could not find any of her friends until she realised they were in the canteen. English and Science were fun but she had a lot of homework to do in English. In Science N worked in the garden and had fun weeding. N found lunch long and boring and Design and Technology was very boring for N.

#### **Specific description N9**

N enjoyed English because she managed to complete all of her homework. However she was bored with her other lessons because she was tired and some lessons were uninteresting. Health was uninteresting towards the end only. N found her recess stretching forever although lunch was good because N and her friends were happy together. N enjoyed playing a game called 'Circus' in Maths Lab which was her second favourite subject.

#### **Specific description N10**

N had a great day at the swimming carnival. She missed out on her usual lessons because of the swimming carnival. She was there early, before roll call, to participate in an event and came out in the middle position. She almost missed roll call because she had to rush after her event. She was pleased when she won the heat and later she participated in a number of events. She was proud of her achievements

in three events (100m freestyle, 50 m backstroke and 50 m butterfly) where she took first place. She did not know her position in the breaststroke event because it was closely fought race and was confused. N also represented her house in the freestyle final and the relay. N had a fun day at the swimming carnival.

### **Specific description N11**

N was tired because the previous day, which was the swimming carnival, was exhausting. N attended a number of lessons which she enjoyed. She started off by enjoying Human Society in Its Environment but got bored towards the end of the lesson. N enjoyed Visual Arts because it is her favourite subject and it was fun. She wrote a song in Music and was proud of her achievement when her song was chosen as the second best. N's teacher gave her a lot of homework in Maths and N's friends were worried about too much homework. N found the day to be the longest of her life.

### **Specific description N12**

N found her Maths lesson to be uninteresting. She really enjoyed Physical Education. She learned to draw perfect diagrams in Science. Her favourite subject for the day was 'lunch'. She bought coke and nachos. N had a good time in Design and Technology where she took down notes and had a discussion. She ended the day with a boring Maths lesson.

### **Specific description N13**

N went to the Powerhouse Museum today and had a great time. She missed out on her normal lessons for the day. She found the bus ride long but did not mind it because it gave her the opportunity to talk to all her friends. When she arrived at the museum she had recess and realised the other students had arrived as well. She first went to the Toys' Display. She loved that section because she could play with all the toys. The students had a break before continuing to the next section, the Innovations and Inventions Area. After that, they had lunch and then N and the others went back by bus. N enjoyed the day because she had fun at the museum.

**Specific description N14**

N had a number of fun and interesting lessons including English and Health. In Health she played a number of games. In Peer Support, two groups of students combined so that they had the opportunity to meet more students. N did not enjoy her Design and Technology lesson. The day ended with N having a Maths Lab lesson which N thoroughly enjoyed.

**Specific description N15**

N liked Tuesdays because the school was dismissed early for staff meetings. N decided to sit next to some talkative girls in History so she would not get bored with the lesson. N found a girl who did not like her and she did not know the reason for that. N enjoyed her two breaks that day. She attended a special assembly and went to Peer Support. N was so bored in Maths that she could not even think properly.

**Specific description N16**

N was bored with History after the previous day's lesson but she managed to survive it. Maths was better than she expected and found it to be good. During recess, N could not differentiate between the twins in her Year and she was confused. She could not find her lolly. In Science N thought it was cool to be able to measure the mass of air. In Design and Technology, her teacher informed the class that they would be using a sewing machine in the next lesson. N loved the A Factor, a talent competition, and looked forward to it all day. In health N and her classmates did not enjoy viewing a video on puberty which she finds 'gross'.

**Specific description N17**

N had Maths which had been bugging her all week. She did not think she could face another lesson because it drives her crazy. As it turned out, she was pleasantly surprised at how easy the work was this time and she quite enjoyed the class. N was happy to participate in Physical Education after Maths because it is her favourite subject. In Physical Education she had her final practice before the assessment. N is confident she will do well in this assessment. At recess she found it strange that she could only find one of her friends. She learned about Australian scientists in Science and then went to Design and Technology where she used a sewing machine which

she really enjoyed. N went to watch 'A Factor', liked it and was pleased with the results because she liked the winner.

### **Specific description N18**

N paid \$20 for an excursion to the IMAX Theatre and Museum which is in four days time. M's first class was History which she does not like. After recess N raced her friend to her Design and Technology class. She was pleased that she got there first. She found it difficult to thread the sewing machine. N had fun in English. Lunch was her favourite 'subject' for the day followed by Maths which she usually she finds to be stupid. N finds her Maths lessons meaningless.

### **Specific description N19**

N missed a day of school because she felt sick when she woke up. Although she felt lazy she knew she was not lazy, just sick.

### **Specific description N20**

N was all excited about the Year 7 camp and could not wait to get there. She found the bus ride really boring. Once she arrived, she hoped the day might improve since there was a major mix up with the cabins. As soon as N found her room everything was better and she had fun. N found the treasure hunt was not interesting. She enjoyed lunch and found the food to be delicious. She had fun at Surf Education and enjoyed swimming at the beach. At night she participated in the Talent Quest. She was in a skit where she was the hands putting make up on other people. She enjoyed being the hands of other people. This was the first time she had participated in a Talent Quest in front of some people she did not know. N and the others were tired so they all went to bed early that night. She found herself for the first time sharing a room with new friends. N and her friends got up early the next morning for breakfast and they were not tired unlike others. N went on the giant swing thinking it was going to be scary. She was pleasantly surprised that she had fun and she enjoyed the experience. N loved the low ropes course as well. N did not mind the lunch although she did not know what she was eating. She guessed it to be chicken. She attended a History workshop after lunch. She had mixed feelings about the workshop because it was interesting, weird and boring at the same time. When they

had free time N and her friends hosted a VIP Party. She attended the disco that night and later spent the night telling spooky stories to her cabin mates.

### **Specific description N21**

N had a boring History lesson. She had a problem tying her shoe laces and felt silly until she got it right. In Visual Art N worked on improving her painting and she was pleased with the results. She enjoyed Music because she played the xylophone. She was bored with Maths which was at the end of the day.

### **Specific description N22**

N described high school as a scary but also fun place. N enjoyed making new friends, studying new subjects and also having many subjects and teachers. She liked many of the teachers although she could not always remember their names. She got help from the ones she liked. She had problems finding the rooms but within two weeks got used to it. N found the subjects easy and was able to cope. The hardest thing about high school for N was changing to a new school, losing old friends and finding her way around. N found Year 7 teachers more sympathetic towards the needs of their students than primary school teachers. Other students towered around N, making her feel really small and also she did not feel big anymore. N was no longer a leader (like she was in primary school) but did not mind because she was new to the school. N found completing the homework a challenge because there was just too much of it although it was not difficult. She got more homework now than she did in primary school. N had to be more organised with her books and carry the correct ones to class which was another challenge she has learned to overcome. N enjoyed the Year 7 Camp because she overcame her fear of heights together with her friend and also made new friends. N's friends support her and help her with her work and they are important to her.

## **Specific Description for Participant 15 – O**

### **Specific description O1**

O found the first day of high school interesting and fun. O went to the hall with the other students and a number of teachers spoke on the day's proceedings and about high school life. O attended Peer Support group for Peer Support activities. O and others played name games and they were informed about what Year 7 was about.

O got to know her leaders and then proceeded to Roll Call. O had a number of classes that day. In Design and Technology the teacher talked about the topics to be covered in Year 7. During recess, O managed to meet up with her friends. She found her Physical Development teacher to be really nice and the teacher discussed the subject with them, O's Music teacher was fun and she played the name game with the class and talked about musical instruments they would be playing this year. Finally O had English. She decided her English teacher was not her favourite. The class ended earlier today. She left the school pleased that she was in a good school.

### **Specific description O2**

O felt it was not the best day at school but neither was it the worst. Her Maths teacher forgot to collect the class from the Year 7 Quad. This was O's first Maths lesson and she and her classmates did not know where to go. The class went looking for the Maths room. Although they found it they did not think it was the correct room because it was a Computer room and their teacher was not there. The rest of the class decided to stay in the room while O and another girl decided to go back to the Quad hoping the teacher was there. Since the Quad was empty O and her classmate decided to go back to the room where the rest of the class was. When they arrived the teacher was already in the room and O and her friend were late which displeased their teacher. She liked all her lessons except English where she had to copy out the rules for the whole lesson. O was not pleased with this because there were copies of the rules available in the scrap box. In Human Society in Its Environment, O had a teacher who had taught overseas and in many local schools. O was pleased that nothing bad had happened to her so far because she and her friends had not been bullied and nothing scary had happened to her.

### **Specific description O3**

O felt she had been at high school for ages although it was only the second week. She was proud that she and her friends knew the location of all her classes while other Year 7s were still looking at the map to find their rooms. O worked in pairs in History and had to race around the school against her classmates to answer questions her teacher asked. O was pleased she and her partner came second in the race and both of them received a merit certificate. O had fun doing this activity.

**Specific description O4**

O did not have the first two periods of the day because of a guest speaker Dr. Karl K who addressed students on the topic of Science. She was disappointed that she missed out on Physical Education, a subject she liked. O received her bus pass the previous day and started using it. She was pleased she did not have to walk from the station because the bus stopped outside her house. However O found the buses were too crowded.

**Specific description O5**

O's favourite subject was Physical Education. During this class, she was taught to do spins in the air. O and the others in her class got dizzy and kept falling over for some unknown reason. She was taught how to do cartwheels although O and her friends already knew how to do this so they practised instead. Her teachers informed the class about the evaluation performance and what skills they would need to demonstrate. O had a lot of fun in Physical Education.

**Specific description O6**

O received a rose from her friend on Valentine's Day but the rose died by lunchtime due to the heat. Yet O found the Portable classroom freezing in the morning where she had her Language class. O was pleased that she had not been given a lot of homework although she was expecting more as the year went by. She already had one project in English where she is studying friendships. O was glad she was given a month to complete it because it is a big project.

**Specific description O7**

O had a first spelling test. There was a special assembly for last year's Year 12 students which O found uninteresting. She was pleased that she missed out on a couple of lessons. After school, O and her friends decided to visit her primary school since school was dismissed early today and primary school children would not have been dismissed. Her primary school teachers were pleased to see O but O decided not to go near the new teachers' classes as they did not look friendly. O was busy after school with netball training and got home late in the evening. This meant she had less time to do school work.

**Specific description O8**

O sat the state-wide Literacy test. She was pleasantly surprised to find it easy but was bored with it. During the test she had four different teachers. She had to do two sections before recess and the rest after recess. At the end of the day she only had one lesson, Design and Technology. She had no work in this lesson.

**Specific description O9**

O visited the Powerhouse Museum for Activities Day with all the Year 7s and their Design and Technology teachers. O went with her class and teacher. When she arrived she had recess before viewing the displays. She was given a worksheet to complete while she was there. She saw the work of one of last year's Year 12 students displayed at the Museum. The student had designed costumes for a story book. There were three different designs and each in a different colour. O had lunch before returning to school.

**Specific description O10**

O had a note from her Roll Call teacher to go to the Front Office to collect her bus pass. O already had one. O went during recess to explain that she had one. She was told not to worry about it since the Bus Company must have sent one by mistake. The day was uneventful except in Physical Education O's Physical Education routine was going to be assessed so she practised. Her assessment would be in a week's time.

**Specific description O11**

O loved finishing school early on Tuesdays. She was proud of her Physical Education routine as her group was ahead of the others and her teacher found their routine the best. Her group continued to practise because they need to improve on their weak areas.

**Specific description O12**

O was absent from school because she attended a concert the previous night and got home late. The previous day O worked on her Physical Education routine and completed it. O had another note from the bus company giving her a pass because

they were not sure whether she had been issued with one. O hoped she would not receive anymore.

**Specific description O13**

O had fun in Design and Technology making key tags and drilling holes. She had been making tags for a week now. Most of the students made the first letter of their names and so did O. She was pleased with the outcome except when she started drilling a hole the tag snapped and she ended up with a small letter of her name instead of a capital letter. She enjoyed doing this a lot because she had never done anything like that before and it was fun.

**Specific description O14**

O was invited to play in the school rugby team but she had to decline because of her bad knee. She decided to help recruit members to form a team. She and her friend were yelled at rudely by a girl when they went to the Year 9 Quad to recruit players for the team. The girl yelled at them to leave the Year 9 Quad so they left. Later O managed to help recruit enough players to form a team. O felt the Year 9 student's behaviour was a bit rude.

**Specific description O15**

O enjoyed her Visual Arts lesson because she was working on a collage. O was making a collage about her place and space at high school. The class worked outdoors mainly to do the drawings and finally in the Art room. O pasted her drawings together to make a collage. While she was in primary school O did not get the opportunity to do collages so she found this activity pleasing and thought her work looked really good.

**Specific description O16**

O practised for the school cross country and ran 1.6 kilometres. This was done with a partner and students were allowed a break during the run. O and her partner ran well and obtained second position scoring a good time. The next time O ran the cross country she did it on her own, without a partner and without a break. She found it quite easy and came fourth of her class. For the run, she began in the middle of the school oval, past the portables, up the stairs onto X Avenue and turned right

on the road behind the school and down on the oval. O ran this route twice and most of the year 7s beat the year 8s which made O and her peers feel proud.

### **Specific description O17**

Due to the rain, O did not participate in Physical Education class but was required to help the teacher pack up the gymnastics equipment. Everyone had forgotten how to pack the trampolines and even the teacher could not remember how to do this.

Another teacher assisted. O packed up the mats and then played games which were fun. The packing up of equipment was boring.

### **Specific description O18**

O was looking forward to going to camp the next day. She was excited and received more information from her teacher as well as notes about the camp. There were a number of students who would not be attending the camp so O felt sorry for them because they were going to miss out on the fun and the experience of a Year 7 Camp.

### **Specific description O19**

O was all excited about going to camp. The class left school and arrived at the recreation centre. When O arrived there she could not go into her cabin to unpack because there was a mistake with the cabin numbers which the teachers realised after half an hour before they sorted it out. The teachers forgot to inform the students the building number so O and the others did not know where to go. O found the waiting around was rather boring. Once this was resolved, it was smooth sailing for O. O enjoyed and participated in all the activities at camp. O had fun even though she found some of the activities were more challenging than others. She participated in a low ropes course. Everyone in the group had a go and O was surprised that even her teacher participated in the activity. The next activity was abseiling and the instructors made sure everyone participated in some way. O had so much fun abseiling that she even raced her friend and won. Some girls in the group were scared and took a long time while one did not participate but O had a lot of fun. All in all, O had a great time at camp.

### **Specific description O20**

O did not have cross country training because of the wet weather so her teacher decided to have a Physical Development lesson instead. O completed some worksheets and discussed the topic of puberty with the class. O was pleased that she had a female teacher because she was not embarrassed to discuss puberty which she saw as a gross topic. Other classes had male teachers which O thought would be very embarrassing. The teacher rewarded them with a video because the class was well behaved. Unfortunately the video was boring. The next day O had cross country training, this time they had to run when previously the teacher allowed them to walk. The next day the teacher informed them that O and her class had to run the full course of the cross country race. O started in the school oval. Her teacher would allow them to walk the distance first before running it because it was a longer distance. O wished the training took place using a different course since she is bored running the same course. She practised for the cross country during her PE lessons.

### **Specific description O21**

O found PE fun in high school. She loved having many subjects because there was variety and therefore she had fun. O liked having many teachers in high school because she found she could always get help from the nicer teachers even if others were mean. O was pleased that she knows her way round the school unlike her first week when she was lost. O was a house captain in primary school with responsibilities. This year, however, her year level is the youngest in high school and O does not have the same type of leadership responsibilities. O found that there was too much homework given and she found it hard to get through all of the work.

### **Specific Description for Participant 16 - P**

#### **Specific description P1**

P was extremely excited about her first day at high school and all the new experiences awaiting her. She referred to it as an amazing day and the day in the world she was waiting for. When her dad woke her up she realised that she would be having new experiences in terms of uniform, school, transport and people. She got a lift to school and was relieved that she did not have to take the bus and train transport by herself. When she arrived at school with her mother, they walked through the front of the school. When P saw Year 12 students in their area she

reminded herself that she would be sitting there one day. Her mum took her to the Clothing Pool and bought P her sports uniform before going to the Hall. While P was waiting outside the Hall, she met a girl and when her friends arrived she introduced this girl to her friends. After the assembly the Year 7s were divided into 6 groups and sports houses. P then proceeded with her teacher to her first ever high school lesson. P's first lesson was Multimedia which only lasted for a few minutes. She was also introduced to another teacher who would take them in Multimedia for the rest of the year. P had a recess break after the first lesson. She attended a number of other lessons that day. P attended Technology and she is looking forward to learning to cook, sew and work with plastics. She had a fun lesson in History where the teacher played name games with the class. P enjoyed the lesson because she felt more confident that she now knew the names of her other classmates. P was excited to spend her lunch break with her friends discussing the day. One of the teachers showed P and her class the way to English where she had a substitute teacher. At the end of the day some of P's friends and P's sister showed her the way to the train station. P had fun on her first day at high school and found it surprisingly easier than what she had expected.

### **Specific description P2**

P did not get lost on her first day of high school and expected the same on the next day but only to find out how wrong she was. P and her sister walked to the bus stop and when the bus arrived P was worried about getting on without a bus pass. When she thought about it again she realised that no one had been given a pass and did not worry any more. After the bus ride, P and her older sister took the train and then walked to school. P attended a number of lessons that day. She started the day with Technology and then she had roll call. She got lost and could not find her roll call room. Eventually she met up with her friend and was relieved when a Year 12 student showed them the room. P enjoyed her roll call and had fun in her science lesson. When it was time to go home, P's grandmother gave her a lift home. She had a great day because it was fun and exciting although she was a bit worried at times.

### **Specific description P3**

P slept in and was surprised that she made it to school on time. She attended a number of lessons and found some interesting. She liked her teachers and found her

Science teacher great. P liked her Maths teacher although she was not keen on the subject. P enjoyed eating at recess. P found her Languages lesson interesting. P's Physical Education teacher was funny and she thinks she will really enjoy having him as her teacher. P's main concern while she was in primary school was her worry about catching the train and bus to high school. She now realises that it was not as difficult as she had expected it to be and she was getting used to it. P found school a fun place and would easily get used to it.

#### **Specific description P4**

P enjoyed her day at school, attended a number of lessons and met a couple of new teachers. P enjoyed Christian Studies because the class acted out a short play. Science was especially fun for P because it gave her the opportunity to work with her good friend and it was an activities-based lesson. During recess P caught up with her friends who are not in her class and she loved the food. P loved Art but lost her way to her Art Room. She made posters in History. P was getting used to taking the public transport and found it easy now. P loved high school and had fun except for the homework which she was confident she would get used to.

#### **Specific description P5**

P attended a number of lessons and was pleased when she received an award in Maths for solving a puzzle. P made new friends in high school and also got to know the teachers better. She felt it was important to know the teachers well and to be friendly with them because she could then approach them outside class time and get their help easily. P felt it was easier to approach a teacher for help if she liked that person. She enjoyed high school and thinks she will have fun over the next six years.

#### **Specific description P6**

P had roll call in the wet weather room and felt lucky that she could find the room. She received her transport passes in the Year 7 playground area. P She was extremely excited about her first house meeting where they discussed the swimming carnival. P had a fun day and was looking forward to enjoying using her transport passes.

**Specific description P7**

P missed the first two lessons because there was a guest speaker at school who spoke about Science and other important topics. P really enjoyed listening to the guest speaker. She had a number of classes after that. P was excited that she could do a handstand in Physical Education. Art was fun because she learnt to paint and mix colours.

**Specific description P8**

P enjoyed school and found it exciting. She got a locker today and was very excited that she did not have to carry a heavy bag all day. P had Peer Support with Year 11s. She looked forward to the rest of high school.

**Specific description P 9**

P indicated that the one negative aspect of high school was homework. Some subjects give more homework than others. P received a lot of homework for English, Maths and Technology while Music, Christian Studies and Physical Education gave the least. Although there were many differences between primary school and high school, P enjoyed high school. P found there were more teachers and students in high school. There was also more homework in high school and the layout of her previous school and this one was different. There were more subjects in high school. P really enjoyed high school because it was fun.

**Specific description P10**

P found it was important for her to have friends at high school because she would not be bored during breaks. P also found that her friends helped her when she did not know her work which was a great help. P has made many friends in her class and in other classes through her primary school friends. On Valentine's Day P was disappointed that she did not get any presents from her friends. P had a great day although she was tired.

**Specific description P11**

P was pleased when she received her second merit award in Science for an experiment she conducted with her friend. P attended a special assembly for last year's Year 12 students. They spoke about their HSC and study tips. P enjoyed Peer

Support because she played games and had the opportunity to meet some Year 7 and Year 11 students. Overall P enjoyed the day.

**Specific description P12**

P had an enjoyable day at school. She learnt to light a Bunsen burner and was very excited with this new experience. P enjoyed her lessons in Language and Health. Although she thought high school was great, P found that she did not have much time in the afternoon because she had to do her homework. P would rather watch television than do the homework.

**Specific description P13**

P found high school more confusing than primary in some ways because of the newness of the experiences but was confident she would be fine by the end of the year. She indicated she was looking forward to the swimming carnival. P was amazed that she actually likes school and never thought she would ever say that. On Photos day all the students took turns to take photos according to their Year groups. P enjoyed her Physical Education lesson and liked her teacher. She also enjoyed her other lessons and had a lot of fun.

**Specific description P14**

P did not participate in any event at the swimming carnival. She enjoyed watching the Year 12s. She sat at the edge of the pool with other Year 7s and fell into the pool once. She is confident of enjoying future swimming carnivals.

**Specific description P15**

P had Peer Support at the beginning of the day. She was very excited about her feat in Physical Education because her group formed a human pyramid to be pictured in the school newsletter. She was at the top of the pyramid and very proud of her achievement. She liked Physical Education and was looking forward to having more fun in the next lesson. P attended a number of other lessons and nothing interesting happened although they were all enjoyable.

**Specific description P16**

P spent Science in the garden where she found a nest of lizard eggs. She was allowed to play with the instruments in Music. She learnt new information about colours in Visual Arts. P had an enjoyable day at school. She wished there were fewer stairs in the school and that is the only thing she would like to change about high school. She would rather have escalators instead of stairs. P really had most fun during recess and lunch followed by Physical Education, Art and Music. P found her teachers really good but wished there was less homework.

**Specific description P17**

P had several lessons this week of school as usual. P enjoyed spending lunch with her friends in the Dance Club practising the dance routine. The next day the Year 7s and 8s had a state-wide literacy test. P found the test not difficult but just tiring. During lunch P went to practise her Physical Education routine with her friends. She had never done that many forward rolls in her life.

**Specific description P18**

P spent her first day out of school at the Powerhouse Museum because it was activities day. The Year 7s met in the 7 playground area and took the bus from school. When P arrived at the museum she had recess then she went into the museum to look at the exhibits on display. P and the others had lunch before returning by bus to school. P had a great day and hoped that she would enjoy future excursions as much.

**Specific description P19**

P enjoyed spending lunch watching the A Factor, a talent competition. She enjoyed it and hoped the other heats would be just as good. Peer Support was fun for P because she liked her leaders. In Science P went to the garden and enjoyed it. She had fun in Christian Studies and Visual Arts because she drew a number of pictures. P had a great day because the lessons were interesting.

**Specific description P20**

P found high school to be a fun place but there was too much homework. P felt there was more homework because of the number of teachers in high school. In primary school she had only one teacher and the teacher knew the amount of homework that had been already given, whereas in high school the teachers were not aware of the amount of homework other teachers have given. P was not sure how much homework she would get each day.

**Specific description P21**

P went to the clinic because she fell over on her way to school and hurt her knee. P could not participate in dance during lunch because of her knee. She had to sit through most of lunch. P had an interesting day at school. The next day P was sick and did not attend school. She stayed home and watched television.

**Specific description P22**

P's Science teacher asked the class to bring seeds. P's group was the only responsible ones to bring the seeds. Her Science teacher rewarded them with a merit certificate. P and her group practised a routine in physical education and did a good job of it. She was hopeful that her group would perform well the following week when they were going to be evaluated by the teacher. P's lessons were all enjoyable and she enjoyed the school day tremendously.

**Specific description P23**

P had a number of lessons. In Music P had a lot of fun because she worked with three other girls and performed rap music they had composed. P played on the drums. In Science P's group brought more seeds and again her group was the only one with seeds. In Visual Arts she continued with work from the previous lesson and still was unable to complete it. P had another great day at school. The next day P had a fun Music lesson but she passed out twice in her Technology lesson and went home early.

**Specific description P24**

P had cross country practice where she walked the course. In Design and Technology, P cooked three kebabs. In English, P examined her test results for

narrative work. In Science, P weighed random objects, including hermit crabs using scales. P enjoyed her History, English and Multimedia classes.

### **Specific description P25**

P had Peer Support instead of Science. She had fun during Peer Support but was tired because she played a number of games. She attended a number of classes after that. On the next day the trains were delayed in the morning and it was wet and cold at the train station. In Christian Studies, P played a game show in a team. There were four teams in the class and P's team came out second. In Science she had a practical lesson in the garden. P had a test in Maths and she was the third person to complete the test in her class. In Visual Art she drew part of the Year 7 playground area and she completed a worksheet in History.

### **Specific description P26**

P attended her first history excursion. Two teachers accompanied them on the excursion. They started the day by having recess in Darling Harbour and they watched a 3D documentary on ancient Egypt in the Imax theatre. P attended the Australian Museum to experience the ancient Egyptian exhibits. P had a great day and took the train home. After the teachers dismissed P at the train station she had to take another train home which she did with a few of her friends. It was a small train which was very crowded. She was glad they managed to squeeze into the train. P enjoyed her day more than her Technology excursion on activities day.

### **Specific description P27**

P enjoyed listening to a visitor to the school who played African music. He brought many drums and played them well. This was a special performance for Year 7s and took place in the hall. She also had fun watching a cooking demonstration in Technology. P was looking forward to cooking and eating it later. The next day was a wet day but P was disappointed when they were not allowed to use the wet weather rooms because it was not wet enough. P was very pleased with her group's performance in Physical Education because they tied for first position. There were six of them in her group and they had been practising for weeks. In Music P played with some instruments and enjoyed her day at school.

**Specific description P28**

In Science P conducted experiments using a Bunsen burner to learn what happens when things are heated. In History P went to the Computer Room to complete a task given by her teacher. The task involved making a chart of evidence about ancient Egypt. She learnt about Easter in France in her Languages class. P participated in a number of practical lessons that day. She learnt a new skill in Visual Arts and played a game in Physical Education. P had fun in Physical Education because her team tied for first place. She had difficulty in doing exercises because she had injured her ankle. P had a great day but was tired.

**Specific description P29**

P enjoyed her Music lesson because she worked in a group and they played with a number of instruments. In Health, P had a student teacher taking the lesson. P did not enjoy her Science lesson because she had to work from books. She found the day was not good.

**Specific description P30**

P enjoyed her cooking lesson in Technology because she had been looking forward to cooking stir fry since the demonstration lesson. The food smelt and tasted good. She and a few of her classmates were late for assembly because they were still cleaning up the utensils after cooking. In English P watched a video and completed some questions based on it. She enjoyed the lesson because she had watched the video previously and liked it. After Science she looked forward to lunch. P was pleased when she received her Maths test results because she was one of the top five students in the class. P had an enjoyable day.

**Specific description P31**

P was very excited about her camp and got a lift to school because she did not want to carry a huge bag on the bus or train. She arrived at school where she caught up with her friends. They went by bus to the camp site. She sat on the bus with three others who were to share her cabin. She was pleased about that. When she and the others arrived at the centre, they went to the conference centre and then to their cabins. However there was a mix up regarding the location of cabins and a lot of time was wasted before it was sorted out. P started the day with a beach activity and

played games such as ‘stuck in the sand’ and constructed sand castles. Her team made a turtle out of sand with babies around it and won the prize for best sand object. After a break P had Surf Education. She was given a talk on safety before being taken to the beach where they were split into groups. P’s group swam for a while before they were taught body boarding. P had a lot of fun. After lunch P did not enjoy the activity because it was a History workshop. At the end of the day there was a talent show before P retired for the day. P had an extremely wonderful day. On the second day P went on a treasure hunt and had a good time even though she did not win. The highlights of the day were challenging activities like the giant swing and the flying fox. P was scared but had fun. She was disappointed that she only managed to go on the flying fox once. P also participated in a course of low ropes followed by another activity. P enjoyed her meals at the camp. P enjoyed the camp and did not want the day to end. On the last day of camp, her teacher played an April Fools Day joke on her and the others. She and her friends believed this teacher when she said they had to leave the camp immediately because she was disappointed with them. She was tired on her way home and rested her head on her friend’s shoulder all the way till they arrived at school. P found the camp exciting, fun, entertaining and tiring.

### **Specific description P32**

P had a number of lessons that day. She copied notes in Science and had a demonstration lesson in Technology. During lunch she and her group were not able to practise their dance routine because their usual room was not available. They tried looking for another room but they were not successful in finding another room. P and her group decided to do it another day. She did not enjoy her English lesson. In History she was given another assignment. She did not have a good day because there was too much homework and sometimes she wished she could go back to being in primary school again.

### **Specific description P33**

In English, P had a listening test. In Physical Education P trained for the cross country. She did not receive her time because her friend had an asthma attack and she helped her to the clinic. Her friend is feeling better now. P had a good day and

she had fun all day and even at lunch when she had dance. The next day P worked with three of her friends on a dance routine for the Dance Club during lunch. She learnt a song in French. Again she trained for the cross country in Physical Education and was one of the last ten to complete the race. P was looking forward to the holidays even though school has been fun for her.

### **Specific description P34**

P found high school fun because there was variety, many activities to do and many different teachers teaching her. She liked having many teachers because it meant she need not be with an unpleasant teacher for a whole day as in primary school. P found there was too much homework in high school although it was not difficult.

### **Summary**

This section presented findings from the journal entries in the form of 207 specific descriptions of students' experiences of high school transition. The specific descriptions were consistent statements of each of the experience of the participants. Tentative themes emerged from these experiences using Giorgi's (1985a) Steps 1 to 4a and these are presented in Table 4 in Appendix C. Table 4 reflects the method used in determining a theme to be essential which was by cross-checking tentative themes against a set of seven essential themes (which represent the general statements of experiences). A theme is deemed 'essential', according to the researcher, if each participant experienced that theme at least once. That is to say Subject A must have at least had this experience once among all her other experiences and therefore be ticked and accepted as an essential theme. For example for the Theme "Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school" to be deemed essential, Subjects A to P in this study must have at least experienced it once and this is evident when A experienced it in A1 while Subject B experienced that theme in B3 (see Table 4 in Appendix C). Tentative themes that did not coincide with essential themes were discarded because they did not fit in with the criteria set by the researcher. Table 4 (see Appendix C) demonstrates this process of validation of a theme to be deemed essential through the cross checking process by moving from specific description, to tentative themes, to essential themes. The next section turns to the general

descriptions that resulted from the seven essential themes and the 207 specific descriptions of the 16 participants in the current study.

## **GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS**

A synthesis of the specific statements of students' lived experience of transition into high school resulted in seven essential themes. These seven themes and their descriptions represent the general structured descriptions. These seven themes are:

- Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school
- Schools support transition through programs and activities
- New procedures, locations and routines need to be learned in a new environment
- Learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning
- Feelings of confidence, success and achievement can enhance high school transition
- Homework/assignments are a necessary component of the high school curriculum
- Teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring

The general structured descriptions of the seven themes and their descriptions are provided below. These general descriptions were written based on the specific descriptions of each participant's experience which is Step 4b of Giorgi's (1985a) research methodology.

### **Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school**

Peers can play a significant role in enabling a smooth transition to high school. Friendship is important for survival in high school. Knowing others from primary school helps students feel safe, comfortable and less nervous particularly in the early

days and weeks of high school. When students see familiar faces amongst so many unfamiliar faces, they feel more confident and able to cope with the new environment. Friends help each other out in difficult situations by being aware of their needs and also by providing each other with support when certain academic work is too challenging. Friends help each other survive uninteresting lessons. To feel comfortable and confident in the new environment, students need at least one friend to be with whether it is during class time, breaks or to participate in lunch time activities.

It is easy to make new friends in high school because the student population is very large when compared to the smallness and intimacy of primary school. The Peer Support program also enables them to get to know other students in the year.

Being the youngest members of the school has made some students feel the need for the support of their friends to cope in an environment where others are older. Initially students feel helpless in the new environment because they do not know their way around and therefore seek the help of older students who refer to them as “little and cute” Year 7s much to their annoyance and embarrassment. Students are appreciative of the support and assistance provided by the older students.

A smooth transition can be hindered when students face older peers who are rude, not helpful and abusive to them. Their own peers too can be abusive and can bully. For some students, not being bullied by other and older students was a welcomed and surprising event. Although an infrequent occurrence, bullying when experienced is both unsettling and upsetting for students. The lack of peers who are friends can make high school a lonely and scary place.

Peer pressure is a strong force in making students participate in extra-curricular activities. Students participate in activities during lunch because they do not want to be by themselves. Sometimes their initial involvement is a little reluctant but the fear of not being part of a group persuades them to join in.

Friendship groups can change on entering high school, which is not always expected. Not all students stay in the same primary school friendship groups; new

friendships evolve and develop. This results in others having to establish new friends as well. Although friends are the key to every day survival in high school, some friends are difficult to understand or trust and others are unable to commit to making friendship work. Some friends can disappoint through their actions and unkind words. High school is not only about making new friends; unfortunately it is also about losing some old friends.

### **Schools support transition through programs and activities**

Schools support transition through a number of programs and activities to help students adapt to the new environment. One such program is Peer Support where each Year 11 Peer Support leader acts as a buddy to a group of ten Year 7 students. This allows the Year 7 students to turn to them for assistance. The leaders are friendly and helpful, paving the way to a smooth transition. They provide information about the school and its procedures and thus reduce students' fears and frustrations regarding fitting into the new environment. The program enables students to meet and get to know other Year 7 students, fostering and developing new relationships amongst them. The leaders show them the way to the train station and help them on the right trains on the first day, making them feel comfortable about train travel. These leaders also show them the way around the school and help them locate their classrooms whenever they are lost. Students learn survival skills like how to handle students who bully them from these leaders. The friendly and informative support of the Peer Support leaders eases transition and allows Year 7 students to feel safe.

The Year 7 Camp also fosters and develops new friendships. The students learn to overcome their fears and gain confidence through participating in Camp activities, which also provide opportunities to strengthen friendships with existing friends. Leadership skills, character building and teamwork skills are enhanced through these activities, preparing them better for high school. Students get to know their teachers in an informal environment who then encourage them to participate in all activities. The Camp provides a positive learning experience for these students. A private area within the school grounds is set aside for the exclusive use of Year 7 students outside class time. They feel safe and confident here because they are

closeted away from the potential intimidation of other students in the school.

Teachers show students to their classrooms for each subject from this private area in the first week and this allays their fears of getting lost or being late for classes.

Teachers explain the workings of the timetable, building student confidence in bringing the right books to class. Teachers engage students in games, group work and extracurricular activities to help students socialise and make new friends as well as help them understand their existing friends better. This reduces the stress of the new environment.

Programs and activities are introduced to support transition by helping students make friends more easily, know their teachers better, and feel safe in the new school environment during transition.

### **New procedures, locations and routines need to be learned in a new environment**

Students need to learn new procedures, location of rooms and other new routines in this environment. High school students follow a set timetable each day. Students need to learn to read this timetable. The timetable is not user-friendly and a great challenge to all because it is in a coded form. By not being able to read and understand the timetable accurately some students bring the wrong books to class, get mixed up with their subjects, look disorganised and feel inadequate. The diary provided by the school is designed to assist in the interpretation of the timetable, but in the early weeks of the term failed to achieve this.

Students worry about finding their way around the school. The school is big and they get lost very easily and cannot find their classrooms and other amenities. There are many different ways to get to the various rooms and this adds to the confusion of finding places and takes them longer time to understand the layout of the school. The numerous stairs add to the difficulty of movement between classes. Many students find it a chore to move from to class to class for each lesson because this routine is new to them. This movement causes the hallways to be crowded with

students rushing between classes and sometimes Years 7 students get shoved around because they are the tiniest in the school.

Students are pleasantly surprised to find help is nearby and older students, especially the seniors, are most willing to show them their way around the school. Students are embarrassed about asking for help because in the previous year they have shown others around in their primary school. This makes them feel young, lost and very much like 'babies'.

The map of the school in their diaries does little to help them locate places around the school because it is confusing. The layout and the design of the school are confusing also because it is like a maze. The rooms are poorly numbered and difficult to understand. Even after ten weeks some have difficulty finding rooms and it will take some time before students feel capable of finding their way around the place. However, there are some who enjoy this challenge and believe it will get easier with time.

There are many subjects in high school and as a result many books to carry each day. There is also the added pressure of carrying the right books each day. The books are heavy to carry around from class to class especially when battling with the stairs and the constant movement between classes after each lesson. Lockers provide a handy solution to carrying heavy bags all day long. However, the lockers are not situated anywhere close to the Year 7 Area which is disappointing to many students. High school is exhausting to many because there are numerous lessons and lots of movement between classes.

Students need to be familiar with the new school rules very quickly to avoid getting into trouble with their teachers and disappointing them. Some face anxiety because high school is a highly organised institution and they need to learn organisational skills to survive and be part of the new environment. The diary helps them to be more organised in meeting learning outcomes more efficiently, allowing them the opportunity to function more productively and satisfactorily.

Catching public transport and getting used to train and bus timetables are a new experience for many and given time they expect to be familiar with it. Students enjoy having an early afternoon once a week; however, they do not like rushing for the transport due to the tight schedule. Being in a single-sex school is another new experience for all students involved in the study.

High school is a noisy place because there are so many teachers and students in the school population and this sheer volume of people is sometimes difficult for students to handle since primary schools are much smaller in nature.

### **Learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning**

Learning occurs in a number of ways in high school. There are many academic subjects taught and many classes to attend. Some students find this exhausting while others are thrilled by this new experience. Many of the subjects taught here are new to students. Some subjects are harder to understand than others mainly because they are unfamiliar. Students who learn these subjects in an interactive and interesting manner find it easier to cope with them. Learning new subjects with teachers who provide extra academic and moral support makes it easier to meet the challenge.

Invited speakers from outside the school enhance the learning program in the school. They provide information not previously available and from a different perspective. This adds variety to the school day making it interesting and informative.

Practical lessons and extra-curricular activities enhance the learning process by teaching self-confidence, leadership skills, group work ethics, teamwork, character building and co-operation. These activities make learning more meaningful because they teach students to get to know others and assist them to build new friendships and positive relationships with their peers. Outdoor activities enhance the learning process by making the challenges more attainable.

Students find easy subjects 'good' and difficult subjects 'bad'. The easy subjects are the ones that are interesting and activity based and not teacher or purely content centred. Too much school work given by teachers reduces time spent on leisure

activities; this makes the academic curriculum too challenging and beyond the ability of some to cope and this makes high school a difficult place to survive.

The academic subjects in high school teach students many new skills not previously taught in the primary school curriculum. Continual assessments are a part of high school curriculum. Students realise to be successful they need to practise, meet learning deadlines and revise regularly. High school curriculum is varied and can be challenging for many.

The learning style expected of students in high school differs from primary school. This style assumes that students know how to study and how to learn. Students are not completely thrown in at the deep end as teachers in this school provide scaffolding to assist students how to learn the skills necessary for learning. Learning how to learn is a skill that is very much appreciated by many students because it enhances the learning process and reduces the frustration of learning in this new high school environment.

### **Feelings of confidence, success and achievement can enhance high school transition**

High school transition is enhanced when students are confident and feel a sense of achievement and success in their new environment. Students are confident of surviving in the new environment when the support of at least one friend is available. Knowing peers from primary school makes students feel that they are not alone here. Recognition of work by other peers boosts their self confidence and ability to adapt to the school. Students feel they have a sense of belonging when they are able to move around the school independently. Good and helpful teachers and friends build positive feelings and boost their confidence. Knowing others' names makes them confident of making friends easily.

Lack of confidence in the new school environment can result in making the transition harder for many. High school is competitive which results in some feeling uncomfortable and not being able to cope with it. They do not know where to go and what to do especially on the first day which upsets some. Students realise that once

they are over the confusion of the new environment high school will get easier to manage. Students find homework new to them and this has affected their confidence in succeeding easily. Not being organised affects their ability to complete work therefore achieving their goals. Lack of respect from other students for being the youngest and not holding a position of authority affects students' confidence.

Teachers and peers play a crucial role in helping students to succeed academically. Recognition of achievement by teachers and peers boosts students' self-confidence making success more easily attainable and a sense of knowing that they are able to cope successfully. School is a more enjoyable place when students achieve and succeed in academic and non-academic activities.

Students need rewards to verify their success and achievements, giving them the ability to believe in themselves. Students need the approval of their work from peers and teachers. Gaining approval and recognition among peers gives them the satisfaction that others too, acknowledge their good work. High school is competitive and students need constant encouragement from peers and teachers to succeed. Being praised for good work and high standards makes students feel positive about themselves and when they are able to complete their tasks it helps them feel successful.

A lack of achievement occurs when students are not able to submit work and meet learning deadlines. This then affects students' ability to feel confident about their potential success in the new environment. Success is important to high school survival and integration.

### **Homework/assignments are a necessary component of the high school curriculum**

Homework and assignments are a part of the high school curriculum. Students find the amount of homework given to them is far more than they received at primary school. The students do not find the homework difficult. It is the volume of homework given to them which poses a serious concern. There is more homework issued to them than they can complete in the given time period, resulting in it

affecting their leisure activities. Students realise that there is more homework given to them here unlike primary school because there are more teachers teaching them. The teachers give their own work without checking with the other teachers what the workload for students is and this lack of coordination among the staff/faculties frustrates students.

Besides the daily homework given, students also receive assignments/projects to complete. Students find these assignments far too challenging because many of them are given at the same time and they overlap with other subjects in terms of the deadlines unlike primary school where only one is given at a time. Where it is not possible to complete homework/assignments on time, students attempt to complete only some of them. High school is a fun experience except for the amount of homework and constant assignments.

### **Teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring**

Teachers play a crucial role in making transition easier for students by assisting them with the integration into high school. They provide opportunities for students to get to know others in their class through games that teach about friendship. They build students' confidence by making them realise that changes during puberty are faced by all and they are never alone. Students prefer female teachers to teach subjects relating to puberty because they find female teachers more approachable and students find it less embarrassing. Students find pleasant, helpful and kind teachers more approachable and easier to seek assistance during and after class. Such teachers also enhance learning by making learning easier, interesting and less stressful. These teachers help to resolve problems faced by students and make them feel comfortable in the new environment. Students prefer to have many teachers because there will be some nicer ones amongst them whom they can approach for help and make them feel safe. Teachers support students by allaying their fears regarding high school procedures making the transition a smooth one. Through encouragement from their teachers, students find it easier to achieve their potential as well as overcome academic difficulties. Overall, students find high school

teachers to be more pleasant and understanding of their needs than primary school teachers.

Yet, teachers can also hinder the integration process in a number of ways for students. When teachers are too strict and unfriendly students find it harder to approach them, slowing down the integration and learning process. Teachers who are intolerant of students who are late to class because they have lost their way put unnecessary pressure on them. Teachers who get upset with students who bring the wrong books to class because they are not able to read the timetable accurately cause students to be upset and frustrated.

Students are confused by the different standards of discipline, rules and expectations of teachers from class to class and this lack of uniformity among teachers makes it harder for them to understand the expectations of the new environment.

Students want to succeed academically in high school and find that teachers who do not explain concepts clearly and who are unapproachable inhibit learning while kind and competent teachers make it easier. Teachers with low expectations of their students' academic ability hinder students' learning and achievement.

Teachers have a role in making lessons and learning interesting. Lessons that involve interactive and practical activities are more meaningful, interesting and enjoyable. Students are happy to tolerate teachers who are strict if their lessons are interesting and challenging.

Students need some kind of challenge to have fun at school. They enjoy the challenge of learning new skills from the new subjects taught in high school. Students appreciate teachers who use games to teach the concepts in their lesson as it makes learning less stressful and more interactive. Learning is easier and more meaningful through practical lessons rather than textbook based and teacher-centred lessons. Students enjoy learning through fieldwork activities both within the school (such as working in the school garden during Science classes) and outside the school (such as visit to the Museum). There is more variety in high school activities than in primary school.

Lack of challenge and variety is a problem for a number of students. Easy lessons are not challenging therefore not interesting or fun. There are too many school assemblies and they are boring because they are long and lack in variety. Students find subjects that occur twice in a day very boring and tedious even if the earlier lesson is interesting. Too much of the same lesson in one day is hard for the students to sustain their interest. Too much work given by teachers also reduces the enjoyment to learning. Students need variety for school and learning to be fun. Students want to have fun at school.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the findings of the current study which examined the experiences of students during the first ten weeks of their high schooling. The chapter began with a discussion of the participants, their experiences and frequency of data entry. Sixteen students participated in this study. All participants were female and came from a high school in the northern suburbs of Sydney in New South Wales. The students were volunteer participants who attended the school where the study was conducted.

Data was collected via journals where the students described their experiences of being in high school. Students were asked to record their experiences at least three times in the first six weeks and at least twice in the last four weeks of Term 1. Some recorded more than was requested of them while others recorded fewer experiences.

Giorgi's (1985a) method of data analysis was used to analyse the journals. From the journal entries for each of the students, a total of 207 experiences were made available for analysis. Analysis commenced by the researcher reading through the entire descriptions in the journal entries to get a sense of the whole. The researcher then read them more closely and identified the transitions in the meaning to find meaning units which were phrases describing the meaning within each experience. The third step involved eliminating redundancies and transforming the meaning units into a meaningful language to write a specific description of the experience. Tentative themes were then identified from each specific description. The final stage

in the process was the elucidation of seven essential themes which were common across all of the students' experiences. These essential themes were validated by a cross checking system. The essential themes were cross-checked against tentative themes that emerged from each of the specific descriptions. For a tentative theme to be an essential theme in this study it was decided by the researcher that all participants must have experienced it at least once in their experience and then it was considered common to all. Any tentative themes which did not coincide with the essential themes were discarded and not deemed as essential to the experience of transition. These essential themes which were derived from the specific descriptions and were validated as essential were then used to devise the general descriptions which represent what it is to be a student experiencing transition into high school while they live through that experience. The seven general themes identified were:

- Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school
- Schools support transition through programs and activities
- New procedures, locations and routines need to be learned in a new environment
- Learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning
- Feelings of confidence, success and achievement can enhance high school transition
- Homework/assignments are a necessary component of the high school curriculum
- Teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring

Finally in this chapter, general descriptions for each essential theme were written to represent the experiences of students' transition into high school for the first time while they undergo that experience. The next chapter progresses to a discussion on the findings of this chapter based on the essential themes and general descriptions.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the findings discussed in the previous chapter in light of the literature and the research question, “What are students’ experiences of transition into high school?”. There are two parts to this chapter. The first part discusses the findings in relation to the general statements derived from the seven essential themes. The second part considers some of the implications arising from the discussion.

Seven essential themes were identified from the phenomenological analysis of students’ lived experience of transition into high school. Seven general statements were distilled from these themes. These general statements were taken back to the participants to ensure the authenticity of their experiences in these general statements. Upon discussion the students were satisfied that the general statements were their experiences of transition into high school. Each of these seven themes is now discussed in this first section, and compared with relevant existing research.

#### ESSENTIAL THEMES

The seven themes reflecting the essence of the general statements in relation to students’ high school transition experience are now discussed.

##### **(i) Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school**

The current study revealed that peers (same aged and older) were significant others for the incoming Year 7 students since they had the ability to facilitate a smooth transition into high school for many students. The study showed, as in the case of experiences of A1, C1, E1, F1, H1 and N1 that it was a great comfort when students recognised at least one familiar face when they arrived at their new school. The fear

of not knowing other students was a finding that Yates (1999) reported in her study of students' transition into secondary school in Victoria. She noted that the "sea of unknown faces... [was] ...worse than students had anticipated" (p. 28). This study lends support to Yates' research since it substantiated the importance of students knowing and recognising other students on their first day in the new environment. It is evident that friendship plays a critical role for student survival and more so during transition, when the quality of the socialisation aspect of schooling is particularly important for better or worse. In supporting the transition to secondary school, the helpfulness of older students was a further significant theme.

### ***The helpfulness of older students***

As evidenced by the experiences of A7, I2, K2, M1, O1, P2 and P25, students appreciated the kindness, helpfulness and friendliness of older peers who aided them in making their transition smooth. Here, the work of Akos (2002), who conducted a two year longitudinal study in the United States on students' experiences of transition into middle school, is relevant. Other studies have shown that positive relationships with older children can enhance children's feeling of competence, efficacy and self worth (Meece, 2002). Peer support leaders who were part of the transition program helped the new students make a smooth transition by acting as peer mentors and/or tour guides for them within the school. This study supports Akos' (2002) recommendation for the use of senior students to ease transition for new students. In Kneisler's (2001) school in the United States, where bullying by older students was rife, a number of programs were introduced to ease the transition process for students into ninth grade and high school. In this school, older students had viewed intimidation of new students as their right. To overcome this problem, these older students were used in the orientation program. It was found that where senior students were used as part of the transition program, the anxiety facing these new students was reduced as the older students were now their buddies, looking after them. This again supports the views held by the students in the current study on the helpfulness of senior students to smooth transition.

### ***Identity and role confusion***

Elias (2002) and Meece (2002) argued that students lost their identity and were destabilised when they arrived in a new environment whether it be middle school or

high school. It would appear that some students (e.g. F, L, and N) in the current study, at least in part, experienced a sense of loss of being the oldest and most powerful students in their primary school when they moved into secondary school. For example F felt she had to stay close to her other friends as she felt very young and lost while L did not like to be referred to as 'cute'. The confusion that these students undergo in terms of their loss of status is described by Erikson (1963) in his psychosocial stage theory. In this model, adolescents have to re-identify who they are and what they want and are going to do. For some students like F, L, N and O, this transitional issue was challenging, for example N was referred to as a 'little Year 7' and she resented that.

Some students noted that being the youngest in the new environment posed certain difficulties. For example, the experience of F6 indicated that she was not comfortable as the youngest in the school environment, hence she felt the need to stay close to her friends for support. Other students commented on the shift in status from an important position of some authority (i.e. being the oldest in their primary school) to relinquishing that when they entered the new high school environment. For example, L20 did not like being referred to as "cute" by older students, while N3 resented the new intake being called "little Year 7s" by older students. This perception of feeling 'small' and 'young' and being treated like a 'baby' has been reported elsewhere in the research (e.g. Barratt 1998; Green 1997; Hatton 1995; Yates 1999). For example, in Yates' (1999) study, students felt it was a step down socially from "being the oldest and most expert to being the youngest and most neophyte" (p. 32). Likewise, Barratt (1998) on reviewing related literature reported that young adolescents on entering high school find themselves insignificant in the greater scheme of things and that being the youngest in school does not help them fit in quickly.

Similarly, Hatton (1995) found that students faced an "unexpected culture shock arising from being treated as immature and babyish" (p. 21). While it is difficult to comment on the extent to which students in the current study actually experienced 'culture shock', it was evident that they did not appreciate being treated as immature and of no significance by their older peers when some were leaders of their school in the previous year.

The students' experiences in the current study indicates that although they appreciated the help given by the older students in settling them into the new environment and in reducing the fear of being bullied, they still did not like being treated as the 'babies' of the school.

### ***Bullying and the threat of bullying***

The experience of being bullied or threatened to be bullied has been widely reported in the research literature. In fact, recent research (Feroro, McLellan, Rissel, & Bauman, 1999; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Rigby & Slee, 1999; Slee, 2003) has shown that bullying behaviour in school children is prevalent in schools in Australia and other countries. Past studies lend support to the point that being bullied and/or bullying others appears to be widespread in schools in New South Wales. Forero et al. (1999), for example found that almost a quarter of students (23.7%) bullied other students, 12.7% were bullied, and 21.5% were both bullied and bullied others on one or more occasions in the last term of school. Another study conducted in New South Wales by Rigby and Slee (1999) indicated that approximately one in six students reported being bullied on a weekly basis.

In this study, as evidenced in the experiences of A3, K5 and I4, students who felt threatened by their peers because of intimidation had difficulty in adapting to the new environment. A number of other students indicated they were grateful they had not been bullied. For example, D and O assumed going to high school meant being bullied by older peers and they were therefore pleasantly surprised when neither of them nor their friends was bullied by older students. Research studies (see Akos, 2002; Arowosafe & Irwin 1992; Cotterell, 1982; Cumming & Cormack 1996; Green 1997; Hatton, 1995) have also shown that students about to enter high school for the first time are very concerned about the threat of bullying. For example, Hatton (1995) carried out a qualitative study with students from Years 6 to 9 in a girls' private school in rural New South Wales. All 13 Year 6 students were interviewed about transition into high school and of concern to them was the tradition of bullying in Year 7 by the Year 8 girls. Although they expected this as it was part of the school culture, they dreaded the humiliating initiating practices of this school. They also said in the interviews that it would be their turn to bully the Year 7s the following year to continue with the school tradition which was unfortunately part of

that school's hidden curriculum. In another study, Akos (2002) noted that students (girls more so than boys) were most stressed about being bullied by older and bigger students, while students in Arowosafe and Irvin's (1992) study feared for their safety in the new environment because of rumours about older students.

An important finding of Green's (1997) qualitative study of student transition from primary to secondary school in Melbourne, however, was that that "anxieties about being bullied plagued some of the students" (p. 78) yet bullying itself was not evident in the study. While Cotterell's (1982) study of diary entries of 204 new students' reactions to events on entering the first three weeks of secondary school showed evidence of bullying and intimidation of these newcomers by older students, the fear of being bullied was greater than the actual incidents of bullying itself.

From these and similar studies, it is evident that bullying is an issue of real concern to many students during transition whether it is at middle school or high school. However, in this study there were only three such experiences reported within the 207 specific experiences that came from the 16 students. Nevertheless, that a number of students expect to be bullied when entering high school is of concern.

### ***Peers who hinder***

While peers were generally supportive and helpful, there were some incidents, such as when old friendships were abandoned for new ones or where peers disappointed students through their lack of support and loyalty. For example, D was abandoned by a person whom she considered had been her best friend for many years. N was disappointed that high school was about losing old friends. A, B and 'I' were all disappointed by the actions of good friends and realised that while trust was important in a friendship, not all friends could be trusted. Yet, as Elias (2002) found, an important pre-condition of students' academic success is that they need to connect with their peers.

A further possible negative effect of peers is indicated in Green's (1997) study, where students worked hard at maintaining friendships at the expense of school work. Additionally in Green's (1997) study, one student lost the only friend he had made and hence lost interest in completing his school work. Unlike the current

study, however, the findings of Elias (2002) and Green (1997) did not highlight any form of loss of friendship for students as they moved from primary school to high school. It seems there has been no evidence from past empirical studies that entry into high school results in a change in friendship groups for some and losing old trusted friends for others. The current study provides some empirical support for this point from the unfortunate experiences of A, B, D, K, N and 'I'. Thus once more this study confirms the importance of friendship for children in transition.

### ***The positive impact of friendship***

Green (1997) found a large number of students were concerned about making new friends and maintaining them. Students in Green's (1997) study noted that friendship provided security of walking into different rooms within the school and someone with whom to sit. Brown and Theobald (1998) found in their study of an American high school that the best thing students found about high school was being with their friends. Yet Hinebauch (2002) reminds us that peer group acceptance is no longer unconditional and students do need to work hard at maintaining friendship and acceptance. This sometimes adds to the stress of being in a new environment. Elias (2002) argued that some students find it difficult to make friends and therefore harder to be part of a peer group when they enter a new school environment.

However, while a small number of students lost friends from years back, the current study found that entry into high school provided many opportunities for them to make and form new friendships. In their study, Letrello and Miles (2003) noted that students found it easy to make friends in high school. This was evident in the experiences of D1, E8, F5, F6, I8, and L20. Similarly, an important factor that students alluded to that facilitated their finding and making friends so readily was the large size of the student population and that there were so many friends from whom to choose rather than being overwhelmed by the number of students.

Green's (1997) study revealed that without peers, students find it difficult to focus on academic success, while Elias' (2002) review of related literature on transition into middle school highlighted the need for peers to support each other through academic challenges like the many new subjects facing them. Meece (2002) also stated that peers have an important influence on school success and "children with

poor peer relations are known accordingly to experience low self-esteem and poor school achievement” (p. 445). The current study revealed that peers supported each other in and out of the classroom to help each other overcome academic challenges as experienced by A, F, G, N and P. For example, A’s friends made learning easier for A, while F found it easier when she worked with a group of friends and this finding has been verified by Shaffer (2002).

### ***Peer group pressure***

This study revealed that students participated in a range of activities because of peer group pressure. They chose to do so since it meant they belonged to a group and were not alone during break times. According to Brown and Theobald (1998) and Shaffer (2002), students by being in peer groups forge a sense of identity and peer group enhances their self esteem (Slee, 2002). As an example, both A and L succumbed to peer pressure by joining a lunch time activity as a way of avoiding being on their own. The experience of not being able to locate her friends and therefore spending the lunch break on her own was not an enjoyable one for N. In the cases discussed here, the students feared the possibility of being on their own and chose the safety and security of a ‘group identity’ (Kaplan, 1996; Mitchel, 1978) even though it meant participating in activities in which they were not initially interested.

Maslow’s (1987) hierarchy of needs model is useful here since it helps to explain the need that individuals have for belonging and acceptance. Without meeting this need, Maslow (1987) maintains that people cannot progress to the next level in the hierarchy – which is the achievement of self-esteem. This was evident in the current study because some students are still lost and feel anonymity in the new environment like N22 who was scared of the new environment.

Kaplan (1996) argued that students’ academic achievement will be affected by their lack of self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, in order to achieve academically they must first be connected to the new environment and feel they belong and peers can help in this respect which promotes the possibility of better self-esteem. The current study supported the view that group belongingness and friendship are key factors in facilitating a smooth transition to high school. In summary, then, the aforementioned

discussion has revealed that peers (both same aged and older) can and do play a significant role in affecting a positive and smooth transition to high school.

### **(ii) Schools support transition through programs and activities**

State and Territory Departments of Education have recommended that schools develop strategies to develop transition programs (Schools Council, 1993).

According to Fields (2002) and Morgan and Hertzog (1997), school visits to feeder schools, information from counsellors, guided tours of the new school, orientation programs, parent nights, transition team and teacher swap days are examples of successful transition activities which help to reduce apprehension and increase a sense of belonging.

There were a number of programs and different types of activities in existence to support high school transition in the school which the students of this study attended. This essential theme is now discussed in relation to the sub-themes of the peer support program, Year 7 Camp, special area for Year 7s, 'getting to know you' activities/group work and extracurricular activities.

#### ***Peer support program***

The Peer Support program was important for and appreciated by many new students because it introduced them to other peers as well as to the new environment in a friendly, non-confrontational manner. For example, the experiences of M10, O1, P19 and P25 indicated that peer support leaders were fun and friendly and helped them to settle into the new environment. The experiences of A7, L6, M1, M10, N1, O1 and I1 revealed that these leaders were helpful and made the incoming students feel safe by teaching them survival skills and showing them around their new school. The peer support leaders also provided opportunities for these students to meet and make new friends in Year 7 which was evident from the experiences of L17, N14 and P11.

Dockett and Perry (1999b) who studied home to primary school transition in New South Wales claimed that an effective transition program would enhance "a sense of community among participants" (p. 13). This was evident in the current study as

most students indicated they were confident to approach their peer support leaders for guidance since they were viewed as buddies. The enlistment of senior students to support incoming younger students' transition has been advocated by many researchers (see Akos 2002; Kneisler 2001; White-Hood 2001). By way of example, both Kneisler (2001) and White-Hood (2001) used seniors in their schools to help reduce the anxiety of incoming students in a new school environment. In White-Hood's (2001) study, older students were trained to be mentors so they knew the requirements of their involvement in easing students' transition. From the reported experiences of students in the current study, the peer support program was successful in that it supported students in a number of ways during their transition into high school – helping them feel safe, showing them around the school and teaching students survival skills in bullying – and yielded many positive experiences for incoming students.

There has been considerable support for transition programs in Australia. For example, Pinnell (1998) interviewed middle school students, teachers and parents in a college in Melbourne and arrived at the conclusion that a structured pastoral program would help ease the anxiety of students entering the new environment. Likewise, the Australian Secondary Schools Principals' Association (1994) reported the need for peer support and pastoral care be introduced to ease transition for students entering high school. Central to these programs is the creation of a safe and supportive environment for students (Commonwealth Schools Commission 1978; Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Pinnell, 1998). Such an approach is consistent with Maslow's (1978) conclusion that meeting the need for safety is an important pre-condition to advancing to the next level of self-esteem and self-confidence. These issues of self-esteem and self-confidence are now addressed in more detail as they impinged on the students in this study.

### ***The Year 7 Camp***

A case study conducted in a school in Gippsland, Victoria (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2002b) revealed that a Year 7 Camp in week 2 of Year 7 benefited the integration process of students into high school. The students in the present study similarly strengthened their friendships, overcame

some of their fears and met others in an informal environment in the Year 7 Camp. For example, the experience of F5 and N22 revealed they were able to overcome their fears through the activities provided at the Camp. F and N made new friends at the camp while others strengthened their friendships and had fun, as evidenced by the experiences of A24, D3, O18 and P31. The current findings would suggest that the camp played an important role in smoothing students' transition into high school. 'I' was upset that her friend's phone was stolen at camp. A and her friends found it hard to share a room with peers who were not their friends. They also experienced rude behaviour and language used by other students which scared them. While A felt students used rude language to impress others, she and her friends also witnessed a nasty incident in their cabin where a girl vandalised another girl's property. These were some of the less pleasant activities associated with the camp for some of the students. Arguably, then, the organisation, functioning and detail of the camp are significant features in supporting transition or otherwise.

### *Special area for Year 7s*

A number of students indicated they appreciated a special and private area that was set aside exclusively for their use. This place within the school grounds ensured a secure and safe environment away from the possible intimidation of older students. The strategy of setting aside an area for a group of students to aid them in feeling safe in a new environment seemed to work well with students. Thus, this was an effective school-based strategy used to support transition. This practice of an area set aside for Year 7 is in line with the middle schooling practice of "providing students with sustained individual attention in a safe, healthy school environment" (Chadbourne, 2001, p. 2) and demonstrates "an ethic of care on community safety" (Luke et al., 2003a, p. 3). There was also a recommendation in the document 'From Alienation to Engagement' (Cumming & Cormack, 1996) to designate specific learning and recreational areas at junior secondary level. The National Action Plan (1993) recommended that schools provide adequate play space and 'girls only' spaces to ensure harassment-free zones and equal playground space for girls. Similarly, for these students in the current study, a special area meant that they felt secure and free from intimidation of other older peers.

Students found the teachers were helpful by assembling them in their private area at the end of each lesson in the first week to be taken to the next class. Students found this to be comforting as it meant they did not have to be late for class or worry about getting lost in the first week. This arrangement by the school reduced the anxiety of the new environment as indicated in the experiences of J and P.

This concern about the organisational structure of a new environment is an issue that has been raised in other research (see Cotterell 1982, Hatton, 1995). This situation led Cotterell (1982) to conclude that ‘mini-schools’ could replace the existing large high schools to reduce the stress of the new big environment. The literature on middle schooling (Chadbourne, 2001; Luke et al., 2003a) supports the view of having small school sizes as recommended by Cotterell (1982). Chadbourne (2001) too promotes small learning communities that provide student sustained individual attention as well as extended contact with a small number of teachers. This is only possible if there are fewer numbers of teachers teaching students as proposed by the middle schooling policy. It does seem from the middle schooling literature that a smaller school size could make the movement between classes easier for students without having to rely on their teachers.

#### ***‘Getting to know you’ activities/Group work***

The teachers used a variety of learning activities to support these new incoming students to become familiar with their new school environment and their new classmates. These activities were designed to help students get to know others in their class as well to talk about themselves. The teachers invited students to introduce themselves to their classmates by playing games with them, for example name games and charades.

In other instances the teachers invited the students to talk about themselves and their primary school in order for the others to learn more about their classmates. From the experience of A it is evident that by the teacher getting them to talk about themselves, she got to know her friend even better. This was appreciated by A. Some teachers also started talking about themselves which acted as an ice-breaker and helped students to get over the initial fear of making friends as it was initiated by the teachers instead. A, ‘I’, L, O and P appreciated their teachers’ role in helping

them make friends through games. Student 'I' indicated that she was able to know her teachers better because of the opportunity to play games in class and therefore the setting in the room was more friendly. This practice is likely to assist students to get to know their high school teachers better, which research shows is important during transition (Cumming & Cormack, 1996).

The teachers also helped students to get to know the school and their classmates by doing group work and interactive activities. One teacher asked students to wander around the school and collect information in pairs. The teacher paired them up so that they would have the opportunity to get to know other students in the class. The experiences of A1, A2, A5, A6, A18, N1, N4, I3, L2, O1 and P1 referred to the effectiveness of this learning activity for helping them make friends with their new classmates. Many of the teachers continued using group work even after the first few weeks and well into the term to ensure that students became more familiar with their school and classmates. This notion is supported by Coleman (2001) who argued that, students learning needs can be met when working in groups.

### *Extracurricular activities*

Extracurricular activities like Dance Club at lunchtime and Band were especially designed by some teachers for Year 7 students to meet other Year 7s. This helped many make friends during lunch and also prevented some from spending lunch alone. These were much appreciated by some students who did not like being alone at break times. These lunchtime activities helped A, L, M and N make new friends. By knowing others they become part of a community which, according to Dockett and Perry (1999), is important during transition to 'fit' into a new environment. All these activities were designed to enhance students' sense of being part of a community.

As discussed previously, the concept of middle schooling and middle schools was introduced in place of transition programs to provide an environment that meets adolescents' social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs (Chadbourne, 2001; Hill & Russell, 1999). The school where the study has taken place has endeavoured to address the social and emotional needs of these students without the need for a separate middle school by providing the Year 7 students with Peer Support, a Year 7

Camp and learning activities by teachers to help them understand their new environment and meet others. Students' reports of their experiences have indicated that they benefited from these activities greatly.

Both Cotterell (1982) and Yates (1999) found that in the initial stages of transition students need help to get to know the physical location of various components in their new school. Cotterell (1982), Green (1997), Johnstone (2002) and Weldy (1990) also note that the greatest anxiety faced by students during transition is the organisational and geographical structure of the school. These findings are supported in this study, as the students clearly stated that they appreciated being guided to their classes by their teachers in the first week. They were taken from their private area in the playground for each lesson, which helped reduce the anxiety of being lost or being late for class. They also appreciated the help of other students after the first week although some were embarrassed to get continued help.

### **(iii) New procedures, locations and routines need to be learned in a new environment**

These students faced many new challenges on entering high school. They realised they had to learn a number of new procedures and routines about the new environment as well as locating rooms in the school. Their experiences in learning about this new environment are now discussed.

#### ***Getting Lost***

A great deal of research (see Mizelle, 1999; Pletsch et al., 1991; Weldy, 1990) reveals that students are concerned about getting lost and finding rooms and other amenities in their new environment. As an example, Year 8 students in Pletsch et al.'s (1991) study reported that they were very worried about geographical mobility and were stressed about having to move between classes. In New South Wales, while most primary schools have on the average fewer than 400 students, high schools usually have double that in enrolment (Department of Education and Training, 2003), which automatically makes the size of the school and locating rooms in the school a challenge for many students.

Many students in this study voiced their concern about finding their way around the school. They reported that they were lost and were not familiar with the location of rooms and amenities such as toilets and lockers. A map provided by the school had little impact in helping them locate places; indeed, for many students (e.g. D3, F3, J2, J3, M1 and P9), the map was a source of great confusion and did not help in any way. The concern about getting lost was voiced by almost all students even though it appeared the school had put appropriate measures in place to prevent it. This confirms a finding of Cotterell (1982), that the greatest stress faced by students during transition was finding rooms. The current study also shows that taking the students from their playground area to their classes in the first week as well as the peer leaders showing them around the school did not stop them from feeling anxious. It would appear that more could be done by the school to ameliorate these concerns. For example, one strategy might be using homerooms for students in their first year to reduce the anxiety of movement between classes.

In the current study, some students decided to take 'getting lost in the new environment' as a challenge and, as evidenced by the experiences of E2 and N3, were very proud to have overcome it. Other students (e.g. F, H, M, N, O and P) reported that eventually they found their way around the school before the end of Term 1. In keeping with Green's (1997) findings, students' initial concerns were allayed once they found their way around. However, not all the students in this study were able to overcome this problem. For example, some students (e.g. B, D and L) commented that they continued to experience problems finding their way around the school and were displeased and disappointed by this, 10 weeks after commencement of first term!

### ***Punctuality***

Weldy (1990) concluded that students have a problem in being punctual to classes during transition into a new school environment and this was due to having a new routine of getting to their lockers before going to class. Green's (1997) research noted that the ability to be punctual was very challenging and caused many students great anxiety. She summed this up by saying, "being in the right place at the right time with the right things" (p. 74) added stress to students during secondary school

transition. Likewise, Akos (2002) referred to punctuality to classes as an additional pressure for these students during transition.

In this study, punctuality was an issue raised by students because of the difficulty of locating their class rooms, managing the numerous stairs in the school and finding their lockers between lessons to get the right books for class. For example, H5 and M6 had problems moving between classes quickly and getting to their lockers while G3, J3, J5, J9, M20, L20 and P16 found the stairs an additional challenge to their punctuality.

### ***The timetable***

Cotterell (1982) found the students in his study claimed, “the greatest stress is reading the timetable” (p. 299). Students in this study also found the timetable confusing. It was difficult to read and understand, as the experiences of A1, A8, B1, C2, C9, D1, D3, J1 and J9 pointed out. J1 reported that the diary that was designed to interpret the timetable which the school provided was not helpful either. Reading the timetable wrongly meant carrying the wrong books to class as was illustrated by the experiences of I1 and N22. For example ‘I’ found juggling many books confusing, while N22 indicated she was concerned whether she had the right books with her.

The students in this study had to learn many new rules and procedure about their new environment in order to survive and not get into trouble with the teachers. For example A1, A12, B1, C2, C9, E1, I2, L2, M1 N4 and P27 learnt there were certain routines like punctuality and behaviour codes in certain parts of the school and in specialist rooms which must be followed. Some students learnt that they needed to have the right equipment for their lessons in order to avoid being in trouble. This was painfully experienced by E7 and K3 who forgot their equipment and were in trouble with their teachers. They were not allowed to participate in sporting activities for not having their uniform with them. Akos (2002) found that students had a lot of new rules to learn in middle school and this was the case in this study. Weldy (1990) found that students needed to be given time to adjust to the new rules which other studies do not seem to highlight. This suggestion is relevant to the

current study because students in this study were anxious about knowing the new rules and doing the right thing.

### ***New routines***

Past studies have found that students lacked organisational skills when they entered high school, adding to the pressure of transition and faced anxiety as a result (Cotterell, 1982; Green, 1997; Hatton, 1995; Weldy, 1990). In reviewing related literature on transition into high school, Legters and Kerr (2001) found high schools to be highly bureaucratic, a conclusion consonant with students' reports in the current study that unlike primary schools the new environment was highly routinised, organised and bureaucratic. Classes operated on bell-times and there was a lot of quick movement which was new to many.

Students found they had to be organised such as completing work, meeting deadlines, following bell-times and moving immediately after the bell to survive in high school. These experiences taught C12, F3, G2, J6 and J9 early enough in the year to be organised, to get to class on time with the right equipment, and this helped them cope with the stressors of high school better.

### ***Use of lockers***

The problem of students having to juggle many books and use lockers for the first time was an important finding in Hatton's (1995) research of students' transition to high school. However, using lockers in high school was a new experience welcomed by many (Kirkpatrick, 1992; Weldy, 1990). The present study revealed that students were dismayed at the amount of books/equipment they had to carry each day to the various classes. This concern was experienced by A, D, E I, J, N and P. Lockers were a welcome relief to D, E and J although J would have preferred the lockers in a more accessible location to new students.

### ***Size and noisiness of the environment***

According to some students' experiences (e.g. C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N and P), there were just too many students and teachers in their high school. The effect of so many students and teachers was louder noise levels and crowding along corridors. The noisiness of the environment made it difficult for F and H to concentrate in

class, while K found high school to be such a busy place. As alluded to previously, high schools in New South Wales have a much larger school population - on the average double that of primary schools (Department of Education and Training, 2003). The sheer size of the school helps to explain students' comments regarding the size, crowding and noisiness of the environment which affects their concentration in class as well as the movement between classes being made more difficult.

### ***Public transport***

The current study revealed that many students had little or no experience of catching public transport to their local primary school and when they entered high school they were now required to catch public transport. For example, a number of students (e.g. D2, M4, O4, P3 and P26) in the current study found this to be a daunting experience, particularly in the early weeks. This is consonant with Weldy's (1990) finding that "catching the right bus home" (p. 68) was an issue for some students during transition into a new school environment.

In summary, there were many new procedures and routines that students were exposed to when they entered high school for the first term. The challenges they faced in terms of finding rooms, punctuality to classes, being more organised, using lockers, using public transport, reading the timetable, getting used to a bigger school size and higher noise levels were challenges that have not all been identified by the research literature.

### **(iv) Learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than others**

Students in the current study indicated that they experienced learning in a number of ways. They were exposed to academic as well as practical lessons. They also learnt via extracurricular activities. Unlike their primary school, they experienced many new subjects in high school. Students experienced some learning as more challenging than others. These issues are now discussed in more detail.

***Variety and new subjects***

According to Beane (1991), middle schools are subject-centred and tend not to be interdisciplinary yet Mullins and Irvin (2000) and Cormack and Cumming (1996) found that an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning is viewed as making learning easier for students during transition. In the New South Wales, Stages 4 to 6 of the curriculum, (which covers Years 7 to 12) is based on Eight Key Learning Areas (Board of Studies, 2002) which are not integrated. However, the use of a thematic integrated approach to learning has been identified as critical for increasing students' engagement in learning during the middle years (Luke et al. 2003a).

The current study found that students appreciated the variety of subjects. It indicated that learning occurred in a variety of ways and some types of learning were more challenging than others. Students were exposed to a greater number of subjects in high school than in their primary school. Many students (e.g. A, C, D, F, G, H, I, J, L, M, N, O and P) appreciated the variety of subjects available to them. Students found there were not only many subjects in high school but many of them were new to them.

According to the Gender Education Policy (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987) there is a need to overcome educational inequalities by providing a curriculum which has an instrumental and cultural value for girls as well as boys. The policy document on Girls Technology Strategy (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989) and the Australian Education Council (1993) also expressed the need to provide equal access to educational opportunities for girls. By being exposed to a large number of new subjects, the girls in the study were provided with this educational opportunity. The study also revealed that students had the opportunity to learn skills traditionally learnt by boys in Design and Technology. Here they had the experience of working with wood and plastics and making key tags for example, as in the case of the experiences of H, M, N, O and P who were excited to learn skills which they had not experienced previously.

According to Akos (2002) and Hertzog and Morgan (1998), students often are ill-prepared for the new skills required to study new subjects that await them in high

school and, for this reason, they should be explicitly taught on how to cope with different styles of learning to meet different academic needs in the new environment. The learning to learn program in this school aims to strengthen key competencies in “collecting, analysing and organising information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organising activities; working in teams; thinking creatively and solving problems” (Department of Education and Training, 2001, p. 21). A number of the students commented on this program in their reflections. For example, C indicated that it was an odd subject because she was taught how to learn and never thought of it as a skill she had to learn.

Green (1997) found that students were disappointed when their high school experience did not provide challenging enough tasks for them and when the curriculum was watered down. Likewise, in Hatton’s (1995) study, Year 7 students complained about the lack of expected challenge in high school and found it more of a revision of Year 6 work. Yet high expectations for student performance and sensitivity to individual differences should promote academic achievement (Department of Education and Training, 2005b; Newmann, 1998). Both Green’s and Hatton’s studies support the views of students in the current study who wanted challenging subjects to make high school learning interesting and to engage them actively. Many students (A11, B5, C3, E4, G1, G3, I6, K7, M3, M7, O17 and P10) indicated that learning new subjects was challenging and these new subjects were considered harder by some students (e.g. C12, K, N22) only because they had no previous knowledge about them. There were other students (e.g. A17, L9, L11, L13, L17 N8 and O7) who enjoyed the challenge of having to master difficult subjects because it reduced their boredom during their lessons. The study further revealed that some students (evident in the experiences of A13, C6, E8, G3, I8, L6, L11, M13, N17, O8, P1 and P17) had no difficulties with their subjects.

According to Piaget’s (1968) cognitive development theory, young adolescence is a time when adolescents move from the realm of concrete thinking to abstract thinking in the formal operational stage. Thus, students require activities that engage them not just at the concrete level but also activities that allow them to move to the next and final level of thinking –the formal operations stage. Yet, other theorists like Vygotsky (1978) emphasise the role of social interactions in learning since they

impact on cognitive development. In his words, “[h]uman learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). Thus, activities that are geared towards social interactions are likely to be beneficial to students.

A study by Luke et al. (2003a) highlighted the need for educators to provide activities and curriculum designed to promote lifelong learning in order to prevent disengagement and alienation in the middle years of schooling. Lifelong learning is mainly concerned with keeping students engaged in learning and developing characteristics that would make learning an integral part of their lives when they leave school (Bryce, 2005). Hill and Russell’s (1999) longitudinal study of 90 schools recommended productive and engaging learning tasks to prevent student alienation and disengagement. While the current study revealed that some teachers were able to engage students in challenging, at times fun, and productive learning activities, there were some classes and some teachers who failed to do this by making learning uninteresting.

### ***Many sources of learning***

The current study revealed that teachers were not the only source of learning. Students found the guest speakers to the school and fieldtrips outside the school provided them with a wealth of information. For example A, E, L, M, O and P benefited from guest speakers who enhanced their learning of particular areas. The experiences of A, M, N, O and P found outdoor activities were also valuable learning opportunities.

In a qualitative study of early adolescents in junior and middle schools, Urdan et al. (1995) found that students were more involved when academic tasks are diverse and varied. Cumming and Cormack (1996) and Department of Education and Training (2005b) similarly conclude that to reduce adolescent criticism of routine, boring and uninteresting aspects of schooling, teachers must utilise a variety of techniques which provide experiential hands-on practical learning activities for them. This could include the use of the internet, CD ROM or multimedia texts which provide student motivation and high levels of engagement (Luke et al., 2003a; 2003b) by introducing multiliteracies in education. Students in the current study indicated that

learning was fun and more meaningful when the lessons were activity based and interactive. Students reported they were able to learn a great deal in these lessons since they were actively engaged and involved as participants and not recipients of information. Students' experiences (see A4, A7, A10, A17, B2, C6, C7, C12, F4, L2, L4, L7, L9 L10, L12, M4, M15, M16, N8, O5, O19, O21, P14, P30 and P34) clearly indicated the importance of having interactive lessons to make learning fun and meaningful. A report by the Department of Education (2005b) supports this view that when lessons are fun learning is made easier.

According to social development theory (Jacobs & Cleveland, 1999, p. 1) "society develops in response to the contact and interaction between human beings and their material, social and intellectual environment". The students revealed that extracurricular activities organised by the school and their teachers supported their learning and taught them new skills such as teamwork, character building, leadership, friendship building and work ethics. This was especially the case for A, L, M, N, O and P. These socially-based activities with other groups of students help them learn new skills to work productively with others and to appreciate that learning is a lifelong process.

### ***Lessons on puberty***

Some students were pleased that they had the opportunity to talk about puberty because it was an area of concern to them (e.g. as in the case of the experiences of A17 and M15), while for others (e.g. N16 and O20), the topic was viewed as unpleasant and not appropriate for public discussion. When adolescents undergo puberty their "self-image is challenged ... [and they]...have frequent mood swings with changes in activities" (Oregon State University, 2001, p. 2). It is important for students and teachers to be aware of this issue to help students deal better with it. The New South Wales Personal Development, Health and Physical Education syllabus requires that all students in Years 7 to 10 develop knowledge and understandings about the stages of physical growth and development as well as about the physical, social and emotional changes that occur throughout their life (Board of Studies, 2002) as part of their curriculum. Therefore, although some students were not pleased with discussing the topic of 'puberty', it is part of the compulsory school curriculum for all Year 7 to 10 students.

It is evident from the experiences of students A and M that talking about puberty helped them cope better with transition as they learned they were not alone and others had similar experiences. It also made them confident their teacher was there to provide them with any further information on puberty and female adolescent changes.

In summary, the study revealed that there were different types of learning in high school and some of this learning was academic, while other types were more practical and interactive. Some of this learning posed significant challenges for students while other types were experienced as easy and straight-forward. Students learnt new subjects such as Design and Technology and new skills like working with wood and plastic. Students realised that learning did not just take place in the classroom; it could take place outside the classroom, which could be within the school grounds like the garden in the school or fieldtrips out of the school. Guest speakers were a good source of information and so were their teachers. Many of the lessons were interactive and meaningful, making learning interesting. Learning also took place for some of these students when they learned how to learn and when they learned from each other. Lessons that were not interactive or practically based were described by many as boring. Students seemed to have only two ways of assessing and evaluating lessons - fun or boring. There seemed to be a need for students in this study to be entertained or kept active all the time for them to enjoy learning and evaluate such lessons as interesting. This not only applied to classroom teaching but also outside the classroom and with guest speakers. Finally, it must be noted that students in the current study in their own uncomplicated way compartmentalised lessons into fun or boring categories only, with nothing in between.

#### **(v) Feelings of confidence, success and achievement can enhance high school transition**

Students who feel confident about themselves and their work have a higher chance of a successful transition. This is important because it impacts on students' future academic and social achievement (Dockett & Perry, 2003). Feelings of insecurity made transition harder for some students. This theme is now discussed in greater depth.

### ***Peers/Friends***

Based on the results of a transition program conducted in a school, Chapman and Sawyer (2001) concluded that students' high school success is affected when students have problems making friends in the middle school level itself. Students who feel confident and successful during transition can and do achieve, as revealed by students in this study who reported that high school transition was made easier when they felt a sense of confidence or achievement in the new environment. The experiences of A, C, E, F, G, K, N and P revealed that knowing peers/friends made them feel confident and successful and that helped them view their own ability to achieve.

### ***Teachers***

There is much research to date (e.g. Cotterell, 1982; Cumming & Cormack, 1996; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2003; Fields, 2002; Gilbert, 2003; Kohut, 2000; Newmann, 1998) that has emphasised the key role teachers play in helping students feel more confident about themselves and comfortable in a new school environment. Similarly, students in this study revealed that besides friends and other peers, teachers gave them confidence when they were approachable, as the experiences of C8, H3, K7, L1 and M17 indicate.

### ***Competence and self-confidence***

In their 'Starting School Research Project', Dockett and Perry (2003) interviewed several hundred children entering kindergarten for the first time in New South Wales and also surveyed parents and teachers. The research suggests that "children who make a smooth transition tend to maintain higher levels of social competence and academic achievement" (Dockett & Perry, 2003, p. 1). Legters and Kerr (2001) concluded that when students achieve and form lasting attachments to the new environment there are higher chances of students graduating from high school. Commonwealth Schools Council (1987) proposed that schools promote activities to build self confidence for students to achieve and succeed. Finding their way around the new environment without any kind of assistance and completing tasks gave students in this study a sense of achievement and the confidence that high school was a place in which they could succeed. This was expressed, for example, by the experiences of A2, E2, F6, H3, J1, K6, L3, L16, M3, M17, N9, N18, O3, O15, P7,

P27 and P30. Students reported feelings of confidence and achievement when they were able to find their way around the school independently and when they were more organised to meet their learning deadlines.

Those who lacked confidence about being independent in the new environment found the transition harder. The experiences of A13, B1, C12, D2, D3, E1, G1, G2, H1, I6, L20, M1, N1 and N22 indicated that transition was more problematic when they realised there were many new routines they did not know.

Being the youngest in the school, a case of role reversal from the previous year, had affected many students' self confidence. Not getting the respect they were used to in primary school, where they were the seniors, appeared to be a set back and affected the self-confidence of a number of students, as experienced by B5, D3, E7, G2, G3, H5, I1, J6, J9 and N22 in particular. For example, N felt small when older students towered around her.

Feelings of insecurity are not uncommon during adolescence (Caissy, 1994; Kruse, 2001). Here, these feelings stemmed from the fact that some students were not able to achieve their goals or meet their learning deadlines. This was the experience of B5, D3, E7, G2, G3, H5, I1, J6, J9 and N22. For example, E forgot her sport uniform and had to sit out while H found it difficult to complete her homework. Teachers expected students to be independent in high school and students find they have to learn "how to do school" (Green, 1997, p. 74), that is, to understand the school culture in order to survive successfully.

### ***Recognition and rewards***

Both Mitchell (1978) and Kruse (2001) emphasised the importance of students feeling a sense of achievement and recognition by others, their peers and teachers. As revealed in this study, work recognised or praised by peers and/or teachers built the self-confidence and achievement levels of many students. Students appreciated being rewarded for good work and it made them feel they were succeeding in high school. Rewards and praise verified their success during transition as it was evidence of recognition by others of their good work. This recognition boosted the self-confidence of students in this study (for example, A, L, M, N, O, and P). The

importance of praise and rewards in fostering successful student engagement has been noted by many authors (see, for example, Barratt, 1998; Burns, 2003; Kaplan, 1996; Kruse, 2001; Luke et al. 2003a).

In summary, in order to experience a successful transition into high school, students needed to feel confident about themselves, their work and their new environment. In this study, the process was assisted by teachers and peers who recognised and rewarded them.

**(vi) Homework/assignments are a necessary component of the high school curriculum**

Students found plenty of homework a new component of high school. Generally, students found there was more homework than they had anticipated and many found it hard to manage. This will be explored now by looking at volume of homework, coordination among staff and level of difficulty of homework.

***Volume of homework***

The study found that there was too much homework given to students in high school. Green (1997) supports this view, observing that “homework was a recurring issue mentioned by the students throughout Year 7, the homework demanded greater than expected” (pp. 73-74). In the current study, as expressed by two students (A4 and L18), not to be given homework was a rarity. Students complained about the sheer volume of the work given which included both homework and assignments. While there is no doubt that homework is a key part of the school curriculum (Department of Education and Training, 2002a), the study revealed that the volume of work was beyond the ability of many (e.g. A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, L, M, N, O and P) to complete. The only student who appeared to cope with the volume of work was K. As for H, she used the strategy of completing work only given by teachers who were unapproachable and who lacked understanding so she would not get into trouble. The recommendation that since that middle school students often lack skills to cope effectively with homework (Akos, 2002), such skills be taught explicitly to them, seems highly appropriate.

### ***Coordination among staff***

A lack of coordination regarding homework and other deadlines was a source of great concern to some students (e.g. D and J) in the study. The compartmentalisation of the curriculum in New South Wales, as previously mentioned, has resulted in each Faculty having its own program with no co-ordination with other faculties in terms of the issue of homework and assignments dates. The literature on Middle Schooling Policy recommends reducing the number of teachers, integrating key learning areas and having a thematic approach to learning (Barratt, 1998; Chadbourne, 2001), which should result in better co-ordination among teachers. Other work in this area has advocated the importance of time being put aside for meetings among teachers in the middle school which should increase the coordination across faculties (Vines, 2002) and reduce student the stress of overload and overlapping of homework and assignments for these students during transition.

### ***Level of difficulty of homework***

The study revealed that students were happy with the lack of difficulty of the homework given. In fact it would be easy enough for them to complete their homework if they had been given a smaller volume of it. The homework itself lacked an academic challenge for some. The low level of expectations of achievement by the teachers was disappointing for some and the experiences of C5, E8, F6, G3, H5, L20, M20, N22, O21 and P34 revealed that the homework was far from challenging. Supporting the findings of this research, Green (1997) noted that students found the volume of homework was an issue but not the level of difficulty. Besides being loaded with daily homework, assignments were given out by teachers. Some students (e.g. B5, C11, D3, F6, K7, L13, M15 and O6) experienced great difficulty coping with these extra work commitments. Hertzog and Morgan (1998) support the finding of the current study, that the work became too challenging when students were given both homework and assignments at the same time by different teachers. Student P summed up her experiences of homework by stating, “High school is fun except for the homework” (P20).

**(vii) Teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring**

Teachers have an impact on student integration and learning in high school. They have a critical role in fostering the value of lifelong learning in students. This theme was identified by the study underscoring the importance of teachers' roles in schools. This theme is now examined in greater detail.

***Teachers help in many ways***

The study revealed the central role of teachers in high school in affecting student integration and learning process. Through their attitudes to students during transition, teachers could make students' experiences more interesting, less boring and in some cases, less traumatic. Students found teachers who helped them get to know the others in the class through the process of playing games during the first few lessons and made them get acquainted with their other classmates assisted them in integrating into the life of the school. Some students (A2, A5, A6, N1, and O1) particularly appreciated this technique as it helped them to socialise and make new friends. According to Luke et al. (2003a), "the middle school teacher has to be mentor and monitor" (p. 54) which supports the findings in this study regarding the important role teachers play in helping students experience a smooth transition from primary to secondary school.

Teachers also assisted students in the integration process by allaying their fears about high school, explaining new routines and procedures and supporting them when they needed advice and guidance. This finding supports the work of Cotterell (1982) who argued that teachers play an active role in the transitional period of adjustment when students are being integrated into the new environment. In the current study, students looked to the teachers for help and support. This study reiterates the importance of the role of teachers through the students' voices.

***Puberty***

At the time students enter high school, they are also experiencing the onset of puberty. Some students (e.g. A11 and O20) were very appreciative of teachers who had given them the opportunity to learn about and discuss the physical changes that

would be occurring to them. The opportunity helped a couple of them to realise they were not alone. Huebner (2001) reports that “knowledge about what changes and behaviours during adolescence are normal can go a long way in helping both teens and adults manage the transition successfully” (p. 1). At least for two students in the current study, this was the case but for some it had the opposite effect.

### *Variety of teachers*

The literature on Middle Schooling (Vines, 2000) encourages schools to have fewer teachers for this group of students so that it will reduce the stress of coping from one main teacher in primary school to up to ten teachers when they move to secondary/middle/high school. Chadbourne (2001) also recommended that fewer teachers be used during the transition year to help students familiarise with the new environment. In contrast to these claims, an interesting revelation in this study was that students enjoyed having a variety of teachers teaching them instead of just one main teacher as in the primary school. They found it was good to have many teachers instructing them because they would find at least some teachers who were more approachable and helpful than others, while at the same time they would not be stuck with a ‘nasty one’ all day. Students reported that they were taught by at least one nice teacher per day and in many cases, more than one helpful teacher.

In America the concept of ‘looping’ is encouraged in some schools where the same group of teachers take a class over two years from the first year of transition to reduce the stress of students getting to know many teachers (Gaustad, 1998). In the Cleveland-based Project F.A.S.T, students in looping classes scored substantially higher on standardised tests of reading and mathematics than did students in regular classes even when both groups were taught by the same teacher (Burke, 1997). The Waldorf education settings in Europe have encouraged looping where one teacher has a class for 8 years (Burke, 1997). In Scandinavian countries the students have the same teacher for seven years. Yet, the findings of this study would suggest that students want and prefer to have a greater number and selection of teachers so that they are not exposed to an unpleasant teacher all the time or stuck with an unapproachable one all the time. Students indicated they appreciated a variety of teachers who had different personalities and styles even though it meant they had to get to know more teachers. This finding does not seem to be apparent in the findings

of other research studies since students here seem to appreciate having a number of teachers to go to for help while in previous studies students only saw the aspect of having many teachers as meaning less contact time with them.

### *Unhelpful teachers*

The Middle Schooling literature (Luke et al., 2003a) advocates the right pedagogy and curriculum which involves higher order thinking, problem-solving and lifelong learning to meet the needs of students during adolescence. It also involves having an integrated and inter-disciplinary curriculum with cooperative, collaborative learning activities and an emphasis on strong teacher–student relationships for effective student learning. Fleming (1993) as a practitioner at a Middle Schooling Conference suggested that “adolescence is a burden if there are no choices” (p. 11) and that teachers must recognise this and provide students with the necessary space to survive transition.

For students to be able to achieve their learning outcomes and be lifelong learners, they need a good teacher-student relationship, as advocated in the middle schooling literature (Chadbourne, 2001). When teachers are unapproachable this teacher-student relationship is at best, impaired. Fleming (1993) found many teachers lacked the training to meet adolescent needs and therefore recommended appropriate training to assist them to better help the transition process. Teachers who were unapproachable, intolerant of students being lost and late for class in the first few weeks because they could not read/understand the timetable were viewed as unhelpful and unsupportive by students. This was the experiences as noted in the cases of A8, J2 and O2. Some students (e.g. A13 and I15) indicated that they were upset by teachers who were too strict and unfriendly.

One student in the study found the differing standards of classroom behaviour and rules by each teacher frustrating. While one teacher encouraged a colourful diary another felt the student was breaking the school rule as the diary was to be kept plain for recording school work only and not for personal reasons. The experience of A left her confused and annoyed with the teachers for the lack of consistent standards. This is supported by research (Cumming & Cormack, 1996) indicating that “inconsistency on the part of teachers is seen to be an issue of concern” (p. 13).

*Variety of lessons/skills*

The Department of Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (1997 a, 1997b, 1997c) found through Middle Schooling Forums conducted in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland that a supportive middle schooling pedagogy –learner-centred, collaborative, integrated, flexible and safe learning environment-which take into account adolescent’s cognitive, social and emotional needs - will support high school transition. It has been argued that teaching practices need to be more stimulating and students need to be kept engaged via more challenging ‘hands-on’ activities and multiliteracies of online and virtual texts (Department of Education and Training, 2005b; Luke et al., 2003b). In the present study, supporting that conclusion, teachers were an important source for making learning and lessons interesting and for academic success/failure. Interesting lessons made learning more meaningful. Students (e.g. A, B, C, E, I, K, L, M, N, O and P) found interactive, practical, engaging, and student-centred lessons easier and stress-free. They also found lessons using the internet, an experience that enhanced their learning especially in difficult subjects areas like Maths and Science.

The study also revealed that students found learning easier when teachers were competent and gave clear explanations. This is evidenced by the experiences in the case of A6, B5, J2, K3, K7, L1, M20, N22, P3 and P5. Lessons with poor teaching (that is, poor explanations by teachers) were frustrating to some as in the case of the experiences of A10, A16, J8 and L14. In order for lessons to remain interesting there must be variety and the experience of A17 indicates that students were tolerant of strict teachers if their lessons were interesting and challenging. Students appreciated the new skills and subjects learnt in high school as they were a challenge to them, while low expectations held by teachers upset some. This view is supported by Hatton’s (1995) study where students did not enjoy doing work considered to be primary school level since it reflected teachers’ low expectations of Year 7 student performances and academic abilities. The Department of Education and Training (2005b) also expressed concern that some Year 7 teachers have been known to reteach the same knowledge and skills learned by students in primary school thus limiting their opportunities to experience challenging and new types of curricula.

### *Curriculum and pedagogy*

Piaget (1968) posited that at adolescence, students' cognitive thinking changes and adolescents are moving to the level of abstract thinking and away from concrete thinking and therefore students do need relevant stimulating learning environments. Both Barratt (1998) and Chadbourne (2001) advocate a stimulating and developmentally appropriate curriculum for adolescents taking into consideration the developmental changes that adolescents undergo at this age which include cognitive changes. Luke et al. (2003a, 2003b) also reported the need for pedagogy that is appropriate to meet the developmental needs of students who are adolescents and undergoing transition into high school at the same time. This, according to Cumming and Cormack (1996), would reduce student disengagement and alienation from school and enhance learning. The Linkages program (Department of Education and Training, 2005a) in New South Wales is one example of a State wide program that aims at reducing student alienation by bridging the gap between Stages 3 and 4 curricular.

Students in the current study have made the point that they wish to be engaged in their learning actively, not as recipients of content but active participants. It seems that a more child-centred approach away from teacher centred lessons might give students the opportunity to move possibly into the abstract realm of cognitive thinking (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1968) through interactive learning activities. In line with the middle schooling practice, the adoption of an integrated curriculum, technology in teaching, thematic units and multi-disciplinary teaching teams (Barratt, 1998) would better serve the needs of these adolescents who have indicated that they need opportunities for active and challenging participation in the classroom to enhance their learning. The values underpinning middle schooling practices include learning that is collaboratively-organised, learner-centred, flexibly constructed and strategically linked curriculum (Barratt, 1998). These practices would engage the students learning in the current study as indicated by their need to be active learners and challenged.

The current study underscores the role of teachers in supporting students during transition. Students reported that teachers had a great impact on their learning. Their

experiences indicated that teachers can help or hinder a smooth high school transition through their teaching pedagogy and personalities.

In summary, the first part of this chapter discussed the key findings that emerged from the study in the light of pertinent literature. The final part of the discussion will now explore some of the pertinent issues and some implications arising from the discussion. Contrasts between the findings of this study and those of previous studies will also be noted.

## **ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of the current study show that students face many challenges during transition into high school and, at the same time, experience many positive aspects of transition. To a large extent, these findings did not unveil any new or different aspect of transition into high school that had not been reported previously in other research. For example, as with many prior studies, the students in this sample found that it was a challenge to locate places/rooms in a new environment and they had difficulty reading the timetable. They found it stressful when they were lost in the school and became late for classes. They also worried about friendship. These were some of the challenges. The positive experiences saw them enjoying being with friends and learning new and interesting things. Although the bulk of findings in the current study mirrored much of the literature on transition into high school there are four key issues that do need special attention and further discussion in this study. These four key issues which include friendship, bullying, teachers' roles and homework are now discussed.

The first issue is friendship. The current study found that students on entering high school could end up losing their friends from primary school, which was least anticipated by all concerned. This for the researcher was a novel finding. These students learned that friends can be fickle and some were disappointed when previous long-standing friendships formed during their primary school years ended so abruptly. Many of the students in the study reported that their best friends were

no longer their friends. These valued friends of many years chose to seek to new friendships.

Although these students were disappointed and upset by the loss of their best friends they also managed to make new friends without too much difficulty. They found it easy because high school was a bigger place with a greater enrolment of students as compared to their primary school. Thus, it was easier for them to make friends. Unlike other studies (Cotterell, 1982; Hatton, 1995) where students had difficulty penetrating large, complex organisational structures making transition more difficult – a finding which led to Cotterell recommending smaller schools or ‘mini-schools’ – here the size of the high school worked to the students’ advantage. While other studies (e.g. see Elias, 2002; Green, 1997; Hinebauch, 2002) found students had difficulties making friends in their new environment, the students in the current study found the big school was an advantage because there were more people to make friends.

The students in this study were unprepared for the change in friendship groups and the development of new friendships, indicating that teachers in high schools should be aware of the fragility of friendship. Teachers have a responsibility to assist Year 7 students by providing them with opportunities to meet, develop and promote new friendships in their classes through learning and extracurricular activities. By using a variety of strategies to encourage students to get to know each other particularly in the early part of the year, teachers in this study did assist students in the transition process.

In summary the study has clearly shown that schooling is not just about learning the curriculum; the social aspect of schooling plays a critical role at this stage of their lives. It is important that educationalists do not underestimate its importance for learning can be a challenge for many without friends. The study has clarified that during transition into high school, friendship is key to making a successful school and academic life for many students and schools need to underscore the social aspect of schooling.

The second issue concerned bullying. Although bullying has been found in other studies, it is an issue of importance in this study as it was conducted at the researcher's school therefore the extent of bullying is important information for all members of the school community. Three of the 207 experiences from the 16 students in the study pointed to some form of bullying. These figures would suggest that bullying was not a common occurrence for these 16 students during transition into high school. As with Green's (1997) findings, the anticipation of being bullied was greater than the actual event. The current study revealed that most students expected to be bullied when they entered high school. They also expected to be harassed because they were now the youngest in the school and therefore the smallest in size and the lowest in the social order. Such feelings of insignificance possibly exacerbated their fears of being bullied.

Unlike past studies (Akos, 2002; Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Cotterell, 1982; Cumming & Cormack, 1996; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Weldy, 1990) which reported evidence of many students' experiences of bullying and intimidation at the hands of older students, there were no reported incidents of senior students bullying these Year 7s, only two older peers. That bullying did not emerge as an issue for the majority of students in the study may be explained, at least in part, by the school's peer support program whereby senior students played an important role in helping to socialise students, showing them where buildings and amenities were and generally making their lives much easier. The peer support program provided the Year 7 students with seniors as buddies. For a number of students, their peer support leaders made them feel safe and protected and helped them to make new friends as well. Other older peers helped students too and did not harass them. Thus, an important implication in this study was the implementation of peer support program which aided and eased students' transition into their new environment and, at the same time, lessened the possibility of seniors being potential bullies.

In this context, then, a national anti-bullying campaign that was launched in Melbourne in June 2005, which promoted a buddy system as a way to reduce bullying in schools, is noteworthy. This program, known as the Better Buddies program, reinforces positive values such as empathy, care, respect and acceptance of differences, which have been proven to reduce bullying (Bertrand, 2005).

In summing up, bullying was not a common occurrence for the experiences of the 16 students in the study. This is not to say that bullying was not an issue for the remaining Year 7 students who did not participate in the study. This is not known. What the study shows, however, was for the student sample in this study, bullying did not appear to be a major issue; the fear of it was greater than its reality. Its almost absence for students in the study suggests that interventionist strategies such as the peer support program of which peer support leaders played a major role, and other activities designed to ease students' transition, do reduce its presence.

The third issue relates to the role of teachers. Students in this study found teachers were very helpful as they assisted them to get to know other students in their classes, explained new procedures and routines (such as the timetable) and were there to support them when they needed guidance. Students in this study did not have the experience of being treated as 'babies' by their teachers. Although some did feel like 'babies', it was not due to the actions or behaviours of their teachers. This was in contrast to other research (see Barratt, 1998; Green, 1997; Hatton 1995; Yates, 1999) that revealed that students felt they were treated as 'insignificant', 'immature', 'babies' or 'neophytes' by their teachers. It is important for all teachers therefore to recognise students' need to be treated as adolescents and not as immature individuals.

Students indicated that they enjoyed having many teachers because it meant they were exposed to a variety of personalities and approaches. Furthermore, they had a larger pool from which to draw if they needed help and support. These findings are in contrast to other studies (see Cumming & Cormack, 1996; Green, 1997; Johnstone, 2002; Weldy, 1999; Yates 1999) which found that students did not enjoy the experience of having so many teachers and found it to be a problem. Middle schooling policy (Chadbourne, 2001; Luke et al., 2003a) also encourages the reduction in the number of teachers in the middle years; yet, this study indicates that students enjoyed having many teachers so that they could have access to at least one kind and supportive teacher and they could not be with an unkind/unhelpful teacher all the time. Reduction in number of teachers during transition may therefore not necessarily be the answer for an easier transition into high school. It is the

consideration and caring nature of teachers that is of paramount importance for surviving high school transition for these adolescents according to this study.

Besides helping students ease into high school life, students commented on the role played by teachers in making learning and lessons interesting. Students tended to describe their lessons as either fun or boring, with nothing in between, as they tended to compartmentalise their lessons in these two categories. Interactive, hands-on and engaging lessons were considered fun, easier and less stressful. Students enjoyed the range of new subjects plus practical and student-centred activities used by the teachers to introduce them to the new curriculum and learning. The middle schooling reform (Luke et al., 2003a) centres on more effective student learning, positive experiences in adolescence and a desire and capacity for lifelong learning, which is reflected by the excitement of the students in this study to the new learning strategies which they found interesting and enjoyable.

Some students were disappointed by lessons that were uninteresting and boring especially the subjects that were allocated two lessons on one day. Teachers who gave poor explanations and had low student expectations were viewed as ineffective by students. They did not appreciate teachers who used the same methodology all the time since their lessons were experienced as unchallenging, dull and boring. To engage students more actively in their learning, it is important for all teachers to use challenging, engaging and novel teaching strategies to ensure learning is a rich and valuable experience.

As evident from previous research, this study supported other studies that have identified the key role of teachers, their need to be sensitive to the needs of newcomers and to realise that, for students, entering a new environment can be fraught with many challenges. Teachers need to remember to support students by giving them the time needed for high school adjustment and not rushing them. They must be aware that many of these students, initially at least, lack confidence, therefore tactfulness is required. As Cumming and Cormack (1996) state, teachers who are not tactful could very well hinder high school integration and cause alienation and disengagement. Teachers could benefit by training in the area of

adolescent development to better support this age group (Barratt, 1998; Cumming & Cormack, 1996).

The teacher's role is to facilitate and foster lifelong learning which involves helping students overcome problems faced by them during transition. According to van Manen (1991), "being educationally involved with children, is to empower children to give active shape to their life's contingencies" (p. 3). His comment underscores the vital role of teachers play and their need to act tactfully and thoughtfully when working with children. Teachers need to be aware that, in line with middle schooling literature, their role is to promote lifelong learning that is, an openness and readiness to learn not just for the schooling years but for life. Some teachers, however, also need explicit training on pedagogy so as to engage middle schoolers better.

Finally, the last key issue relates to homework and assessments. Past research conducted in Australia (Cotterell, 1982; Hatton, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1992, Yates, 1999) has found homework to be a major issue of concern among students entering high school, yet it seems that schools continue to have high expectations regarding the quality and quantity of homework expected by students. In this study, students were concerned that they were overloaded with homework/assessments.

Interestingly, it was not the level of difficulty of the homework but the sheer volume of it coupled with unrealistic deadlines. Students blamed this overload on poor coordination among their teachers. Students also complained about the assignments that were given on top of the daily homework. Attempting both homework and assignments was a great struggle which was beyond the capacity of many.

A Homework Policy (Department of Education and Training, 2002a) exists in New South Wales as part of the curriculum. However, the amount or frequency of the homework is not stipulated or mentioned in this Policy. This leaves the interpretation of the Policy in terms of the appropriate volume and level of difficulty to individual schools and individual teachers. It can be implied, then, that schools do have some autonomy and choice regarding this issue and could make a difference in the lives of novice high schoolers by being aware of student concerns in this regard.

It is evident that there is a need for coordination among teachers when planning and setting assignments and other tasks required by students outside of class hours. Such coordination could help to ensure that students are not overloaded with too many tasks at the one time. Teachers need to meet and discuss when each faculty is setting homework and assignments and the due dates for each. This rather simple process would ensure that the workload is spread out for the students and would avoid overlapping. Emphasis should be placed on the quality of homework and not the quantity of homework. Homework/assignments should be academically challenging and should 'value add' rather than being given as a matter of course. An important implication for the school in which the study took place is the need for teachers and administrators to re-examine the School's Homework Policy to see if it best reflects the interests and needs of students. Second, it might be appropriate to incorporate a component on developing organisational skills within the existing program, (i.e. the Learn to Learn Program, Peer Support Program) to help students meet their learning deadlines. Homework, then, is an important area to consider during transition as it emerged in this study and other studies (Cotterell, 1982; Hatton, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Yates, 1999) as a key issue of concern for students.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter began by examining the seven essential themes that emerged from the study of students' lived experience of transition into high school using Giorgi's (1985a) phenomenological psychological research methodology. The essential themes which arose from the central research question in the thesis were discussed in the light of the research and other literature on transition into high school. All the essential themes derived from the study were supported at least in part by research and writing in the field.

Although many of the current findings reflect findings from past research on transition four key issues were raised and discussed further. These were issues that firstly, related to friendship groups and how friendship groups can and do form when students enter high school. A second issue was that bullying was not a

common occurrence for these students. The third issue related to the role of teachers in assisting students' integration into high school. In this study, students reported on receiving a large volume of homework which for all, except one student, was an issue because it was beyond their ability to complete within the given time even though the homework was not difficult in itself. The final issue was concerned with the important role teachers play in facilitating learning.

The final chapter of the thesis which follows provides a summary and discussion of implications, limitations and recommendations arising from the study on students' lived experience of transition into high school using a phenomenological research methodology.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter summarises the purpose of the study, phenomenology as the methodology for the study, the findings of the study, the discussion of the findings and the key issues which arose from it, and the study's contribution to and implications for practice. It concludes by outlining recommendations for further research on transition into high school.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

High school transition is an important stage in the lives of adolescents. At this time, the majority of students move to a new school environment and undergo a range of significant developmental changes including cognitive, physical, emotional and psychological changes that coincide with high school transition (Caissy, 1994; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Shelton et al., 2001; Steinberg, 1993; Stowell et al., 1996).

There has been a substantial amount of research literature and education policy developed that promotes the concept of middle schooling designed to meet the changing needs of students during adolescence. In the literature, it has been described that students' cognitive, social and emotional needs must be supported while they move into high school to ensure academic and future success. Past empirical studies (e.g. Barratt, 1998; Cumming & Cormack 1996) and the review of literature (e.g. Beane, 1991, 2002; Chadbourne, 2001; Luke et al., 2003a) on transition into middle/high school have also supported the idea that students' needs are different during adolescence and that school administrators and teachers should use curriculum and pedagogy relevant to meeting these special needs.

To date, there has been a small yet growing body of research on transition that has examined teachers' and students' views of high school transition. Some of this research (e.g. Akos, 2002; Yates, 1999) has been longitudinal, studying transition over a period of time, such as over two to four years. Other research has tracked students from primary school asking them about their expectations of high school transition and then followed them on to high school to ask about their actual experiences (Akos, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992). From an examination of the empirical literature in the field, it appears that only one study was conducted on students' experiences of transition while they were undergoing it during the first few weeks of high school. This was a study conducted over twenty years ago by Cotterell (1982).

Given the existing research in the field, a study that explored students' experiences of the first 10 weeks of their high school experience while they were undergoing transition was deemed an appropriate topic of investigation. The aim of this study, then, was to explore the nature of students' unique experiences when they enter high school for the first time. The researcher chose the first ten weeks or first term as the timeframe because it was seen as a critical time period to explore the phenomenon of transition coinciding with the first term of high school (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).

Another purpose of this study, as is the practice with the Doctor of Education degree, was to investigate an issue of relevance to the researcher in her place of work. The researcher, a high school teacher, was interested to explore students' experiences of entering high school for the first time. As a Year Adviser, she had first hand experience in helping such students and believed that the findings of a study of this nature might help to improve the transitional process of students in the school.

## **PHENOMENOLOGY: THE METHODOLOGY**

A phenomenological psychological research methodology was used to examine students' experience of transition into high school. Since phenomenology represents an effort to describe human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and a systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning of structures of the

lived experience (van Manen, 1997), this methodology was deemed appropriate for this study. Phenomenological psychology as propounded by Giorgi (1985a) was the methodology which guided the study.

Students were asked to describe their experiences of being in high school for the first time in the first ten weeks of high school, recording them in a journal which was collected at the end of each week and photocopied and returned the same day. In the tenth week the journal was collected for the final time. They recorded their experiences at least three times in the first six weeks and then at least twice in the last four weeks of journal entry. The objectives of the study outlined in Chapter 1, were met in the study. The objectives were:

- To comprehend student experiences of transition as they enter high school for the first time
- To arrive at an understanding of high school transition by turning to the lived experience of a group of first year high school students; and
- To investigate what students constitute as pleasant/interesting and unpleasant/difficult/disappointing/traumatic experiences during transition into high school

During the data collection and analysis stages, the researcher had to bracket her own presuppositions about transition, as is done with phenomenology. It was important for the researcher to suspend her presuppositions and knowledge of the empirical research on transition to ensure that the data collection and/or analysis process did not contaminate the process. This was achieved by the researcher suspending her biases and theoretical frames of reference. It needs to be acknowledged that the data was interpreted by the researcher and therefore the issue of eliminating bias completely is highly problematic.

Giorgi's (1985a) methodological process was followed very closely to explore the process of transition into high school. From this method, a specific statement representing each individual's experience and a general statement of essential

structures which synthesised all of the experiences representing the phenomenon of transition into high school as a lived experience were derived.

## **FINDINGS**

Seven essential themes were derived from the investigation of students' lived experience of transition into high school. These seven themes characterised the substance of each of the essential structures. Each of the themes is summarised below:

- Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school
- Schools support transition through programs and activities
- New procedures, locations and routines need to be learned in a new environment
- Learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning
- Feelings of confidence, success and achievement can enhance high school transition
- Homework/assignments are a necessary component of the high school curriculum
- Teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring

The findings in the current study were verified by much of the previous research done in the area of high school transitional experience. With that said, however, there were four key issues that emerged from the findings that provided an interesting and important contribution by the study regarding transition into high school. These four issues related to friendship, bullying, the teacher's role during transition, and homework and assessment tasks. Each of these is now briefly discussed.

## **KEY ISSUES**

### **Friendship during transition**

A very interesting finding in this study was the critical role friendship plays during transition into high school. Friendship groups changed for some of these students. It was easy for these students to make new friends in a large school even though some of them had lost their old and trusted friends. Transition into high school became a period for the end of existing friendship for some students and the beginning of new ones for many of these students. Change in friendship groups was therefore a key issue during transition into high school for some of these students. The importance of the socialisation aspect of schooling was underscored in this study.

### **Bullying during transition and the effect of senior students**

An interesting finding in this study was the little evidence of bullying. In fact, only three experiences of the reported 207 concerned a bullying incident. The school's strategy of using seniors as peer support leaders might have assisted in this way. The Year 7 students looked for guidance and support from these senior students so the potential bullies of the school, played a very different role.

### **Teachers' role during transition**

Another issue that arose from this study was the significant role of teachers in engaging students in school and as lifelong learners. Students who found transition easier were assisted by kind, helpful teachers who helped them get to know others in the class. Practical and student-centred lessons made learning fun, easier and less stressful for many students. Teachers who did little to engage students in learning made transition more difficult for these students. This study found that students enjoyed having many teachers and found that many teachers at this school understood their needs just as well as their primary teachers had done. This study reinforced the role of teachers in this school in helping students during transition and underscored their role in empowering students to be committed to lifelong learners' principles.

### **Homework and assessments**

Another issue of significance in this study was that students found the volume of homework and assessment tasks given was beyond their capacity to complete. An important finding was that the homework was not difficult. Students found there was a lack of coordination among teachers that resulted in being given excessive homework. Previous studies conducted in Australia (Cotterell, 1982; Hatton, 1995; Johnstone, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Yates, 1999) have shown that students in the first year of high school find there are excessive amounts of homework as well. The four key issues identified here have implications for practice. This is discussed next.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

An interesting implication of the findings of this study for middle schooling policy is that students in this study showed they do not have a problem with a large school population in fact, this gave them an opportunity to meet a greater number of people and form friendships with so many others. Students found transition-based activities organised by the school helped them meet and form new friendships easily. The implication here is that educational institutions may consider not to be divided into smaller clusters of Years 7 to 9 and 10 to 12 if other measures are put into place to ensure that students are not isolated in the new environment. An important contribution of this study, then, is that the traditional school with Years 7 to 12 in one campus/building can still function just as effectively as middle schools if administrators and teachers support students during transition into high school by engaging them in activities that integrate them fully into the new environment. From students' reflections, it appeared that the school supported and helped them integrate into the new environment through its activities such as peer support, using senior students as buddies, Year 7 Camp and lunch time activities.

This study showed that students needed to make new friends as they lost their old long-term friends. The implication here is that students could lose their friends from primary school and schools need to create opportunities to promote new friendship groups among these students. During transition, friendship groups change and

schools need to provide the necessary support to ensure students can make new friends easily. The transition activities in this school helped these students through its peer support program, lunch-time activities and Year 7 Camp to form new friendships when they lost their old friends.

According to the students in this study, students need a familiar face to be comfortable in a new environment. The implication for teachers and school administrators is that more thought should be given to this matter when allocating students into classes. Most schools however, place students according to academic ability not primary school groups. It seems that a way of overcoming this issue would be for schools to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs of students when placing them into class groups. In this school this was not the case as the top sixty students were placed in graded classes and the others randomly. Through classroom activities organised by their teachers, many of these students made new friends. This helped these students although it would have been less challenging for many if they had a familiar face in the class right from the beginning.

In terms of the current policy literature, many teachers and policy makers note that transition is considered problematic for adolescents (Akos, 2002; Barratt, 1998; Cotterell, 1978; Cumming & Cormack, 1996; Green, 1987; Hatton, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1995; Legters & Kerr, 2001; Mizelle, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). However, this study has shown that not everything about transition was problematic. The implication is that there were many aspects of transition that were positive. For example, being in a large school was viewed as a good thing since it meant that many children occupied the school and therefore there were many potential friends. Students also appreciated being taught by many teachers and supported by them if they needed it. Seniors were very helpful - buddies and not bullies. Many students were pleasantly surprised that, unlike their expectation, they and their friends were not bullied. Teachers in high school were also found to be just as understanding of their needs as their counterparts in primary school even though they had the students for a shorter period of time. New subjects made learning interesting and so did the teaching approaches used by teachers. There were more practical lessons in high school which made learning easier than anticipated. The contribution of this study to the literature is that transition can be a pleasant

experience if schools can provide support through its program/activities. In this school, transition had positive effects mainly because of the involvement of the teachers and the seniors. The lesson to take from this study is that transition is likely to be more positive for many students if teachers and administrators provide suitable activities to meet their needs.

A serious concern of all students in the study was the timetable being too difficult to understand. The timetable most likely needs to be reconsidered to ensure it is more user- friendly. This school made transition harder by coding the timetable and not teaching the students how to decode it when it was first issued. The implication here is that timetables are a problem that students have to overcome and they need to be student friendly to ease transitional problems. Schools possibly need to provide simple, easy to read timetables. In this instance, the school tried to provide the necessary support to ease transition through the peer support leaders who unfortunately were not able to explain the timetable to the satisfaction of all the students in the study.

In the current policy literature, the middle years of schooling have been identified as important years of schooling which could, if not managed correctly, result in disengagement and alienation of adolescents (Barratt, 1998; Cumming & Cormack, 1996). In the Middle Schooling policy literature, fewer teachers and teams of teachers have been recommended to teach students on the assumption that students will have problems adjusting to too many teachers after having one main teacher in primary school and in consequence would feel alienated. However, the implication of this study was that students did not mind that many teachers taught them because they were confident that they would be able to encounter at least one kind and helpful teacher among so many. By having many teachers they felt they were not stuck with one teacher all day especially if s/he was a nasty one. Therefore, an implication for practice is that there is a place for having many teachers teaching Year 7 students (the high school transition year in New South Wales) if teachers provide support for these students.

A further finding of this study was that teachers lacked consistency in terms of class rules and had different expectations for students. Thus, school administrators and

teachers need to be involved in the planning and implementation of a school-wide policy for class rules and student expectations in order to remove the confusion that currently exists among the students.

The study uncovered the lack of tolerance of some teachers to students being lost and therefore late to class. The implication here is that there needs to be a school policy for teachers to follow while students are still unfamiliar with the location of rooms in the school. Some students were unhappy with the teachers' lack of understanding in their not finding their classrooms. It seems that the school in question could have done more to alleviate this situation. Even with peer support leaders and teachers helping to direct to students to their respective classrooms during the first week, students continued to get lost. It took some students a couple of weeks to achieve this challenging task.

In this study, students found there was a lack of knowledge and coordination among staff regarding the work they were doing and assignments they were expected to undertake. Each teacher appeared to be working independently. A finding of the study was that during transition teachers lacked coordination and, as a result, according to these students they were disadvantaged with large volumes of work. The implication here is that there needs to be better coordination and discussion among Year 7 teachers so that this might help reduce overloading students with homework and assignments. These teachers could try to coordinate assignments and homework dates so that students might not be disadvantaged.

The Homework Policy in New South Wales (Department of Education and Training, 2002a) states that homework is a mandatory component of the curriculum. However, the amount and quality is not mandated. It can be seen from this study that students have reported that they had been given too large a volume of homework and work that seemed too easy for them. The implication here is that each teacher interprets the policy as individual and there does not appear to be a whole school approach operating. The school, therefore, was not assisting students during transition since it overloaded them with work while they were endeavouring to settle into this new environment. The school therefore, would most likely need to take a whole-school approach to this issue to reduce the problem of homework.

The next section now examines the theoretical implications of conducting a study utilising a phenomenological psychological research methodology.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

A phenomenological psychological research methodology was considered by the researcher as a novel and appropriate approach to the study students' experiences of high school transition. However, this methodology was not without its problems. For example, the decision to use journals presented some challenges. The researcher realised after collecting the journal entries after the first week that not all of the volunteer students were able writers of journals entries who could write descriptive and clear accounts of their experiences. Some of the entries were so brief (i.e. one or two lines) that they could not be used as data since Giorgi's (1985a) methodology of data analysis requires information-rich data. Another problem was that there was little opportunity for the researcher to talk with individual students regarding their entries apart from writing notes and comments on their work asking them to clarify and explain their ideas more fully. This improved the understanding of some data but in some cases students did not attempt to explain their experiences. The result was that some data could not be used. Although interviews are the most common data collection source used in phenomenological psychological studies, this approach was not feasible under school conditions and due to the age group because interviews would take about 45 and 60 minutes. These students could only be interviewed outside class time so as not to interrupt their school work. It was difficult to conduct these interviews outside school time because these students were only 12 years of age and therefore reliant on others for transportation. It would not have been ethical, in the researcher's opinion, to interview them at lunch because being new to the school they should be given every opportunity to meet others and not be taken away from their lunch time social activities.

Another issue was the sample size. The researcher initially decided on having no more than 10 participants for the study and decided to accept the first 10. However, when 18 participants showed interest, the researcher was not sure how many of the 18 would enter the school - the research site - the following year and accepted all the

volunteers. Finally 16 of the 18 students did attend the school. The researcher decided to accept all 16 as she was not aware of their writing ability and feared that some of the participants might not be proficient writers or might not wish to engage fully in the expected writing tasks, as required in this methodology. As it eventuated, some students did provide inadequate and limited data (i.e. one sentence as opposed to a rich description outlining the experience). By having a larger sample it was believed that there would be sufficient data for the study even if some students decided to withdraw from the study or leave the school. Therefore, the researcher decided a larger sample was needed in this case. Some researchers might consider the sample size of 16 not large at all; however, it is deemed more than adequate for phenomenological studies. A limitation of the sample size, however, is it precludes any generalisability of the findings.

These limitations aside, phenomenological psychological research methodology showed itself to be appropriate for studying an important human experience such as transition. A significant contribution of this study was that it used a methodology which tends not to be used commonly in educational research yet it does have the potential for unearthing lived experience by listening to the voices of students' themselves.

## **SUMMARY**

The chapter began with the purpose of the study which was to describe students' lived experience of transition into high school from a phenomenological perspective. In so doing the study placed at the centre of the research investigation students' unique voices of transition into high school. The next section discussed phenomenology as the methodology for the study and how it was conducted in this instance. The chapter then moved on to the findings of the study. There were seven essential themes that arose from this study which were discussed in that section.

The seven essential themes of this study were:

- Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school
- Schools support transition through programs and activities
- New procedures, locations and routines need to be learned in a new environment
- Learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning
- Feelings of confidence, success and achievement can enhance high school transition
- Homework/assignments are a necessary component of the high school curriculum
- Teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring

Four key issues arose from the discussion of the general description of these seven themes. The four key issues highlighted the role of friendship, seniors and teachers during transition and finally the issue of homework and assessments. A key finding of this study was that some students lost their old and trusted friends to others at high school and had to make new ones. The role of teachers was also underscored in this study. The socialisation aspect of schooling seemed to be important for students during transition. The implications of the study for practice and theory were finally discussed. This chapter concludes with recommendations for further research and recommendations for teachers and administrators for students' transition into high school.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

It is recommended that:

1. phenomenological psychological research methodology be used more widely in studies that seek to understand human experience
2. a study of this nature be carried out more widely in a range of schools and seek the experiences of both boys and girls
3. a study be conducted on evaluating the effectiveness of transition programs in schools to facilitate transition
4. a study on the role of friendship and its impact on academic achievement during transition be conducted
5. a study that explores the role of friendship during transition be conducted
6. a study on the influence of senior students on high school transition be conducted
7. a study be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of an integrated curriculum and team teaching for Year 7 students.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS**

The aim of this study was to describe students' experiences of transition while they live through it. The findings from this study come from one school and therefore they are not generalisable. However, it is still possible that the findings of this study may help teachers and administrators in other schools to re-evaluate their transition programs, policies and practices.

In the context of this study, the essential structures of the lived experience of transition into high school for the first time could give new meanings to the way transition is viewed by policy makers, teachers and administrators of school. The following recommendations are made in view of the findings of this study based on the essential structures that emerged from it.

It is recommended that:

1. schools are sensitive to the friendship needs of students when placing them into classes because familiar peers play a critical role in the first few days
2. senior students play a pastoral role in schools' transition programs as a means of assisting new students integrate into the environment
3. teachers and administrators be aware of the social aspect of schooling and not just the academic aspect and promote this through activities and programs that foster the development of friendship groups among students
4. teachers of Year 7 students are consistent in their use of school rules and expectations. Greater communication amongst Year 7 teachers should help to alleviate overloading students or setting assessment pieces that fall on similar days
5. some consideration be given to the finding in this study that showed that students are not always disadvantaged by being taught by a large number of teachers although some of the middle schooling literature advocates fewer teachers and teaching teams. What is critical is that teachers provide support and guidance for students. High schools can therefore, just as effectively, function in their existing framework (Year 7 to 12) without having smaller clusters if they promote transition programs that help students to integrate effectively and make friends easily in the new environment

6. teachers are sensitive to the possibility of students losing their old friends during transition and create opportunities to foster new friendships
7. a student friendly timetable be issued during the transition year to reduce the stress of transition
8. teachers be sensitive of the time needed by students to adjust to the new rules in the new environment
9. teachers be given the opportunity for professional development that focuses on adolescent curriculum and pedagogy
10. when homework is issued to students it must meet their academic needs and challenge them

## **CONCLUSION**

It is evident from this study that high school transition was experienced in a variety of ways by students. The study showed that high school transition can be a pleasant experience for some and less traumatic for others if there is sufficient support given to students by their peers, high school teachers and older peers. Support can be also provided through programs and targeted activities designed to enhance students' sense of belonging and reduce their fear of the new environment. This study has shown, therefore, that it rests in the hands of a school's community – peers, teachers and administrators - to make high school transition a smooth transitional experience for new high school students.



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**Appendix A: Copy of Letter Sent to Parents/Caregivers****LETTER TO PARENTS/CAREGIVERS**

Dear Parents/Caregivers

Date

I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Queensland University of Technology. As part of my doctoral studies, I am proposing to conduct a research project that uncovers and describes the experiences of students as they make the transition from primary school to high school. This study is about discovering what it is like to experience transition into high school while the students are experiencing it.

As a teacher at XX High School I have the opportunity to teach and support students at this school and would like to better understand the transition process as they experience it.

I would like to invite fifteen participants in total, who will be attending XX High School in Year 7 in the Year 2005. These students will be approached at their primary schools in Term 4, 2004 so that data collection can commence from the first day when students enter high school. I propose to collect data by asking students to write about their experiences of being in high school for the first time. Students will record entries in their journals at least three times per week in the first six weeks of the Term 1 and twice for the rest of that term. The journals will be kept by the participants until the end of Week 10 of Term 1. However, the journals will be collected at the end of each week, entries read by the researcher (me) and returned on the same day. The students will be asked to write about what it is like to experience transition from primary school to high school. All descriptions will be analysed and presented back to the students for their clarification and endorsement.

If the journal items should reveal any issues that indicate students' safety or well-being is in jeopardy, the researcher will be compelled to report her concerns to the appropriate personnel in line with the School's and Department of Education and Training's procedures.

Students who agree to participate in the study will be issued with consent forms and information about the study. Both participants and their parents or caregivers will be asked to sign the consent forms. Students' rights and privacy will be honoured throughout the study. If they wish to withdraw from the study at any time, they will be able to do so without comment or penalty.

I write this letter to seek your consent in allowing your child/ward to participate in this study. Please find attached 'Information For Participants' for further clarification regarding this study. I will be pleased to discuss or clarify any further questions you may have and I can be contacted after school hours at 02-99720381 or 0404950053 and at this email address: v.ganeson@student.qut.edu.au. If you do consent to your child/ward in participating in this study please complete the 'Research Participant Informed Consent Form' within the next two weeks and return it to the primary school.

Please be assured that research of this nature is being governed by strict ethical guidelines and ethical clearance from Queensland University of Technology and the Department of Education (NSW) has been achieved. If you require further information about the ethical aspects of this study, feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr Lisa Ehrich (QUT: 07 3864 3038) or the ethical clearance office at QUT (email: ethicscontact@qut.edu.au)

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely

Krishnaveni Ganeson

**Appendix B: Copy of Letter Giving Informed Consent by Research Participant****RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS INFORMED CONSENT*****Re: Students' Lived Experience of Transition into High School: A Phenomenological Study***

I am willing for my child/ward to participate in a study that investigates students' experiences into high school carried out by Krishnaveni Ganeson, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

The aims of this study and the nature of the participation have been clearly explained to me. I know that participation is voluntary and that my child/ward can withdraw from the project at any time. I understand that my child/ward will be asked to write about her experiences that describe what it is like for her during transition into high school in the first ten weeks at XX High School.

I understand the information provided by my child/ward will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify my child/ward with this study without my specific approval unless the personal safety and welfare of my child/ward is at risk.

I, hereby give permission to my child/ward to participate in the above while she is attending XX High School in 2005.

Name of Participant: (print name) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Caregiver: (print name) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix C: Table 4 Validation Process: Movement from Tentative Themes to Essential Themes

#### LEGEND FOR ESSENTIAL THEMES

- Theme 1: Peers are significant others who can help or hinder a smooth transition from primary to high school  
 Theme 2: Schools support transition through programs and activities  
 Theme 3: New procedures, locations and routines need to be learned in a new environment  
 Theme 4: Learning occurs through the academic, practical and extracurricular activities and some learning is more challenging than other types of learning  
 Theme 5: Feelings of confidence, success and achievement can enhance high school transition  
 Theme 6: Homework/assignments are a necessary component of the high school curriculum  
 Theme 7: Teachers' attitudes/abilities can affect student integration into high school and make learning fun or boring

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>A1</b>	A's mother accompanied her to school								✓
	A was delighted to see friends from primary school	✓							
	A found the timetable confusing but teachers explained it which made A feel better		✓	✓					
	Knowing friends from primary school helped to make A feel safe at high school	✓							
	A attended many classes on her first day				✓				
	A realised that schools have procedures and routine to learn			✓					
	Teachers helped A get to know other students in the class		✓						
	Lunch breaks were a time when A shared with her friends	✓							
<b>A2</b>	Friends helped A feel secure in high school	✓							
	A got lost but did not mind because she was with her friends	✓		✓		✓			
	Teachers played games to help students to get to know each other		✓					✓	
	A realised that school is not just for learning content but also for learning about other students		✓		✓				
	A found it easy to make new friends	✓	✓						

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>A3</b>	A realised that school could be fun when lessons were easy and interesting				✓			✓	
	A found her History teacher was too strict							✓	
	Older students swore at A and other Year 7s which A found upsetting	✓							
	A got lost easily and found it difficult to locate places			✓					
<b>A4</b>	A was pleased when there was no homework						✓		
	A enjoyed having practical lessons like Visual Art				✓				
	Extra curricular activities like Dance Club made school a fun place for A				✓			✓	
	A's friends made learning easy and enjoyable for her	✓							
<b>A5</b>	A enjoyed the guest speaker's presentation which was informative about Science				✓				
	A attended many subjects in high school where lessons were practical				✓				
	Teachers helped A to get to know her new friend better		✓					✓	
	A realised school is a place to learn content and to meet new friends		✓		✓				
	A loved high school because of the positive feelings its brings					✓			
<b>A6</b>	A found high school fun and interesting with interactive lessons							✓	
	A found her teachers were really nice							✓	
	A attended many different classes				✓				
	Teachers played a crucial role in making a lesson interesting and helped A to learn about friendship		✓					✓	
	A realised that school teaches her not just about content but also how to learn		✓		✓				
<b>A7</b>	A found her Peer Support leaders were helpful and informative	✓	✓						
	School was fun for A because the lessons were interactive and practical				✓			✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>A8</b>	A was delighted when her class worked cooperatively and efficiently	✓							
	A enjoyed working with friends as it made school a fun place to learn	✓							
	A found it difficult to understand her timetable			✓					
	A found it upsetting that her teacher got angry because she and the others forgot their book							✓	
	A was disappointed when her teacher had low expectations of the students in her class							✓	
<b>A9</b>	Swimming carnival was fun because A spent the day with her friends	✓			✓				
	A found school more meaningful and enjoyable because of co-curricular activities				✓			✓	
	Recognition of A's performance at the swimming carnival gave her a sense of achievement and belonging				✓	✓			
<b>A10</b>	A enjoyed school because the classes were fun and interactive				✓			✓	
	A realised that learning can occur through playing games		✓		✓				
	A had fun working together with her friends in class	✓							
	A enjoyed spending lunch with her friends at the Dance Club	✓							
	A found that a teacher's role is important in helping students succeed academically					✓		✓	
	A considered teachers who do not explain concepts well as annoying							✓	
<b>A11</b>	High school was great because A enjoyed the practical classes, the teachers and the environment				✓			✓	
	A found some subjects were challenging				✓				
	Teachers helped A realise she was not alone in experiencing changes in her life		✓					✓	
<b>A12</b>	Some of the books were too heavy for A to carry			✓					
	Working with friends made learning fun for A	✓							
	A was annoyed with her teacher for insisting that she keep a plain diary			✓				✓	
	A was confused because her teachers had different standards and rules							✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
A13	A realised that tests can be easier than she expected				✓				
	Some subjects in high school were easy making lessons more relaxing for A				✓				
	A realised that school was not only for learning content but also for participating in extra-curricular activities				✓				
	Working with a friend helped A participate in other activities	✓							
	Competitions made A nervous because she hoped to do well			✓	✓	✓			
A14	Learning content was part of schooling for A				✓				
	Peer recognition of success was crucial to A					✓			
	Supportive peer allowed A to participate in new activities	✓							
A15	A was annoyed her substitute teacher had different expectations and standards							✓	
	A did not mind homework as long as there was not too much						✓		
	A found lessons boring when they occurred twice in a day							✓	
	A found working with friends made learning more enjoyable	✓							
	It was easy to make friends because A joined the Dance Club		✓		✓				
	A found the timetable confusing because she was still getting mixed up with her subjects			✓					
	Lessons were fun when A worked on the computers							✓	
A16	A felt important when her work was recognised by her peers for being good					✓			
	A found the invited speaker interesting				✓				
	A realised that there was too much homework						✓		
	A's self esteem was boosted when others wrote nice things about her					✓			
	A considered it annoying when her teacher gave poor explanations							✓	
	A enjoyed nice teachers because they made lessons easier to understand							✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
A17	A found activity based or practical lessons more interesting and fun				✓			✓	
	A realised that lessons that were not challenging could be boring				✓			✓	
	Nice and helpful teachers made A like her subjects							✓	
	A did not mind some teachers being strict if their lessons were interesting							✓	
	A found puberty a serious matter that other students would also experience				✓				
A18	A enjoyed the activities at school when she had at least one friend with her	✓				✓			
	Teachers should create opportunities for A to make friends and meet new people		✓						
	Joining many activities helped A to make friends		✓		✓				
A19	Success made school enjoyable for A					✓			
	A's achievements in cross country made A feel good about herself					✓			
A20	A was disappointed by the actions of a person she thought was her friend	✓							
	Friendship was important for A but she felt that not everyone could be trusted	✓							
A21	A realised that true friends were always there to help her out of a difficult situation and looked out for each other	✓							
	A found her friends to be sensitive to her needs	✓							
A22	Teachers who were nice made learning easier for A							✓	
	A realised that co-operation was important for group work to be successful		✓	✓		✓			
	A found there were many group work activities in high school		✓	✓					
A23	Success made A feel clever/intelligent					✓			
	A realised that recognition given to her work made A feel confident and good about herself					✓			
	A enjoyed dance class because most of her friends were in her group and they worked well together	✓			✓				
	Friendship was key to high school survival for A because friends made school a fun place	✓							

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>A24</b>	A had fun during outdoor activities at Camp because they make school an enjoyable place		✓		✓				
	A found the food at camp sometimes palatable and other times bad								✓
	A was disappointed with the swearing because it was not a sign of maturity	✓							
	A realised that Camp could be stressful when she shared a cabin with people she did not get along with	✓							
	Friendship for A was about helping friends through their problems	✓							
	A was confident that her teacher could help resolve the problems faced by her friends							✓	
<b>B1</b>	B was confused by the numerous rooms in the school			✓					
	The timetable was confusing for B because it was hard to read and understand			✓					
	B realised that there were many new procedures and routines to learn			✓					
	B was worried of high school because it was easy to get lost and difficult to find places			✓		✓			
<b>B2</b>	B found school enjoyable when the lessons were interesting and interactive				✓			✓	
	B enjoyed playing games		✓		✓			✓	
<b>B3</b>	B found that although friendship is important not all friends could be easily understood	✓							
	B was disappointed with the actions of a person she thought was her friend	✓							
	B was grateful to one of her friend's for being very supportive	✓							
	B realised friendship could be fickle	✓							
<b>B4</b>	B realised that some friends were difficult to understand	✓							
	Friendship was important to B but sometimes it was difficult to maintain	✓							
	B was disappointed by the actions of a person she considered as her friend	✓							

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>B5</b>	B found that there was a lot of homework and assignments which were difficult				✓		✓		
	School was enjoyable for B when lessons were fun and interactive							✓	
	Some lessons were more difficult than others for B				✓				
	B was disappointed with herself for forgetting to submit her work					✓			
	B found it easy to get lost and difficult to find places in high school			✓					
	B realised her teachers were nice							✓	
	B liked having many teachers because B was not with one teacher all day							✓	
<b>C1</b>	C's friends made school more enjoyable and less scary	✓		✓					
	C was relieved that it was easy to make new friends	✓	✓						
	C attended many different classes				✓				
	C was delighted to know children from her primary school	✓							
	Recess breaks were times C shared with her friends	✓							
	C found the teachers were friendly							✓	
<b>C2</b>	C compared high school to a shopping centre because it was always crowded and busy			✓					
	C realised that there were many new procedures and routine to learn			✓					
	C found high school confusing because it was difficult to understand the timetable			✓					
	C was disappointed because she got lost easily and had difficulty finding places in high school			✓					
<b>C3</b>	Some subjects were more challenging than others to C				✓				
	C found subjects that were easy were good while subjects that were hard were bad				✓				
	C realised that some students in other year levels were not always helpful	✓							
	C concluded that high school is a new, unfamiliar environment which took time getting used to			✓					
<b>C4</b>	C was disappointed by the actions of people she thought were her friends	✓							
	C was excited that it was easy to make new friends	✓	✓						

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
C5	C did not mind homework when it was not difficult						✓		
	C considered teachers who could not pronounce her name annoying							✓	
	C realised that there were many lessons to learn				✓				
C6	C found some teachers were mean							✓	
	C enjoyed the visit to museum and had fun				✓			✓	
	C liked high school and thought it was better than primary school because of the varying activities				✓				
	C realised that not all tests were difficult because she found the Literacy test easy				✓				
C7	C found other students' behaviour was sometimes strange because of Valentine's Day celebration								✓
C8	C enjoyed the swimming carnival because she did well in the events				✓	✓			
	Success gave C a sense of achievement					✓			
C9	C found the timetable confusing because it was difficult to understand			✓					
	C realised that there were many new and somewhat confusing procedures to learn about the school			✓					
C10	C thought high school was great because the students were treated to lunch		✓						
C11	C found there was a lot of work in high school				✓		✓		
	It was hard to catch up on missed work for C when she was away						✓		
	School was fun when C was with friends	✓							

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>C12</b>	High school was scary for C because it was easy to get lost and difficult to find places			✓		✓			
	C realised that there were many teachers in high school, some nicer than others							✓	
	C enjoyed school when lessons were interactive and interesting				✓			✓	
	To C school was interesting and challenging because there were many new subjects				✓				
	C was having fun in high school because there were many new people	✓		✓				✓	
	C found there was a lot of homework						✓		
	C needed to be organised to meet her educational challenges			✓	✓				
<b>D1</b>	D had difficulty in understanding the timetable so she got lost easily and could not find places easily			✓					
	There were many subjects to study in high school				✓				
	D found that there were many people in high school so it was easier to make friends	✓	✓	✓					
<b>D2</b>	D was scared about catching the train for the first time			✓		✓			
	A friend showed D what she had to do in order to catch the train	✓							
<b>D3</b>	D expected to be bullied and when she was not, she was surprised	✓				✓			
	Peer support leaders and seniors helped D find her way		✓	✓					
	D found high school confusing since there were many rooms to find			✓					
	D got lost easily			✓					
	D found the time table confusing to comprehend			✓					
	Some books are really heavy to carry for D			✓					
	D realised that lockers were really a good place for storing books			✓					
	There was too much homework/assignments given at one time for D to cope successfully					✓	✓		
	D had problems completing her homework because her sibling was a baby who cried a lot					✓	✓		
	D was disappointed that there were too many assignments to do at the one time						✓		
	D lost her best friend but found new friends in high school	✓							
	Some teachers were nice to D							✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
E1	E felt nervous on the first day of school when she arrived			✓		✓			
	Knowing friends from primary school helped to make E feel safe and confident on her first day	✓				✓			
E2	E had fun finding her way to her classes without help			✓		✓			
	E felt proud and a sense of achievement in receiving an award					✓			
	There were some subjects that E enjoyed more than others							✓	
E3	A broken mobile telephone upset E								✓
	E had fun in school because she learnt a new technique in Visual Art				✓			✓	
E4	E found the writing task in English very challenging				✓				
	E anticipated that the following day when she would be celebrating her friend's birthday would be a lot of fun	✓							
E5	E enjoyed shopping with her friends	✓							
	E found it fun to be with friends after school	✓							
E6	E enjoyed missing lessons because of a guest speaker				✓				
	E was sad to learn that her friend, X, had broken up with his girlfriend								✓
E7	E realised that there were many rules to remember such as bringing the sports uniform to school			✓					
	There were consequences that E had to face for forgetting things or being disorganised (eg no sport)			✓		✓			
	E did not enjoy certain school procedures (eg photos)			✓					
	Friends sometimes jump to the wrong conclusion for example that E was truanting school	✓							
	E liked school and would not consider truanting							✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>E8</b>	It was not too hard for E to make friends because there were so many students	✓	✓	✓					
	E was delighted that there were many teachers in a high school because some were strict while others were not							✓	
	E liked her uniform			✓					
	The subjects were not very difficult as E first thought				✓				
	E realised that the homework was not difficult but there was a lot of it						✓		
	Some books were really heavy to carry around for E			✓					
	E liked lockers because they were really good for storing books			✓					
	E had a boyfriend	✓							
<b>F1</b>	Knowing children from primary school made F feel better on her first day	✓				✓			
	Knowing that F's teacher did not know the school made F feel better							✓	
	F was annoyed that other students could be very noisy	✓		✓					
<b>F2</b>	F found it hard to concentrate in a noisy environment	✓		✓					
	Friends can help F by advising her to stay away from unpleasant people	✓							
	For learning to be pleasant and effective F realised that it was important to work in a group with people with whom she could get along	✓		✓					
	Homework was scary because it was something F was not used to					✓	✓		
<b>F3</b>	F was surprised that high school was an organised place			✓					
	F realised that she needed to be organised not to fall behind in her work			✓		✓			
	F found it a challenge to adapt to a new environment like an all girl school			✓					
	F found it difficult to locate rooms even with a map			✓					

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>F4</b>	F found that there were many different classes to attend in high school				✓				
	Subjects that were practical and where F learnt new things were more interesting				✓				
	Teachers were mainly friendly and helpful making learning easier for F		✓					✓	
<b>F5</b>	Camp was fun because it helped F make new friends and overcome her fears	✓	✓			✓			
	Because there are many students in the year, there were many F could choose from to become friends	✓	✓	✓					
	F enjoyed the disco making school a more enjoyable place								✓
<b>F6</b>	Because there were many students it was easy for F to make friends	✓	✓	✓					
	F realised it was not difficult to make friends if she introduced herself to others	✓		✓					
	F realised it took her some time before she knew the rooms			✓					
	F came to the conclusion that assignments were given at the beginning of the year						✓		
	Homework was not difficult for F and it was manageable					✓	✓		
	Being the youngest made F stay close to her friends for support	✓		✓					
	Finding a good role model was important for F	✓							
	F was delighted that high school was better than expected because most of the people were nice	✓		✓				✓	
	F liked her school uniform			✓					
<b>G1</b>	G felt that high school was scary because there were so many people			✓		✓			
	Friends made it easier for G to cope with difficult subjects like Maths	✓			✓				
	High school made G nervous because it was easy to get lost and difficult to find places			✓		✓			
	G found that there was a lot of homework						✓		

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>G2</b>	High school was a scary place since G was not familiar with the environment			✓		✓			
	A friend helped G to feel happy and less nervous at school	✓		✓		✓			
	High school made G nervous because she was not organised			✓		✓			
	G appreciated the support of friends	✓							
<b>G3</b>	G found it easy to make friends in high school	✓	✓						
	Year 7s have a special private area for breaks which G appreciated		✓	✓					
	The school has too many stairs so that G gets tired			✓					
	G enjoyed having many subjects because there was variety				✓				
	There were many subjects that G found more challenging than others				✓				
	G liked having many teachers because some were nicer than others							✓	
	G realised the homework was not difficult but there was a lot of it						✓		
	G completed the homework of some teachers before others					✓	✓		
<b>H1</b>	Knowing children from primary school made H feel better	✓							
	High school was scary for H because it was so different from primary school			✓		✓			
	H realised that there were more teachers in high school compared to primary school			✓					
<b>H2</b>	H realised the school was noisy because there were many students at high school			✓					
	People were nice so H made friends easily		✓						
	H found the teachers were pleasant to all the students							✓	
	It was easy for H to get lost because the high school was so big			✓					
<b>H3</b>	H was familiar with the school layout which made her feel good about high school			✓		✓			
	H liked her high school because people were good and there were no problems	✓				✓		✓	
<b>H4</b>	H did not enjoy doing Maths				✓				
	High school could be good when H was praised for her work					✓			
	H was not used to being in a single sex school because she missed the coeducational aspect of her primary school			✓					
	H found it easy to make friends	✓	✓						

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>H5</b>	H realised that students were required to move from room to room around the school			✓					
	H found that there were many teachers and lots of subjects in high school			✓	✓				
	H did not find the homework difficult						✓		
	H was frustrated that there was a lot of homework and not enough time to complete all of it					✓	✓		
	H liked high school							✓	
<b>I1</b>	'I' was excited about her first day at high school			✓					
	Peer support leaders made 'I' feel safe	✓	✓						
	The Principal and teachers were friendly which made 'I' feel safe at the school		✓					✓	
	High school was great because people were nice and they showed 'I' around when she was lost		✓	✓					
	'I' found the work easy for the moment				✓				
	'I' realised unlike primary school there were many books in high school to carry and they were heavy			✓					
	'I' found the many books very confusing for her			✓		✓			
	High school was fun because 'I' made friends easily	✓	✓						
<b>I2</b>	High school was fun because 'I' found it easy to make friends	✓	✓						
	Senior students were kind and helpful because they helped 'I' when she was lost	✓		✓					
	'I' realised it was important to know the school rules so she would not get into trouble for talking in the corridors			✓					
	It was important for 'I' to understand her friends so 'I' did not lose other old friends	✓							
	'I' looked forward to the new subjects in high school				✓				
<b>I3</b>	Games helped 'I' to get to know her peers and teachers better		✓						
	Learning was fun for 'I' when it was interactive and through playing games		✓					✓	
	It was easy to make friends because 'I' made many friends within a short time	✓	✓						

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>I4</b>	'I' was bullied by another student in the canteen and was upset about it	✓							
	A friend supported 'I' when she was upset and afraid	✓							
<b>I5</b>	'I' found the high school was big and easy to get lost			✓					
	Seniors were helpful and directed 'I' to her class when she was lost	✓		✓					
	'I' was embarrassed when she got lost because she felt like a 'baby'			✓					
	'I' was embarrassed when her teacher did not believe her reason for being late to class							✓	
<b>I6</b>	'I' found subjects like Maths difficult to understand				✓				
	'I' felt embarrassed to ask for help in front of her peers	✓				✓			
	'I' was pleased to find her teacher helpful and taught her after the lesson							✓	
<b>I7</b>	'I had a good time at camp		✓						
	'I' was upset that unpleasant incidents could and do occur								✓
	'I' was confused about the alleged actions of a friend	✓							
	'I' felt that trust was important in friendship	✓							
<b>I8</b>	High school was fun for 'I' because there were many different subjects				✓			✓	
	'I' found the subjects were not difficult because teachers were helpful				✓			✓	
	'I' realised that there was a lot of homework because there were many subjects						✓		
	High school was scary because 'I' felt like a baby in the school			✓		✓			
	It was easy to make friends because there were many people in high school	✓	✓	✓					
	'I' resolved her problems with another student to her satisfaction	✓							
	High school was scary because 'I' felt like a baby in the school			✓		✓			

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>J1</b>	The first day of high school did not meet J's expectations because she found it confusing			✓		✓			
	J found high school confusing because the timetable was not user friendly			✓					
	The timetable was confusing and hard to comprehend for J even with the help of a diary			✓					
	J was proud to be able to find her way around the school					✓			
	J felt she was getting used to the environment in the high school			✓		✓			
<b>J2</b>	Teachers fetched J to her classes in the first few days		✓					✓	
	J was displeased that the teachers expected the students to be more independent and find their own way to classes			✓				✓	
	J realised that there were different ways to get to the same place because the school was big			✓					
	Students helped J by showing the way	✓		✓					
	The school map was confusing because J found it hard to locate places using the map			✓					
<b>J3</b>	J decided that the school's layout and design needed improvement			✓					
	The school had too many stairs making it difficult for J to move from class to class, ramps or level would be more suitable for all students			✓					
	J felt that the rooms were poorly numbered			✓					
	The school needed to be spread out on a larger location because J realised there was limited space at the moment			✓					
<b>J4</b>	J did not understand the point of celebrating Valentine's Day particularly in a girls' school			✓					
<b>J5</b>	There were too many stairs in the school making movement between classes difficult for J			✓					
	J felt that the lockers for Year 7s were poorly located			✓					
<b>J6</b>	J found it a challenge to locate rooms in the school			✓					
	It was hard for J to remember as well as to be organised to meet learning deadlines because there was too much work			✓	✓	✓	✓		
	J realised that there was too much work and the work was not spread out				✓		✓		

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>J7</b>	J found some books were really heavy to carry			✓					
	J suggested that disks could replace textbooks, to reduce the risk of students having back problems			✓					
<b>J8</b>	J was bored with some subjects because of the way they were taught (eg Visual Art).							✓	
<b>J9</b>	It took some time before J could understand the timetable			✓					
	J realised that she had to be organised in high school to complete her homework			✓		✓	✓		
	J liked having many teachers and they were subject specialists			✓				✓	
	J disliked the numerous stairs she had to face everyday at school			✓					
	J found it easy to make friends in high school	✓	✓						
<b>K1</b>	High school was a great place where K could successfully achieve the HSC					✓			
	K found it easy to make friends at high school	✓	✓						
	High school was like a race to K			✓					
<b>K2</b>	K made a new friend who was in Year 8	✓							
	K was shocked by the rude behaviour of some high school students			✓					
<b>K3</b>	K realised that there were new procedures to learn about in high school			✓					
	K got into trouble for not remembering her uniform			✓					
	Teachers were kind because they forgave K when she forgot to bring her sports uniform to school							✓	
	K had fun with her friend during lunch	✓							
<b>K4</b>	K was bored because she watched and did not participate in the swimming carnival				✓				
<b>K5</b>	K felt terrible to be teased and picked on by others	✓							
	K was embarrassed when other students watched her being told off by her peers	✓							
	K was told not to report the teasing or she would be beaten up	✓							

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>K6</b>	K felt a sense of achievement when she won the competition and received an award					✓			
	K enjoyed some lessons because she had fun in Physical Education and Geography							✓	
	It was easy to make friends in high school because K made a new friend	✓	✓						
<b>K7</b>	K was surprised that high school was not that scary because it was easy to make friends and teachers were good	✓	✓			✓		✓	
	K had difficulty finding the way around the school at first			✓					
	K realised that there were many assignments and they were challenging				✓		✓		
	Some subjects were challenging to K especially the new subjects like Science and Languages				✓				
	Being the youngest in school meant K was not respected as she had been in primary school	✓		✓		✓			
	K felt that it was good to have many teachers because she only had to spend a short time with a bad one							✓	
	It was easy for K to make friends in high school because there were many students	✓	✓	✓					
	Friendship groups change in high school, which K did not expect	✓							
					✓				
<b>L1</b>	There were many different classes to attend				✓				
	Teachers were friendly and helpful and this made L feel comfortable					✓		✓	
	Helpful teachers made learning easier		✓					✓	
	L wanted to make friends soon	✓							
<b>L2</b>	L realised that school could be a lonely place without friends	✓							
	L enjoyed Design and Technology because she liked the teacher							✓	
	L learnt that there were rules of behaviour to remember in certain special rooms			✓					
	L found some lessons were more interesting because they were interactive				✓			✓	
	L's teacher helped her make friends through 'getting to know you' games		✓					✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
L3	School was enjoyable for L because the lessons were interesting and interactive				✓			✓	
	L felt a sense of achievement when her team won a few games in Physical Education					✓			
L4	L realised that school was not just about textbook work but also about the real world with speakers like Dr. K				✓				
	L enjoyed missing out on lessons during a guest speaker's talk				✓				
	L had fun during some lessons like Visual Art and Physical Development, Health and Physical Education because the lessons were practical lessons and interactive				✓			✓	
L5	L realised that school was about learning new skills for example in Science L learnt to use the Bunsen burner				✓				
	L had some uninteresting lessons that day								
L6	L enjoyed Peer Support activities because they taught her survival skills		✓						
	L enjoyed lessons which were not too challenging				✓				
	L enjoyed lessons where she learnt new skills like how to write songs				✓				
	L was excited when she was chosen to represent the school in water polo because it gave her a sense of achievement				✓	✓			
L7	L enjoyed school when her friends were there to accompany her	✓							
	L found the lessons to be fun when the tasks were challenging and interesting				✓			✓	
	L was bored when the activities were uninteresting							✓	
L8	The swimming carnival was fun because L participated in it and enjoyed watching the Year 12s swimming with inflatable toys				✓				
	L enjoyed watching the teachers swim in the carnival and join in the fun on the day							✓	
	Participation in activities made school enjoyable for L				✓				
L9	Lessons which were easy were not necessarily interesting for L				✓			✓	
	Some lessons have too much work to be interesting and L lost interest doing them							✓	
	L found the practical and interactive lessons more interesting and challenging				✓			✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>L10</b>	L had fun in school when the lessons were interesting, practical and challenging				✓			✓	
	L enjoyed lessons that were challenging and not too easy				✓				
<b>L11</b>	L found the literacy test easy				✓				
	School was very good for L because the test was easy and L did group work to complete a practical and interesting task in Music				✓			✓	
<b>L12</b>	School was enjoyable for L when learning took place in a fun environment							✓	
	L realised that co-curricular activities made school interesting				✓			✓	
<b>L13</b>	L realised that assessments and tests were part of high school life			✓			✓		
	L did group work in Physical Education		✓		✓				
	L learnt new skills in Design and Technology				✓				
	L found easy lessons were boring because they lacked challenge				✓			✓	
	Some lessons in school for L involve practical and fieldwork				✓				
<b>L14</b>	L was absent from school for the first time because of a dental appointment								✓
	Friends are special to L because she bought her friend a birthday present	✓							
<b>L15</b>	L found lessons where teacher used the same teaching methodology uninteresting like using flashcards repeatedly							✓	
	L felt a sense of achievement when her group was awarded the top mark in Music					✓			
	School was enjoyable when L learnt new skills and new information				✓			✓	
<b>L16</b>	L was excited to be part of the school band and play an instrument					✓			
	L felt a sense of enjoyment and achievement in learning new skills in Design and Technology which she could show others					✓		✓	
	High school was scary because of the spate of thefts happening at school which was a new experience to L					✓			
	L did not want to be alone at lunch	✓							
	L's friends were caring and supportive because they did not like L to be alone at lunch	✓							
	L caved in to peer pressure by joining the Dance Club	✓				✓			

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>L17</b>	L was disappointed that Peer Support leaders could sometimes forget their obligations and duties		✓						
	L met other students during Peer Support when her group had to combine with another group	✓	✓						
	L enjoyed Science because her lessons were practical				✓			✓	
	L did not like reading a book				✓				
	L found high school different and better than primary school			✓					
<b>L18</b>	School was full of surprises like L being placed in the top category in cross country					✓			
	L felt a sense of achievement in Design and Technology for being able to make a sewing bag					✓			
	It was a pleasant surprise for L not to have any homework in Maths						✓		
	L was pleased that she had joined the Dance Club				✓				
<b>L19</b>	L did well on cross country training					✓			
	L enjoyed her English class because her teacher read to her							✓	
	L enjoyed lessons where she learnt new skills like using a thermometer				✓			✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>L20</b>	High school was a challenging place for L because there were many steps and it was difficult to locate rooms			✓					
	L was annoyed because there was a lot of homework although, the homework was not difficult						✓		
	The amount of homework has increased over the weeks for L						✓		
	L felt helpless when she needed other older students to show her the way	✓		✓		✓			
	It took time for L to know the school better			✓					
	L realised that there were many teachers in high school			✓					
	L liked having many teachers because she did not spend the whole day with one teacher							✓	
	L liked having many different subjects in high school				✓				
	High school is different from primary school because there are many teachers and more students			✓					
	L found it easier to make friends in high school because there were more students	✓	✓	✓					
	L felt helpless being referred to as “cute” by other older students especially since she was her school captain last year	✓		✓		✓			
<b>M1</b>	M found high school confusing because there were different classes, teachers in high school			✓	✓				
	High school was confusing because it was not easy for M to find her way around			✓					
	It was difficult for M to find rooms in the school because the map was not easy to read			✓					
	Peer Support leaders were helpful showing M the way to the train station and helping her catch the correct train	✓	✓						
	High school was different from primary school because there were many new procedures and routines for M to learn like bell-times, train times			✓					

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>M2</b>	M found high school less confusing once she knew her way around			✓					
	High school was interesting because M liked to learn many Languages				✓				
	M preferred high school to primary school because there were many teachers so it was easier for M if she did not like a teacher			✓					
<b>M3</b>	There were a number of lessons which M found interesting because they were new to her				✓				
	M found Physical Education a challenge				✓				
	M enjoyed the new subjects she learnt in high school				✓				
	It was difficult for M to find her way around the school			✓					
	M was confident that she would soon know the class locations			✓		✓			
<b>M4</b>	There were many different subjects in high school which were not available to M in her primary school				✓				
	M enjoyed high school because she found the work more challenging and fun				✓			✓	
	M did not enjoy running to catch her transport home on Tuesdays when school was dismissed earlier			✓					
	The timing of M's bus was better in primary school			✓					
<b>M5</b>	M found the guest speaker informative and made school a more interesting place				✓				
<b>M6</b>	There were many routines in high school for M to learn like the timetable and the five lessons a day routine			✓					
	M realised that primary and high school were very different because of the movement of people from one class to another			✓					
	In High School, Year 7s are the youngest and get pushed around a lot	✓		✓					
	M found the hallways were crowded and hot unlike her primary school			✓					
<b>M7</b>	M decided that high school involved a lot of hard work				✓				
	The HSC M realised was a stressful and difficult exam				✓				
	Past students, M thought gave good study tips to present Year 12s			✓					

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>M8</b>	High school was fun for M when there were practical lessons				✓			✓	
	M learnt new skills in Science				✓				
	M was in pain when she burnt her finger during a science experiment			✓					
<b>M9</b>	M enjoyed the swimming carnival because some students dressed in ridiculous costumes				✓				
	M had a great experience being a part of the winning team					✓			
	M was surprised that the high school swimming carnival was more competitive than primary school carnivals			✓		✓			
<b>M10</b>	M found school a routine			✓					
	M liked her Peer Support leaders because they were funny	✓	✓						
	Peer Support leaders taught many things to M such as what to do when bullied		✓						
<b>M11</b>	M found school exciting because of the extra curricular activities organised like the disco				✓				
	M enjoyed the Disco because the students were well-behaved and no one was rough				✓				
<b>M12</b>	M's teachers helped her allay her fears about the Literacy test							✓	
	School was fun when M did group work with others		✓					✓	
<b>M13</b>	M found the Literacy test quite easy				✓				
	M was surprised at how quiet the students were during a test, following high school rules			✓					
	M was surprised at how quiet the students were during a test, following high school rules			✓					
<b>M14</b>	Not all excursions were interesting for M because she had visited this place before				✓			✓	
	M realised activities that were not new lacked challenge				✓				
	M enjoyed playing with her group in the Toys Section at the museum							✓	
<b>M15</b>	M concluded that assignments were part of high school						✓		
	M chose a fast moving piece of music for the gymnastics routine				✓				
	School taught M to work in groups		✓	✓					
	M learnt about puberty in Health				✓				
<b>M16</b>	Practical lessons made school an interesting and fun place for M				✓			✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>M17</b>	M learnt new skills in Design and Technology				✓				
	Practical activities made learning enjoyable and fun for M				✓			✓	
	M was disappointed when she was not able to represent the school in rugby because this clashed with her other activities					✓			
	M felt a sense of achievement when she did well in a practice test					✓			
	Teachers helped M achieve her potential by encouraging her					✓		✓	
<b>M18</b>	M realised that outdoor activities are a part of Physical Education				✓				
	M found running cross country events were physically tiring				✓				
	M improved her time the second time she participated in the cross country event				✓	✓			
	M learnt new skills like packing up a trampoline				✓				
<b>M19</b>	M was excited about the prospect of the Year 7 camp		✓						
	M's teacher provided important information they needed regarding the camp							✓	
	M felt that sometimes there was too much homework in high school						✓		
<b>M20</b>	M found that there was too much homework given over the holidays						✓		
	M realised that in the last week before the holidays everyone was more relaxed at school	✓						✓	
	There was too much homework for M so M had to wake up early to complete her homework						✓		
	M found that the homework was not too difficult						✓		
	The subjects were more interesting and challenging for M				✓				
	There were new subjects in high school which M liked learning				✓				
	There were many teachers in a high school which M liked			✓				✓	
	Some teachers were good and M could go to them for help							✓	
	The school was bigger and had many stairs for M			✓					
	There were more new people to make friends with in high school for M	✓		✓					

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
N1	The first day of high school was scary because N was uncertain of the day's events			✓		✓			
	When N found a friend she was not so scared	✓		✓		✓			
	N made a friend easily when she did not have any	✓	✓						
	N enjoyed lessons which helped her to know others in the class		✓					✓	
	N was given her first piece of homework						✓		
	N spent recess and lunch sharing experiences with her friends	✓							
	The school made sure N got home safely	✓	✓						
N2	N was finding it easier to find her rooms			✓					
	It was easy for N to make friends	✓	✓						
	N was enjoying school because she was having fun with her new friends	✓							
N3	N had fun looking for class rooms			✓					
	N was referred to as a 'little Year 7' because she was the youngest in the school which she resented	✓		✓					
	N was enjoying school because she had new friends	✓							
N4	N decided school was a place not just to learn content but a place to make friends and socialise		✓	✓	✓				
	N was given a lot of homework in English						✓		
	N had fun learning new words which were challenging in Language				✓			✓	
	Playing games in Maths made it enjoyable for N		✓					✓	
	N realised that learning could take place through games and it was more enjoyable		✓					✓	
	Rules, N realised were important and must be learnt			✓					
N5	Uninteresting lessons seemed to go on forever for N							✓	
	N's substitute teacher's voice was driving her crazy and she was relieved when the lesson ended							✓	
	N did not like attending two periods of History							✓	
	Some subjects were enjoyable for N because the teacher made them more interesting							✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>N6</b>	N found Maths and History boring							✓	
	N found lessons like Music and Visual Art interesting because she had fun							✓	
	Days that were boring drag on for N							✓	
<b>N7</b>	N was bored with Maths and Design and Technology							✓	
	N found practical subjects, like PE, particularly enjoyable				✓			✓	
	N wished she did not have to attend some uninteresting lessons							✓	
	N met a girl who was funny and cool	✓							
	N was bored during lunch break because it was too long			✓					
<b>N8</b>	Special assemblies are a part of the school functions yet quite boring for N				✓			✓	
	Although assembly was boring, it meant N missed out on Maths				✓				
	Friends are important during break time because N missed them when she could not locate them	✓							
	N noted that was a lot of homework in English						✓		
	N had fun weeding the garden in Science				✓			✓	
	N found Design and Technology boring							✓	
<b>N9</b>	N felt a sense of achievement because she was able to complete her homework					✓	✓		
	N found many subjects uninteresting				✓			✓	
	N had too much time during recess			✓					
	N enjoyed being with her friends at lunch time	✓							
	N enjoyed playing a game during Maths		✓						
<b>N10</b>	N enjoyed the swimming carnival and had fun				✓				
	N won three events in the swimming carnival which gave her a sense of achievement and recognition					✓			
	N was proud to represent her House					✓			

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>N11</b>	School can be exhausting			✓					
	N enjoyed some classes including Human Society and Its Environment, Visual Arts and Maths							✓	
	N felt a sense of achievement when she wrote a song in Music that the teacher recognised as the second best in the class					✓			
	N found that there was too much homework in Maths that it worried her friends						✓		
<b>N12</b>	N found Maths boring							✓	
	Some lessons were interesting when N learnt new skills like drawing diagrams in Science				✓				
	N enjoyed lunch and the food sold at school								✓
<b>N13</b>	N enjoyed the excursion because she missed out on normal lessons				✓			✓	
	N had a good time with friends on the excursion	✓							
	The bus ride to the museum was fun for N because she could catch up with her friends	✓							
	N realised that learning could be fun taking place outside the school environment				✓			✓	
<b>N14</b>	N found lessons where she played games more interesting		✓					✓	
	Peer Support helped N meet more people		✓						
	Some lessons such as Maths and Design and Technology were not enjoyable to N							✓	
<b>N15</b>	N liked Tuesday because the school hours were shortened so that teachers could have a staff meeting			✓					
	N sat next to talkative girls in History to help her survive this boring class	✓						✓	
	A girl in N's class did not like her and N did not know why	✓							
	N was bored in Maths and could not think properly							✓	
<b>N16</b>	N could not differentiate between the twins in her class								✓
	N enjoyed Science because she learned how to measure the mass of air				✓				
	N enjoyed the A Factor, a talent competition, at Lunch				✓				
	N found the subject of puberty 'gross' and did not enjoy viewing a video on it				✓				

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
N17	N enjoyed her Maths class because the work was easy				✓				
	N enjoyed Physical Education							✓	
	N practised her routine in Physical Education				✓				
	N missed seeing most of her friends during recess	✓							
	N enjoyed learning a new skill in Design and Technology				✓				
	N enjoyed watching the talent competition, A Factor because she liked the winner				✓				
N18	N realised that excursions were a part of the school curriculum				✓				
	N enjoyed racing her friend to class and felt good that she won					✓			
	N threaded the sewing machine which she found challenging				✓				
	N found Maths lessons meaningless				✓				
N19	N was absent from school because of illness								✓
N20	N was excited about the Year 7 Camp		✓		✓				
	N attended the Camp and stayed in a cabin with some friends	✓							
	N enjoyed participating in many activities including swimming and other physical activities				✓				
	At Camp, N participated in a Talent competition and acted in a skit with others				✓				
	Camp was fun because the activities were fun to N		✓		✓				
	Being at the camp provided N with many opportunities to be with friends and enjoy their company	✓	✓						
N21	N was embarrassed for not being able to tie her shoe lace					✓			
	N enjoyed Visual Arts where she improved her painting				✓	✓			
	N found Maths and History boring							✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
N22	High school for N was about making new friends	✓	✓						
	There were many new subjects in high school that made high school challenging to N			✓	✓				
	There were many teachers that N found it difficult to remember their names			✓					
	High school is scary because it was a new environment for N			✓		✓			
	N found that high school could be scary because it was easy to get lost and difficult to find places			✓		✓			
	N was disappointed that high school was about losing her old friends	✓							
	N was relieved that high school teachers were more understanding and helpful to Year 7s than primary school teachers							✓	
	N felt physically small and had no position of authority being the youngest year in the school	✓		✓		✓			
	There was a lot of homework in high school but N felt the work was not difficult						✓		
	There were many subjects in high school so N needed to be organised to carry the right books			✓	✓				
	High school could be scary if N did not get the right books and carry them with her			✓		✓			
	The Camp helped N overcome her fear of heights		✓		✓	✓			
	N's friends supported and helped her	✓							
	O1	O found the Peer Support leaders friendly	✓	✓					
O used recess breaks as a time for sharing with friends		✓							
Teachers played name games for O and other students to get to know each other in the class			✓					✓	
O learned about many things she would be covering in her subjects during the year					✓				
O decided school was fun and interesting because many of the teachers were really nice								✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>O2</b>	It was difficult for O to find rooms in a new environment and easy to get lost			✓					
	O tried to be helpful but it backfired when she got into trouble with her teacher for arriving late to class			✓				✓	
	There were many rules and procedures for O to learn about high school			✓					
	O enjoyed most of her classes							✓	
	O was grateful that she and her friends had not been bullied at school	✓							
<b>O3</b>	O found her way around the school and felt proud about it since others continued to get lost			✓		✓			
	O enjoyed school because the classes were fun and interactive							✓	
	O and her friend received a merit certificate for coming second					✓			
<b>O4</b>	O realised that learning can occur through outside speakers				✓				
	O was pleased she got transport to the front of the house			✓					
<b>O5</b>	Learning was enjoyable when O was taught new skills				✓				
	Practical lessons were fun and challenging for O				✓			✓	
<b>O6</b>	O received a rose from her friends on Valentines Day	✓		✓					
	O found the classrooms were very cold in the morning			✓					
	O realised that there was not too much homework in high school						✓		
	O was given one month to work on an English project						✓		
<b>O7</b>	O undertook a test for English			✓					
	O found special assemblies could sometimes be uninteresting				✓				✓
	O was nostalgic about her primary school			✓					
	O's extra curricular sporting activities kept her busy from schoolwork				✓				
<b>O8</b>	O sat the state-wide Literacy test			✓					
	O was pleased to find some tests could be easy				✓				
<b>O9</b>	O found that learning could be done outside the classroom on fieldtrips and excursions				✓				
	O was proud to see a previous high school student's work displayed at the museum					✓			

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>O10</b>	Administrative errors could happen in a school (i.e. O received two bus passes)			✓					
	O practised a routine in Physical Education because she was going to be assessed on it				✓				
<b>O11</b>	School was fulfilling when O was achieving well in assessments like the Physical Education routine					✓			
	Practice could make O's group perform better in an assessment				✓	✓			
<b>O12</b>	O was absent from school due to a late night								✓
	O had fun at a concert								✓
	Assessments were part of schooling O realised			✓					
	Practising was an important part of learning for O				✓				
	Administrative errors could be annoying (i.e. O received two extra bus passes)			✓					
<b>O13</b>	School was fun for O because she learnt new skills such as making key tags				✓			✓	
	O enjoyed the lesson because she had not experienced anything like this before				✓				
<b>O14</b>	O was disappointed she could not participate in rugby due to an injury				✓				
	A student in Year 9 was rude to O	✓							
	O helped her friend recruit students to play in a rugby team	✓							
<b>O15</b>	In high school was enjoyable because O learnt more skills than in primary school like collage making				✓				
	O was proud of her achievement because she learnt to make an effective looking collage				✓	✓			
<b>O16</b>	O participated in cross country runs and achieved places on both occasions				✓	✓			
	O felt a sense of achievement when she beat Year 8s in the cross country run					✓			
<b>O17</b>	O realised that high school was about learning new skills like packing up equipment				✓				
	O found some skills were difficult to understand and grasp and were challenging even for teachers				✓				

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>O18</b>	School was exciting for O with fun activities like the Year 7 Camp		✓						
	O was sorry for her peers who would miss out on the school camp	✓	✓		✓				
<b>O19</b>	Activities in high school made it enjoyable for O				✓				
	Camp was fun because O participated in challenging activities				✓				
	O realised school was not just about learning content, it was also about character building, leadership and teamwork		✓		✓				
	O felt that the teachers were very encouraging by participating in the activities with them		✓					✓	
	Outdoor activities helped O build self-confidence				✓	✓			
<b>O20</b>	O and her class were rewarded by seeing a video					✓		✓	
	O found the topic of puberty 'gross'				✓				
	It was less embarrassing to O to have a female teacher teach Physical Development than a male teacher							✓	
	O participated in cross country training				✓				
<b>O21</b>	O enjoyed PE							✓	
	O loved having many subjects in high school because there was variety and it made learning fun				✓			✓	
	O liked having many teachers because there were nice ones who could help her							✓	
	After time O could find her way around the school			✓					
	Being the youngest in the school meant O did not have as many leadership responsibilities unlike the previous year	✓		✓					
	There was too much homework given in high school for O to complete but it was not difficult work						✓		

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>P1</b>	P's mother took her to school and walked with her inside								✓
	Teachers and other students showed P and her class the way to rooms	✓	✓					✓	
	Teachers were helpful		✓					✓	
	P attended many different classes during her first day				✓				
	P was looking forward to learn how to cook, sew and work with plastics				✓				
	Knowing the names of others in P's class made her feel more confident		✓	✓		✓			
	P learned the names of other children in History		✓						
	P shared her lunch breaks with friends	✓							
	P's friends and sister showed her the way to the train station	✓							
	School was easier than what P had expected		✓		✓				
<b>P2</b>	High school can be a bit of a worry because it is easy to get lost and difficult to find places			✓					
	P and her sister caught a bus and train to school			✓					
	P enjoyed a number of lessons which were enjoyable and fun							✓	
	Seniors were helpful to P when she could not find her room	✓							
	Taking public transport to school was stressful to P so getting a lift was good			✓					
<b>P3</b>	School was fun because P finds her lessons interesting							✓	
	Teachers were good and interesting							✓	
	P was worried about taking public transport to school but now she was getting used to it			✓					
	There were many procedures to get used to for P			✓					
<b>P4</b>	School was enjoyable because the lessons were fun and interactive							✓	
	Working with friends made school enjoyable for P	✓							
	Recess breaks were a time P shared and caught up with friends	✓							
	P found that it is difficult to find rooms and easy to get lost in high school			✓					
	It was less stressful taking public transport after a few days			✓					
	P realised that there was too much homework in high school						✓		

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>P5</b>	P made new friends in high school	✓							
	It was important for P to build a relationship with teachers and approach them out of class if help was needed							✓	
	It was easier to approach teachers if P liked them							✓	
	School was fun to P when her good work was recognised and rewarded					✓			
	P was enjoying high school							✓	
<b>P6</b>	P received her transport passes and thought she would enjoy using all of her new cards			✓					
	P found the house meeting informative because the swimming carnival was discussed				✓				
	P was excited about the swimming carnival				✓				
<b>P7</b>	P found the guest speakers interesting and informative which made school more interesting				✓				
	P felt a sense of achievement when she could do a handstand in Physical Education					✓			
	School taught P new skills								
<b>P8</b>	P found school fun and enjoyable because the lessons were interesting							✓	
	Lockers were really useful to P for storing books			✓					
	P realised that some books were really heavy to carry around all day			✓					
<b>P9</b>	P did not enjoy the amount of homework						✓		
	Some subjects, P realised gave more homework than others						✓		
	P liked the fact that there were many teachers, students and subjects in high school – more than in primary school			✓					
	The layout of P's primary school was different from the layout of the high school			✓					

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>P10</b>	Friendship was important in high school for survival because friends kept P company during breaks	✓							
	Friends were supportive by helping P when she did not understand her work	✓			✓				
	P had made many new friends in high school	✓							
	Breaks are a time for sharing with friends	✓							
	P was disappointed her friends did not give her a gift on Valentine's Day	✓							
<b>P11</b>	P felt a sense of achievement when she was awarded a merit certificate for her good work					✓			
	P worked with a friend on the experiment in Science		✓		✓				
	Peer Support helped P to get to know other Year 7 students and Year 11s	✓	✓						
<b>P12</b>	P enjoyed learning how to light a Bunsen burner				✓				
	P enjoyed her other lessons such as Language and Health and found the subjects interesting				✓			✓	
	Too much homework meant that P did not have time to watch television after school						✓		
<b>P13</b>	High school was confusing to P although she thought that confusion would not last too long			✓		✓			
	P was looking forward to the swimming carnival				✓				
	P liked school but did not think she would							✓	
	P got her photograph taken			✓					
	P liked her Physical Education teacher and the other lessons							✓	
<b>P14</b>	P did not participate in the carnival but enjoyed watching it all the same				✓				
<b>P15</b>	P felt a sense of achievement by building a human pyramid and a photograph of same was to be included in School Newsletter					✓			
	P enjoyed her lessons although nothing interesting happened				✓				

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>P16</b>	There were many practical subjects in high school and P enjoyed them				✓				
	P learnt new skills in high school				✓				
	High school was great except for the many stairs P had to climb to get to classes			✓					
	There was too much homework in high school for P						✓		
	P found her teachers were great							✓	
<b>P17</b>	P enjoyed lunch time with friends engaging in extra curricular activities	✓			✓				
	P completed the state wide Literacy test but did not find it difficult only tiring				✓				
	P practised her Physical Education routine and dancing routines with friends during lunch	✓			✓				
<b>P18</b>	School was fun to P because there were many activities like excursions				✓			✓	
<b>P19</b>	P enjoyed watching the A Factor with friends	✓			✓				
	P enjoyed Peer Support because her leaders were friendly		✓						
	In Visual Arts, P drew some pictures				✓				
	P enjoyed her classes because they were interesting							✓	
<b>P20</b>	There was too much homework at high school because P had many teachers each of whom gave homework			✓			✓		
	School was a fun place to P except for the homework						✓	✓	
<b>P21</b>	P did not participate in Dance during lunch because earlier in the day she hurt her knee				✓				
	P stayed away from school because of illness and watched TV								✓
<b>P22</b>	P was rewarded for being responsible and doing what the teacher requested					✓			
	P practised a routine with her group in Physical Education				✓				
	P enjoyed the day							✓	
<b>P23</b>	P enjoyed composing rap music and performing it during music				✓				
	P did not complete all of the work required in Visual Arts				✓				
	P fainted in her Technology class and went home early								✓

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>P24</b>	P cooked three kebabs in Design and Technology				✓				
	P examined test results in English				✓				
	P weighed random objects in Science				✓				
	P enjoyed the classes							✓	
<b>P25</b>	Peer Support was fun when playing games but P found it tiring at times		✓						
	P played a game show as part of a team in Christian Studies		✓	✓					
	P had a test in Maths			✓					
	P drew a playground area in Visual Arts				✓				
<b>P26</b>	P enjoyed her History excursion				✓			✓	
	It took P two trains to get home			✓					
	P caught an overcrowded train with her friends	✓		✓					
<b>P27</b>	P enjoyed listening to a visitor playing African music				✓			✓	
	Guest performances made school more exciting for P								
	There were many procedures and routines for P to understand like wet weather rooms			✓					
	P and her group tied in first position for their Physical Education routine					✓			
	Doing well in school gave P a sense of achievement					✓			
<b>P28</b>	P conducted experiments in Science				✓				
	P learned many new things such as what Easter was like in France and what happened to things when they were heated				✓				
	P had fun in Physical Education							✓	
	P's team tied for first place in a Physical Education game they played					✓			
	P was tired at the end of the school day				✓				
<b>P29</b>	Group work made learning enjoyable when P worked with her friends	✓						✓	
	P found practical lessons were more interesting than working from a textbook							✓	

Experience	Tentative Themes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Discarded Themes
<b>P30</b>	P enjoyed the practical lesson of cooking				✓				
	P was late for assembly because she and her friends took extra time to clean up the kitchen after making stir fry			✓					
	P enjoyed watching a video in English because she had seen it before and liked it				✓			✓	
	P was proud of her Maths test results when she learned she was in the top five students in Maths					✓			
<b>P31</b>	P enjoyed the school camp because of its many activities and games		✓					✓	
	Outdoor activities were challenging to P				✓				
	Winning gave P a sense of achievement					✓			
	Camp was fun but P found it tiring							✓	
<b>P32</b>	P was disappointed she and her friends were not able to use their usual room to practise their dance routine			✓					
	P did not enjoy her classes mainly because she was given too much homework						✓		
	There was too much homework in high school that P was nostalgic about her primary school days						✓		
<b>P33</b>	P helped her friend who had an asthma attack during the cross country run	✓							
	P learned a song in French				✓				
	P did not do very well in the cross country race and was one of the last ten people to finish the race				✓	✓			
	P was looking forward to the holidays even though she found school fun							✓	
<b>P34</b>	P had fun in school because there was variety and there were many activities				✓			✓	
	P liked having many teachers because she was not with a bad teacher all day							✓	
	There was a lot of homework but it was not difficult						✓		



**Appendix D: Example Illustrating Giorgi's Methodology (A1)****1. Reading the entire description to get a sense of the whole statement**

*In this step the journal entries are read to get a sense of the whole. The following is an example of one of the student's experiences of high school transition. This has been coded as (A1) in the findings chapter.*

**Journal Entry for A1**

Today was my first day at high school. I woke up pretty early as I was so excited and keen to start the day. When I got to the Hall I sat with all my friends from primary school, which made me feel happy because I knew that I had lots of people that I was fond of. The Principal and our Year Adviser gave us such lovely speeches that made us feel welcome and safe. Then we said goodbye to our Mums and soon received our Diaries and Journals. Our Peer Support leaders then took our group to the oval to get to know each other and to explain to us about our Diaries. Next we went to the Year 7 Quad to get out timetables and find out what class we were in. I was so delighted to see that one of my good friends, X, was in my class, 7Y. I was also a bit confused because I couldn't read the timetable. Soon enough I headed off to my first class, DT, with our Year Adviser, Z. We only had a short class but in the time we had she explained the Diary a little bit more and made sure we were all OK. She seemed like such a nice and helpful Year Adviser and teacher. Then I had recess with my friends and talked about our exciting morning. Following recess I went to English class and the teacher got each of us to talk to someone we hadn't already met. You had to ask her all kinds of questions then tell the rest of the class. It helped me a lot because you not only got to know about one person, but when everyone read it out to the class we all soon began to know everyone else. Next we had History, the teacher discussed with us what History is about, and then organised our timetables. To finish off we started working on a sheet. Then it was lunch so again we talked about our classes with our friends. After Lunch my class went to Maths and we all found out what primary school everyone went to. Then we looked at some other things on the overhead projector, and then went home. I had such a fantastic day so I'm really looking forward to going tomorrow.

## 2. Discrimination of Meaning Units

*In this step meaning units are identified and separated using two slashes (/). Each meaning unit is then given a number. Meaning units are then recorded using as much of the students language as possible.*

//Today was my first day at high school. I woke up pretty early as I was so excited and keen to start the day 1//. //When I got to the Hall I sat with all my friends from primary school, which made me feel happy because I knew that I had lots of people that I was fond of 2//. //The Principal and our Year Adviser gave us such lovely speeches that made us feel welcome and safe 3//. //Then we said goodbye to our Mums 4// and soon //received our Diaries and Journals 5//. //Our Peer Support leaders then took our group to the oval to get to know each other and to explain to us about our Diaries 6//. //Next we went to the Year 7 Quad to get out timetables and find out what class we were in. I was so delighted to see that one of my good friends, X, was in my class, 7Y 7//. //I was also a bit confused because I couldn't read the timetable 8//. //Soon enough I headed off to my first class, DT, with our Year Adviser, Z. We only had a short class but in the time we had she explained the Diary a little bit more and made sure we were all OK. She seemed like such a nice and helpful Year Adviser and teacher 9//. //Then I had recess with my friends and talked about our exciting morning 10//. //Following recess I went to English class and the teacher got each of us to talk to someone we hadn't already met. You had to ask her all kinds of questions then tell the rest of the class. It helped me a lot because you not only got to know about one person, but when everyone read it out to the class we all soon began to know everyone else 11//. //Next we had History, the teacher discussed with us what History is about, and then organised our timetables. To finish off we started working on a sheet 12//. //Then it was lunch so again we talked about our classes with our friends 13//. //After Lunch my class went to Maths and we all found out what primary school everyone went to. Then we looked at some other things on the overhead projector, and then went home 14//. //I had such a fantastic day so I'm really looking forward to going tomorrow 15//.

### 3. Transformation of the subjects expressions into a psychological language

*Giorgi(1985a) states that this step moves from the participants language of concrete description of experiences to a more general description. Each meaning unit has a corresponding transformed unit written at this stage.*

**Meaning Unit 1:** Today was A's first day of high school, she was so excited that she woke up early and was keen to start the day.

**Transformation 1:** A was excited to attend the first day of high school.

**Meaning Unit 2:** When A arrived at school she sat with her friends from her primary school which made her feel happy as she also saw many familiar faces.

**Transformation 2:** A was happy that she was sitting with her friends from primary school.

**Meaning Unit 3:** A heard lovely speeches from her Principal and Year Adviser which made her feel safe and welcome.

**Transformation 3:** The principal and Year Adviser made A feel safe and welcome.

**Meaning Unit 4:** A and the others said goodbye to their family after the speeches.

**Transformation 4:** A's Mum left after the introductions.

**Meaning Unit 5:** A and others received their Diaries and Journals.

**Transformation 5:** A received her Diary and Journal.

**Meaning Unit 6:** A's peer support leaders took her to the Oval to explain how to use the Diary and also to get to know each other.

**Transformation 6:** Peer support leaders explained how the Diary worked and A got to know others in her group.

**Meaning Unit 7:** A went to the Quad to receive her timetable and was delighted to find one of her friends in her class.

**T 7:** A received her timetable and was delighted to have her good friend in her class.

**Meaning Unit 8:** A was a bit confused because the timetable was hard to read.

**Transformation 8:** A was a bit confused as she had difficulty interpreting the timetable.

**Meaning Unit 9:** A started her first lesson and it was with her Year Adviser. She explained the Diary and that made it easier for A to understand it. A found her Year Adviser a nice and helpful teacher.

**Transformation 9:** The Year Advisor explained how to interpret the diary. The teacher was helpful and nice.

**Meaning Unit 10:** A had recess with her friends and they talked about their exciting morning.

**Transformation 10:** During recess A and her friends shared their morning experiences.

**Meaning Unit 11:** A went to English after recess. The teacher got the class to speak to someone they hadn't spoken to previously and wanted them to get to know that person and report it back to the rest of the class.

**Transformation 11:** A attended English class. A got to know a new person by asking questions and reporting this back to the class and it helped everyone to get to know others in the class.

**Meaning Unit 12:** A had History where the teacher explained what History was about and her timetable was organised for her. She did a worksheet.

**Transformation 12:** A attended History and her teacher explained about the subject and helped her organise her timetable. A worked on an activity sheet.

**Meaning Unit 13:** A had lunch after history and talked to her friends about the classes.

**Transformation 13:** A had lunch with friends and talked about her classes.

**Meaning Unit 14:** A had Maths after lunch and found out what primary school others in her class came from. A then worked on the OHP.

**Transformation 14:** A attended Maths and learnt about the schools the others in her class came from. A did work.

**Meaning Unit 15:** A went home thinking school was great and she was looking forward to the next day.

**Transformation 15:** A enjoyed her first day of high school and was looking forward to the next day.

**4a. Synthesis of transformed meaning units into a specific statement describing the experience**

*In this step the insights within the meaning units are synthesised to write a specific consistent description of that experience*

A was very excited to attend her first day of high school. Her mother came with her and stayed till the introductions and welcome speeches before she left. When A arrived she saw her friends from primary school and was happy to sit with them. The Principal and Year Adviser in their speeches made A feel safe and welcome. A received a Diary and Journal and which was explained as the day proceeded. When A received a timetable she was confused about it but her teachers later in day explained more about it which made A feel comfortable. A was delighted to find her good friend in her class. A attended a number of classes where she got to know more about other students in her class and the primary schools they came from. She also learnt about the subjects she was studying. Her teachers made it possible for A to get to know more information about her new classmates. A spent recess and lunch with her friends from primary school discussing the experiences of school that day. A enjoyed her first day of high school and was looking forward to the next day.

**From the specific statements, meaning units, transformed units and the journal entries tentative themes emerged for (A1)**

- There are many classes to attend
- Schools have procedures and routine to learn
- Teachers were friendly
- Teachers helped in A getting to know other students in the class
- Knowing friends from primary school helped to make A feel safe at high school
- Lunch breaks were a time for sharing with friends
- School teaches not just content but also about other children in the class

**4b. Synthesis of all the specific statements into a general statement**

*In this step all specific statements are synthesised into a general statement of that experience. This has not been demonstrated here because only one specific statement has been used as a sample here.*

**Appendix E: Copy of Letter Sent to High School Principal (Site of Study)**

Dear

Date

I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Queensland University of Technology. As part of my doctoral studies, I am proposing to conduct a research project that uncovers and describes the experiences of students as they make the transition from primary school to high school. This study is about discovering what it is like to experience transition into high school while the students are experiencing it.

As a teacher at XX High School I have the opportunity to teach and support students at this school and would like to better understand the transition process as they experience it and hope that this will further benefit the students and staff in this school.

I would like to invite fifteen participants in total who will be attending XX High School in Year 7 in the Year 2005. These students will be approached at their primary schools in Term 4, 2004 so that data collection can commence from the first day when students enter high school. I propose to collect data by asking students to write their experiences of being in high school for the first time in a journal. Students will record entries in their journals at least three times per week in the first six weeks of the Term 1 and twice for the rest of that term. Participants will be asked to write about what it is like to experience transition from primary school to high school. All descriptions will be analysed and presented back to the students for their clarification and endorsement.

Students who agree to participate in the study will be issued with consent forms and information about the study. Both participants and their parents or caregivers will be asked to sign the consent forms. Their rights and privacy will be honoured throughout the study.

I would appreciate it if you could provide a letter of approval for me to conduct this research with the students who will be attending Year 7 at XX High School in the Year 2005 as well as to address the 15 participants on Orientation Day in December 2004. Please find attached my research proposal for further clarification regarding this study. I will be pleased to discuss or clarify any further questions you may have.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

Krishnaveni Ganeson

**Appendix F: Copy of Letter Sent to Feeder Primary School Principals****LETTER TO PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

Dear

Date

I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Queensland University of Technology. As part of my doctoral studies, I am proposing to conduct a research project that uncovers and describes the experiences of students as they make the transition from primary school to high school. This study is about discovering what it is like to experience transition into high school while the students are experiencing it.

As a teacher at XX High School, I have the opportunity to teach and support students at this school and would like to better understand the transition process as they experience it.

I would like to invite fifteen participants in total who will be attending XX High School in Year 7 in the Year 2005. These students will be approached at their primary schools in Term 4, 2004 so that data collection can commence from the first day when students enter high school. I propose to collect data by asking students to write about their experiences of being in high school for the first time. Students will record entries in a journal at least three times per week in the first six weeks of the Term 1 and twice for the rest of that term. Participants will be asked to write about what it is like to experience transition from primary school to high school. All descriptions will be analysed and presented back to the students for their clarification and endorsement.

Students who agree to participate in the study will be issued with consent forms and information about the study. Both participants and their parents or caregivers will be asked to sign the consent forms. Their rights and privacy will be honoured throughout the study.

I write this letter with the approval of the Principal of XX High School and the Department of Education and Training. I would appreciate it if you could provide a letter of approval for me to approach the students in your school that you know who plan to attend XX High School in the Year 2005. I would like the opportunity to speak with them about the study towards the end of Term 4 2004. Those who volunteer to take part in the study will be addressed during Orientation at XX High School in December 2004.

Please find attached my research proposal which further clarifies the study. I have also attached letters from the Department of Education and Training and the Principal giving me approval to conduct the research. I will be pleased to discuss or clarify any further questions you may have. I can be contacted after hours at 02-99720381 or 0404950053 and at this email address:

v.ganeson@student.qut.edu.au

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

Krishnaveni Ganeson

**Appendix G: Copy of Research Proposal Outline Sent to Feeder Primary School Principals and the High School Principal where the Study took place**



**RESEARCH PROPOSAL OUTLINE**

**Topic:** Students' Lived Experience of Transition into High School: A Phenomenological Study

**Purpose of the study:**

The aim of this study is to investigate what it is to be a student experiencing transition into high school in order to explicate a phenomenological description of the findings. It aims to find out about the experience while it is lived. There is a need to examine student experiences as previous studies have not focused on this aspect of transition.

**Research Question:** What are students' experiences of transition into high school?

Subjects participating in the study will be asked the specific research question: "What are your experiences of being in high school for the first time?"

They will be asked to keep a journal to record their experiences (i.e. feelings, perceptions, observations, and so on).

**Objectives of the study:**

- To understand student experiences of transition as they enter high school for the first time
- To arrive at an understanding of high school transition by turning to the lived experience of a group of first year high school students
- To investigate what students constitute as pleasant/interesting and unpleasant/difficult/disappointing/traumatic experiences during transition into high school

**Context and Background:**

- This study will investigate the experiences of transition by seeking insights from the students themselves and not from practitioners and academics as past research has done. It is hoped that by understanding what they experience schools and policy makers can better equip themselves and facilitate student learning during this process of transition.
- Considering the body of literature on school transitions, only a few studies have examined students' perceptions and practitioners' experiences of school transitions even though developmental changes take place at this time making transition important.
- To date there has been very little research which has used phenomenology to investigate students' experiences of transition. The present study, which applies a phenomenological psychological methodology to the lived experiences of a group of students entering high school for the first time, aims to contribute to the research in the field by investigating the lived experiences of transition of a group of first year high school students in an Australian high school.
- Studies conducted in Australia have not looked into the lived experiences of students as they experience transition.

**Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis**

- The research methodology used in this study is phenomenological psychological research methodology using Giorgi's method of data analysis.
- Data will be collected in the following manner:-
  - Students entering XX High School in 2005 will be invited to participate in the study
  - Participants will be asked to volunteer to participate in the study and confidentiality will be maintained at all times
  - Participants will be selected by December 2004, in order to collect data from day 1 of high school in 2005
  - Selected participants ( no more than 15) will be asked to write their experiences of being in high school for the first time in a journal in Term 1, 2005
  - Journal entries must be made at least three times a week for the first six weeks of Term 1 and at least twice a week for the rest of Term 1. The first ten weeks has been selected as the optimum to capture students' initial experiences of transition
  - Participants will be provided with a journal to make the entries which will be done outside class time and in their own time
  - Journal entries made by participants will be copied by the researcher at the end of each week and the journal returned on the same day
  - Journals will be kept by the participants during the ten weeks of data entry and eventually collected at the end of the tenth week
  - At the end of Term 1 data collected will be analysed using Giorgi's method of data analysis
  - At the conclusion of the project the researcher will return to the participants to ask how the interpretation of their description compares with their experience
  - If the journal items should reveal any issues that indicate students' safety or well-being is in jeopardy, the researcher will be compelled to report her concerns to the appropriate personnel in line with the School's and Department of Education and Training's procedures
  - Participants can at any time withdraw from the study as it is on a voluntary basis

**Selection of Participants:** Students attending XX High School in Year 7, 2005 will be invited to participate in this study with the permission of Parents'/Caregivers and the Principal. Feeder primary schools will be approached, in November 2004, with the permission of the Principals' concerned. The first 15 students who volunteer will participate in this study.

**Privacy of Participants:** Participants' names will be removed from the experiences that they record in the journal and it will not appear in any other written report or publication of the research study. The information that participants provide in their journal will be strictly confidential. My supervisor at the university (Dr. Lisa C. Ehrich) and I will be the only persons to examine participants' journal.

**Timeline:** November to December 2004 : Invite Prospective Participants through  
Primary Schools  
January to April (First 10 weeks of Term 1, 2005): Students to write journal  
entries/Collection of Data  
May 2005 to April 2006 – Data Analysis  
May 2006 to Nov 2007 – Writing up of Thesis

**Final Comments:** It is anticipated that by understanding what students experience, schools and policy makers can better equip themselves and facilitate student learning during this process of transition.

**Krishnaveni Ganeson,  
Principal Researcher**

## Appendix H: Copy of Information Letter Sent to Participants



### INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

#### *Invitation to Participate in a Research Study*

A research study on: What are students' experiences of transition into high school?

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by me, Krishnaveni Ganeson, a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. This study is about uncovering what it is like to experience transition into high school for the first time which will be conducted at XX High School.

Participation will involve you writing about what it is like for you to experience transition into high school. You will be asked **to write about your experiences that describe what it is like to be in a high school for the first time**. You will be asked to record your thoughts and feelings about your experience in a journal at least three times a week in the first six weeks of Term 1 and at least twice for the rest of the term. The journal will be in your possession during the ten weeks of data collection, during which time it will be collected, copied and returned at the end of each week. In writing down your experiences of being in high school for the first time, you could include feelings that are pleasant, unpleasant, happy, sad, and traumatic as well as feelings that make you feel good, relieved, stressed, positive or negative and events or incidents that are interesting or disappointing to you during this transition into high school.

This study is for Year 7 students only and will take place over the first term of high school, which is from the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2005 to 8<sup>th</sup> April 2005. It will not interfere in any way with your lessons, class-time or learning. Your involvement is not for assessment; the whole aim is to help me (an educational researcher and teacher) understand what it is like for you to be in high school for the first time.

Your name will be removed from the experiences you record in the journal and it will not appear in any other written report or publication of the research study. The information that you provide in your journal will be strictly confidential. My supervisor at the university and I will be the only persons to examine your journal. However, if the journal items should reveal any issues that indicate your safety or well-being is in jeopardy, the researcher will be compelled to report her concerns to the appropriate personnel in line with the School's and Department of Education and Training's procedures.

If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, your choice will be respected. You are free to email about any concerns or questions you may have regarding this study at: [v.ganeson@student.qut.edu.au](mailto:v.ganeson@student.qut.edu.au) or call me on 02-99720381 or 0404950053 after school hours.

The Human Research Committee at Queensland University of Technology and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training have both approved this study. If you wish to contact my supervisor (Dr. L. Ehrich ) or the Research Ethics Officer, 07 3864 2340 the email addresses are:

[l.ehrich@qut.edu.au](mailto:l.ehrich@qut.edu.au) – Supervisor  
or [ethicscontact@qut.edu.au](mailto:ethicscontact@qut.edu.au),

Thank you for considering participating in this research. If you agree to participate, please complete the consent form. Please submit the consent form within the next two weeks.

Thank You

Krishnaveni Ganeson

Date

**Appendix I: Copy of Letter from XX High School Principal Giving Permission to Conduct Study.**

Ms K Ganeson  
HSIE Faculty  
XX High School

**Dear Veni,**

Thank you for formally requesting permission to conduct research in the school as part of your doctoral studies. I see the topic of your research as highly relevant to improving the Year 7 experience for future students.

I believe your proposed methodology will have little or no impact on the daily organisation of the school, and will be easily managed by you as researcher. I am therefore pleased to approve the research plan as described and will inform the school's Research and Knowledge Management team when we next meet.

Congratulations on your commitment to your doctoral studies. I will be happy to support you wherever I can.

Yours Sincerely  
Principal