Perceptions of schooling: powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement in senior-school students

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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLING:
POWERLESSNESS, MEANINGLESSNESS
AND ESTRANGEMENT
IN SENIOR-SCHOOL STUDENTS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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by
JOYCE McIVER

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
1999
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

my son, Joe, and my daughter, Lindy, with thanks for their special brand of good-humoured encouragement and support, and

my husband, Rob, who always said I could do this thing, but did not live to see it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have given me invaluable support during the process of this investigation and, particularly during the writing of the dissertation. Their special contribution was that they believed in me (even when I didn’t) and they believed in the importance of the project.

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To Ass. Professor Philip de Lacey and Dr Victoria Foster I owe my special thanks for guiding me through the latter stages of the thesis, and for reading and editing the final drafts so thoroughly, patiently and helpfully. Dr Ken Russell deserves grateful recognition for his patient guidance through the statistical analyses, and for his helpful comments on my reporting of research results.
ABSTRACT

This enquiry examines the phenomena of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement as these figure in students’ perceptions of their experiences of senior schooling in four NSW public schools.

The early 1990s were times characterised by high levels of youth unemployment in Australia. They were also times when the Commonwealth Government actively encouraged young people to stay on at school beyond the compulsory years of schooling. A new clientele was now participating in post-compulsory schooling. A large number of senior students had no intention of entering tertiary institutions after finishing school.

In his classic discussion of the term ‘alienation’, Seeman (1959) has identified five main ‘meanings’ attributed to the term ‘alienation’ in the literature: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. It was from these ‘meanings’ that the three focal phenomena of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement were developed for the present investigation.

It appeared to the author of this thesis that, for some senior students in Illawarra schools in the early 1990s, their senior schooling might include experiences of alienation such as those identified by Seeman. If this were so, it seemed possible that the educational environment itself might be a factor in the psychological and social alienation of senior students.

The investigation reported in this thesis sets these questions into the context of such theoretical areas as youth theory, developmental psychology, motivation, picoeconomics, coping, and locus-of-control. It consists of two parts – a quantitative section and a qualitative section. For the first of these, a new questionnaire was developed – the Senior-School Alienation Scale. This instrument was designed to measure levels of student powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement in the specific context of the senior school. It was used to generate data from 156 Year 11 students from four southern-Illawarra public high schools.

The results of this survey indicated significant levels of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement amongst senior students in the schools participating in the study. These significant levels were shown to be related to a variety of independent variables.

Thirty one of the 156 Ss volunteered to participate in interviews. These unstructured interviews, each conducted by the author, yielded data which supported the notion that the educational environment is a factor in the psychological alienation of senior students. The case studies include some Ss’ suggestions for changes that, in their opinions, might provide a better ‘fit’ between senior students and the senior-school environment.

The thesis begins and ends with a concept studied by Toumier (1968) and Maslow (1970). This is the individual’s need to ‘belong’ somewhere. The evidence of this investigation leads the author to suggest that, for many ‘stayers-on’, the senior-school environment is not one where this need is likely to be satisfied. It is claimed that changes are necessary in senior schools, if they are to become places where all students can feel that policy decisions demonstrate an understanding of their ‘belongingness needs’. Changes are necessary if senior schools in the 1990s are to become places where those needs are likely to find fulfilment.
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1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The background of the research project

After four years’ lecturing in adult-education settings, the author returned to teaching in a New South Wales public secondary school in 1991. There she was confronted with considerable changes in the clientele of the senior school. Not the least of these changes was the increase in the numbers of students in senior classes who had no intention of entering tertiary study after completing Year 12. This research project began with the researcher’s conversations with concerned teachers, complemented by her informal observations of senior students’ behaviour, and by her reflections on their comments about school, family life, and the society in which they lived.

Many of the comments made by both teachers and students indicated their perception that something was wrong. In a variety of ways, many students were saying that their expectations of schooling were not being fulfilled in the senior-school setting.

Students described feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness in their experiences of senior schooling. Expectations of failure seemed to have become self-fulfilling prophecies for both them and their teachers. They expressed concerns about discipline systems that appeared to them to be inappropriate to their age. They expressed dissatisfaction with curriculum offerings perceived by them to be irrelevant – lacking meaning for their lives, both present and future.

Teachers spoke of many students’ appearing to lack commitment to the academic tasks of senior schooling, and to the school’s administrative and
disciplinary programs. They seemed to be acting as 'outsiders' – as if they did not belong to the school community. These kinds of attitudes, and the behaviours associated with them, were described by teachers as contributing to an adversarial environment in the senior school. This situation was seen by teachers as making schooling difficult, unpleasant and frustrating for both staff and students – and as seriously disadvantaging the senior students who had returned to school in Year 11 in order to gain an HSC that would lead to opportunities for tertiary education.

1.1.1 The phenomenon of alienation

A wide variety of definitions and descriptions of 'alienation' appears in the literature of psychology and sociology. Discussion of the range of meanings attributed to the term has become part of that literature (e.g. Seeman, 1959; Schacht, 1971; Williamson and Cullingford, 1997). In 1959, Seeman analysed the use of the term 'alienation' in the literature, and identified five basic uses of the term. These five meanings are powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.

It is acknowledged here that Seeman's (1959) analysis of the meanings of 'alienation' in the literature was published almost forty years ago. The early date of this publication does not, however, detract from its contribution to the present discussion since, in the intervening years, Seeman's analysis of pre-1959 alienation literature has remained as a useful starting point for discussions of alienation. These include such publications as: (a) philosophical discussions of the concept of alienation (Erikson, 1986; Kon, 1967), (b) the theoretical framework of research projects in the area of alienation (Mau, 1992; Lefkowitz & Brigando, 1980), and (c) discussions of alienation in specific social environments (Keeting, 1987).
An important reason for the continuing reference to Seeman's (1959) article is that it clearly identifies not only the problem of multiple interpretations of the term, but also five of the most common meanings evident in the literature at that time.

Schacht (1971) makes another important contribution to the discussion of the varied meanings of the term ‘alienation’ when he identifies what he describes as the “most uniquely sociological use of the term” (p. 155). This is the concept of alienation in connection with an individual’s separation from some element of society. He follows this comment with a recognition that some sociologists use the term in the context of work and interpersonal relationships, and that others use it “in connection with the phenomena of ‘powerlessness’ and ‘meaninglessness’” (p. 155). It will be argued later in this section (p. 6) that each of the three manifestations of alienation described by Schacht are observable in the senior school.

In recent years, Seeman has confirmed the ongoing relevance of his 1959 analysis. One example is Seeman’s (1997) discussion of “the social context of experience” (p. 4). Here, Seeman describes the generic features of a person-situation interface, in terms of a number of fundamental decisions that must be made by a person who is dealing with a given situation. Seeman outlines the issues of: (a) meaningfulness, (b) control, (c) cultural norms, (d) the importance of a sense of belonging, (e) the individual’s level of involvement in a social situation, and (f) the influence of values and goals on decision-making. He then comments that these decision-making issues align with the kinds of alienation he had identified in the literature of psychology and sociology up to 1959.
What Seeman (1997) is recognising, in these comments, is that ‘alienated’ people – people perceiving their lives to be lacking in power and meaning, people who feel that they do not ‘belong’, or that they do not share the values and cultural norms of the society in which they live – are likely to experience difficulty in developing the decision-making skills necessary for functioning as a participating member of society. Seeman’s (1997) reference to the current relevance of the five meanings of ‘alienation’ identified in 1959 is important to the present study. This is because, in this study, those ‘meanings’, although published forty years ago, are pertinent to the author’s observations of senior-school students in the early 1990s.

The variety of meanings attributed to the term ‘alienation’ has also been documented by Williamson and Cullingford (1997), who refer to the “use and misuse of the term ‘alienation’” in the literature, and reach conclusions similar to those of Seeman (1959) and Schacht (1971). These concern the need for the term to be defined clearly, especially when ‘alienation’ is to be the focus for empirical research.

It needs to be noted here that the five meanings of ‘alienation’ that Seeman (1959) identified do not describe five components of a construct, ‘alienation’. Such an interpretation of Seeman’s work might lead to the idea that individual scores for the five components could be aggregated to produce an overall ‘alienation’ score. Seeman’s contribution to a clarification of the meaning of alienation was to recognise that a number of different writers, in their use of the term “alienation”, were referring to one or more of the meanings he documented.

Seeman’s (1959) identification of five different meanings given to the term ‘alienation’ in the literature helped the author to clarify the phenomena observed in
the behaviour of senior students, particularly in the early stages of this study. The behaviours and attitudes observed in senior students in 1991 demonstrated at least four of the manifestations of 'alienation' identified by Seeman. These were powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and isolation. As mentioned above (p. 5), these manifestations of alienation in the senior school are similar to those described by Schacht (1971): separation, powerlessness and meaninglessness. The following section will describe ways in which these forms of alienation were demonstrated in the senior school.

1.1.2 School-based observations

1.1.2.1 Normlessness and isolation

Behaviours and attitudes observed included the following: (a) disruptive school behaviour, (b) physical or mental 'dropping-out' of school activities, and (c) students' appearing to espouse values incompatible with those of the school. These observations suggested normlessness and isolation on the part of the students.

In students' comments, and sometimes in their observed behaviour, these two manifestations of alienation seemed to the researcher to be so intertwined that, for this study, they have been combined and presented as the single phenomenon of 'estrangement'. Some students were indicating experiences of estrangement from aspects of the school as a social institution and maybe from aspects, also, of the wider society in which their schools operated. The concept of 'estrangement' in young people is similar in many ways to the sociological concept of youth marginalisation (a significant issue that will be discussed in section 2.1.7). The two concepts are, however, not identical. 'Estrangement', as the term is used in this thesis, refers to the individual’s:
a) assigning low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in a given society (in this case, a comprehensive secondary school),
b) having feelings of, and sometimes acting out of, rebellion in that societal context,
c) belief that given goals cannot be achieved through socially-approved behaviour, and
d) seeking satisfaction of private interests (or personal needs) by any means which seem to that person to be effective, irrespective of the society’s goals or values.

‘Estrangement’ is thus seen to be a stance chosen by, or accepted by, individuals who will not, or cannot, align themselves with certain aspects of the society, or a particular social institution. In this way, the concept of estrangement can be seen to be active in nature, while the concept of marginalisation is passive. As the discussion in Section 2.1.7 will demonstrate, marginalisation ‘happens’ to young people, rather than being in any way chosen by them. The connections between the two concepts are evident, however, when one considers the possible threats to the social structure that some ‘estranged’ behaviour may pose. The marginalisation of such ‘threatening individuals’ is almost inevitable.

1.1.2.2 Meaninglessness

Other behavioural symptoms observed in senior students suggested the phenomenon of ‘meaninglessness’. These behaviours included: (a) disaffection, (b) lack of motivation for school tasks, and (c) school-based resistance. The discussion of alienation theory (section 2.3) will include consideration of the concept of meaninglessness, while section 2.4 will focus on the concept of motivation.
1.1.2.3 Powerlessness

The phenomenon of 'powerlessness' was also demonstrated in a variety of ways. One manifestation involved withdrawal, inertia and lethargy. A second was related to feelings of anxiety, and was expressed in various coping strategies aimed at reducing anxiety levels. These included, for some, the avoidance of failure by choosing not to complete academic tasks and submit them for assessment. For these students, it appeared that opting out of an assessment task was less of an indignity than receiving a failure rating after doing their best to meet the requirements of the task. A third expression of powerlessness took the form of hopelessness. This was demonstrated by: (a) despair, (b) a 'don't care' attitude, and (c) a future-focus deficit with the potential for various forms of self-harm. Section 2.1.10 highlights this manifestation of alienation amongst senior students.

1.1.3 Powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement in senior students

The above discussion about the multiple interpretations of 'alienation' highlights the need for the term to be carefully defined where the construct is to form part of the theoretical base for writing or research. In establishing the theoretical base of the present study, it is intended, therefore, to include 'alienation theory', with the proviso that the manifestations of alienation to be investigated in the present research are 'estrangement', 'meaninglessness' and 'powerlessness'. The survey instrument developed for this study yields scores for these three phenomena. The development of this survey instrument will be described in Section 3.2.2 of the thesis, and the instrument itself appears as Appendix A.
1.2 The concept of belonging

*I'm always looking for a place - for somewhere to be.*

(Tournier, 1968, p. 9)

In each of the phenomena identified above as meanings of 'alienation' in the literature, there is an element of separation – of an individual or group standing apart from a social setting. 'Estrangement', to use the focus word of the *Oxford Dictionary* definition of 'alienation', may be a choice made by the 'estranged', or it may indicate, rather, their perception of a social experience in which they feel that they have been excluded from the mainstream of that social setting (or marginalised). The *Macquarie Thesaurus* (Bernard, 1984) identifies exclusion and incompatibility as concepts implicit in alienation.

'Exclusion' and 'incompatibility' are negative concepts, antonymous with such concepts as 'inclusion', 'acceptance' and 'belonging'. To clarify the significance of senior students' feelings of estrangement, it has been decided, therefore, to set this study into the context of the concept of a human need for affiliation - for community - for acceptance. In the above statement to a psychotherapist, an anxious young student summed up his own understanding of his emotional turmoil. Reflection led Tournier, the therapist, to write: "What he was looking for, and had not found, was a genuine community into which he could really fit" (Tournier, 1968, p. 12). For Tournier, the student's comment triggered an extensive exploration of the phenomenon of 'needing to belong' - of 'having somewhere to be'. Tournier identifies this need as "one of the fundamental needs of men and women" and the perception of 'not-belonging' as "the distress that besets large numbers of them" (1968, p. 9).

While acknowledging the fact that his studies, for the most part, involve 'the sick', Tournier claims that "the sick reveal to us the existence of universal problems with which those who are well manage somehow to come to terms, without finding real
solutions to them. I think of the sick as a sort of magnifying-glass which shows up an anxiety which we all have within us . . .” (1968, p. 34).

If the individual’s perception of ‘not-belonging’ is as universal and as potentially damaging as Tournier suggests, then young people, no less than adults, need help to achieve a sense of belonging, especially when their presence in a specific social institution is not voluntary. The author’s observations of senior students in Illawarra public schools were presented in Section 1.1. Those observations are here interpreted as indications of the ‘distress of not-belonging’ described by Tournier.

The students who participated in the present study were not as explicit as Tournier’s young patient in describing the impact of affiliation-deficit on their lives. He verbalised his distress, stating that he was “always looking for a place – for somewhere to be” (Tournier, 1968, p. 9). In the early stages of the present study, students were indicating similar distress at the mismatch between their perceived needs and their experiences of senior schooling. It was not, however, until some of those students participated in interviews that they described in detail some of the ways in which they experienced a lack of ‘belonging’ in the school setting. Their comments are reported in Section 5.2, and discussed in Section 6.2.

Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs places ‘belongingness’ as the individual’s most pressing need after basic physiological and safety needs have been met. This sense of belonging is described in terms of affiliation and acceptance. Maslow’s theory of affiliation needs supports Tournier’s contention that

it is readily understandable that to be denied a place is to suffer a serious moral trauma. It is a sort of denial of one’s humanity. Deprived of the place that belongs to him, man is no more than a thing, to be treated by everybody without the respect due to a person. (Tournier, 1968, p. 26)

The importance of community is taken up by Mackay (1993) in his analysis of Australian society in the 1980s and early 1990s. A tacit insight into the concept of
'alienation from community' seems to underlie his statements about the mores of groups:

Every group develops its own set of values, conventions, ideals and virtues . . . Any development of an ethical framework depends upon the members of the group having a sense of belonging to the group. Personal relationships are the medium through which ethics, ideals, values and virtues are transmitted and shared. (Mackay, 1993, p. 270)

Where certain members of a group do not share this sense of belonging, their sharing of the ethics, ideals, values and virtues of the group cannot be taken for granted. Nor can this sharing be manufactured or enforced by the imposition of sanctions on individuals whose behaviour indicates rejection of some of the group's values.

There are many experiences and personal perceptions that may lead to such feelings of 'not-belonging'. In contemporary Australian society, this may be seen not only in individuals, but also in certain sub-groups. There are members of various subgroups, for example, who perceive themselves as not belonging to the mainstream of Australian society on the basis of ethnicity, of physical, intellectual and psychological disabilities, and of poverty.

In the 1990s, the concept of estrangement applies to young people who are experiencing great difficulty in negotiating the tasks and changes of adolescence in a social context where widespread long-term unemployment is complicating their transition to adulthood. These problems will be discussed in Section 2.1.5.

The present research arose out of the observation of a form of adolescent alienation that is emerging among senior secondary students who are reluctantly participating in post-compulsory schooling. Many of these students are staying on at school because of the youth unemployment crisis in contemporary Australia, as depicted in Figure 1 (page 18).

In this thesis, it will be argued that 'youth' is a process of transition from child to adult, and that one important aspect of that transition is the development of, or the discovery of, a personal and a social identity. According to Wyn and White (1997),
the sense of belonging is integral to social identity. The social institutions are also where young people develop ideas about their ‘public’ selves which tells them who they are. Identity is first and foremost about social connection. And this, in turn, is shaped by experiences within the social institutions. (p. 82)

If this is so, then the way students experience the social institution of the senior-secondary school will impact upon their sense of personal identity. This is a significant issue, as a schooling experience in which social connection - with other students and with teaching staff - is minimal or non-existent sends to these students a message that will affect their self-image. It needs to be noted here that ‘social contact’ does not constitute ‘social connection’. Many senior students describe schooling experiences of daily ‘contact’ with certain teachers, but very little, if any, ‘connection’. In this context, ‘social connection’ assumes a recognition of the other’s value – an element of mutual respect. As the discussion of the interviews (Section 6.2) will demonstrate, this is not the way senior students perceive their contact with some teachers. If the ‘public self’, or ‘self as student in a particular senior-school setting’ feels consistently devalued, humiliated or disparaged, this will affect the individual’s self-esteem.

In the above discussion, a sense of belonging has been shown to be significant to individuals’ wellbeing. This has included the findings of a psychotherapist (Tournier, 1968), a psychological theorist (Maslow, 1970), a popular sociologist (Mackay, 1993) and sociologists working in the area of youth culture (Wyn & White, 1997). In various ways, they have all emphasised the individual’s need to feel an affiliation with other people – a sense of belonging in a social setting.

An assumption underlying the present study is that, for the senior secondary student, the school is a significant social institution. It is against the background of the positive implications of ‘belonging’ in such a social environment that the phenomenon of school-based alienation will be explored.
1.3 Observed changes in post-compulsory schooling

In the early 1990s, when the author joined the executive staff of an Illawarra high school following an absence of four years, it was clear that the 'shape' of the senior secondary school had changed. The post-compulsory years of schooling were attracting much greater numbers than previously. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1986; 1990; 1991) reports apparent retention rates to Year 12 to have been 34.8% in 1981, 48.7% in 1986, 64% in 1990 and 71.3% in 1991 (*Schools Australia*, 4221).

Many of the 'new clientele' in the senior school appeared to have no intention of working towards any kind of tertiary-study placement. There were many indicators in the author's own observations, as well as those reported to her by teachers from a variety of schools, that academic concerns figured rather sketchily in their reasons for returning to school in Year 11. The most telling of these indicators was a reluctance on the part of many Year 11 students to complete and submit assignments to teachers. The author was teaching a non-Matriculation elective course during the early stages of this study, and typical reasons offered by students for failure to submit work were:

What's the point in doing it, Miss? Will it get me a job if I get a good mark?

I'm not going to do all that work. I'd fail anyway.

I don't understand what it's all about.

If I could get a job, I'd be out of here. I just don't care about assignments and stuff.

I'm just not good at written work - I've never been able to do it, and that's not about to change now, is it?

I don't want to be here, and I'm not going to do all that work.

Such comments, sometimes delivered belligerently, but more often with a sense of quiet frustration, were amongst the early expressions of students' feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement in their experiences of senior schooling.
In the early 1990s, a special program was attracting significant funding. Named 'Staying On', it had the specific role of encouraging continuation in post-compulsory schooling for students, whatever their academic ability and interest level. Retention rates in excess of 90% by the turn of the century were projected as outcomes of this program. Some students were able to receive substantial Austudy payments as long as they attended school.

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated a fall in teenage unemployment between 1983 and 1989, as demonstrated in Figure 1. Figure 1 is Wooden’s (1998) graphic presentation of ABS data from *The Labour Force, Australia, 6203 and 6204*).

![Figure 1: Teenage and total unemployment rates, 1970 - 1997](image_url)

Note: Data relate to August of each year
At a time, then, when official unemployment statistics were indicating a decline in the number of unemployed youth, it seemed likely that one reason for this 'improvement' might have been that many 16- and 17-year-olds were being trapped financially into staying on at school. Others, barred from Aустudy because of parental income, found themselves returning to school because there were no jobs, and because their parents would not allow them to leave school until they had a job. The numbers of unemployed young people had not, therefore, actually fallen. Young people who would previously have been counted among the unemployed were now registered, not as 'unemployed', but as 'stayers-on'.

Informal discussion with teachers and senior students from a range of Illawarra high schools suggested that the subject choices offered to unwilling 'stayers-on', and the pedagogical methodology in many senior classrooms might be mismatched with the interests, academic ability or maturity-stage of these students. In some schools, for example, it was claimed by teachers that the bands from which students made their choices for Years 11 and 12 included the same subjects that had previously been prepared for more academically inclined senior students. Other schools had introduced some special courses, including not only less demanding variants of traditional subjects, but also specially developed non-Matriculation subjects.

Even where such special courses were in operation, however, they tended, according to teachers' comments, to include expectations of traditionally assessable content. Practical courses in community studies and international cookery at one of the schools studied, for example, included theoretical examinations as part of the assessment. Whereas the content of these courses, specially designed for non-academic stayers-on, was well-matched to many of these students' interests and academic ability, the assessment methods for the courses lacked this kind of sensitivity to the students' needs.

There is no assumption, or even suggestion, here that an uncaring attitude towards 'stayers-on' on the part of curriculum-designers and teachers is reflected in the
continued emphasis on academic subjects and on academically oriented assessments of new, otherwise less academic, subjects in the senior years. It would probably be more accurate to describe these mismatches of course offerings to clientele in terms of two important influences. The first relates to historical expectations of senior-secondary schooling in New South Wales. The second influence is the limited resources available for meeting the challenge of post-compulsory schooling in the context of higher retention rates.

Historically, seniors in the secondary school tended to be students intending to continue their education after gaining their Leaving Certificate or Higher School Certificate, usually by pursuing university degrees. The curriculum was designed to meet the needs of such a clientele. On the whole, students were academically able and had a reasonably high motivation to achieve the best possible academic results in their post-compulsory years of schooling. For such clients, a certain style of teaching and certain subject offerings were appropriate and functional.

When the clientele changed as a result of the staying-on program, the resources necessary to such change were not made available to schools. Collins (1992) draws attention to the need for extra funding for such programs as teacher education in new post-compulsory curriculum areas and the professional development of existing teachers in the same areas, as well as for additional counselling and learning-support services specific to non-academic stayers-on. She describes the lack of such funding as one indicator of the impact of economic rationalism on government policy in the area of post-compulsory education for students who are not intending to enter tertiary education.

Observation of senior students, especially the 'stayers-on', suggested that there might be some serious mismatches between their perceived needs as individuals, and the organisation and subject offerings of their schools. Some expressed frustration and feelings of powerlessness in their experiences of rules and sanctions considered by them to be more appropriate to much younger students. Many students talked to the
author about outcomes they would like from senior schooling - in particular, enhanced employability, greater self-confidence and development of life skills - and described many of their subjects as lacking in relevance and meaning. Where senior students were exhibiting problem behaviours, it was likely that these behaviours, and their antecedent attitudes, were related to feelings of estrangement from the values and organisational methods of the school. The mismatches between students' perceived needs and their perceptions of the senior school are thus seen to be manifestations of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement.

1.4 Significance of the study: purposes and justification

This study grew out of a concern for senior students who appeared to be experiencing powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement in the social setting of the senior school - and for staff whose self-esteem and job satisfaction appeared to be diminishing as they attempted to work with these students. The present research project focuses on the first group - the senior students. The purpose of the project is to study students' perceptions of their experiences of senior schooling in four southern-Illawarra schools, and, in particular, to identify the phenomena of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement in these perceptions. It attempts to achieve this by surveying 174 students in term IV of Year 11, and by interviewing 31 of these students. These interviews have, with participants' permission, been taped and transcribed for analysis.

1.5 Research questions - the focus of the investigation

As previously stated, the present study begins with the assumption that 'belonging' is a basic human need, and the concern, based on observations in schools, that many students may not feel a general sense of 'belonging' in the senior school setting.
The informal observations with which this investigation commenced led to consideration of the following research questions:

1. Do students' perceptions of the senior-schooling experience include feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement?

2. If so, how do the levels of these phenomena correlate with antecedent variables? Eleven variables were considered likely to be antecedent, and were investigated in the study. These are: (a) gender, (b) participation in non-Matriculation courses, (c) participation in TAFE courses, (d) receipt of Austudy, (e) main source of family income, (f) an older sibling who is unemployed, (g) an older sibling who has completed Year 12 of school, (h) a parent who has completed Year 12 of school, (i) the expectation that the student will eventually find employment in a preferred occupation, (j) student's first preference - return to school or leave, and (k) whether the return-to-school decision was made by the student or by a parent.

3. How do senior students perceive the impact of school policy, organisation and subject offerings on student experiences of estrangement, meaninglessness and powerlessness in the school environment?

1.6 Schools participating in the investigation

Four schools in the southern Illawarra area of New South Wales were chosen as the setting for the investigation. Each was a comprehensive, coeducational government high school. The researcher was teaching in a southern Illawarra school at the commencement of the research project.

It is acknowledged that this choice of schools provides limited access to data representing the perceptions of the total senior-school population in New South Wales. That population is educated in a variety of school settings – government,
private and systemic. Within each of those settings, there are a variety of organisational styles, expressed, for example, in the existence of comprehensive, specialised, selective, single-sex and coeducational schools.

Chapter Seven will contain recommendations for further research. These recommendations will include a call for replications of the present investigation to be conducted in other senior-school settings such as those described above.

1.7 Contribution of the thesis

This thesis offers an original contribution in three ways:

(a) A new survey of senior-school alienation has been developed. Based on insights derived from observation of Australian senior students, the survey was constructed after the method of Dean (1961), and was submitted to stringent tests of validity and reliability prior to its employment for the gathering of quantitative data for this investigation. For the present study, existing alienation survey instruments, including that developed by Dean (1961), were considered inappropriate for reasons discussed in detail in Section 3.2.

(b) This study provides an important starting point for more comprehensive investigations of the phenomena of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement amongst senior students in a variety of school settings.

(c) By means of interviews, the voices of senior students have been heard as Ss have described, and commented on, their experiences of senior schooling. In the analysis of these interviews and in the discussion of the findings of that analysis, this study has provided a rich source of information about ways in which students, and, in particular, 'stayers-on', experience the senior school.
1.8 Overview of thesis

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework for this investigation of young people's perceptions of the senior school, and supports this framework from the literature. Three major theoretical strands emerge: youth-culture theory, 'alienation' theory and psychological theory pertaining to adolescence or youth. This psychological theory includes motivation theory, developmental theory, self-efficacy theory and coping theory. From these strands, the theory underpinning the present study is woven.

The chapter continues with a discussion of the literature in the area of school-based alienation. The general phenomenon of student alienation is described, and illustrated from United States literature focusing on the problem of students' dropping out of school.

Ainslie's (1992) theory of picoeconomics describes the impact of individuals' motivation on their behaviour, particularly as that motivation is affected by the relationship between perceived reward values and individuals' willingness to delay gratification in order to obtain higher-value rewards. Issues of alienation arising out of students' perception of being manipulated by the school system into experiences of delayed gratification are discussed in the context of picoeconomic theory.

The literature review then focuses on Australian schools. Post-compulsory schooling in Australia is discussed in the context of the past 20 years of school reviews and reports in Australia, and in NSW in particular. The chapter culminates in the posing of detailed research questions to be investigated in the study.
Chapters Three, Four and Five describe the two sections of the research study. Chapter Three presents a description of the quantitative method adopted for the first part of the investigation. It commences with a description of the development of a Senior-School Alienation Scale, in the context of a discussion of early measures of alienation. It then outlines the administration and analysis methodology for the questionnaire.

The qualitative method adopted for the second part of the study is the focus of Chapter Four. The constructs underlying qualitative inquiry are discussed, as is the phenomenon of volunteerism and the question of generalisability of qualitative-research findings. The chapter closes with a description of the method used to analyse the 31 interviews.

Chapter Five presents the results of the data collection and analyses of data for both the quantitative and the qualitative sections of the investigation.

In Chapter Six, the discussion of these results begins with further consideration of the research questions. The discussion draws together ways in which the information gathered in this investigation appears to clarify the concept of school-based alienation, as that alienation is manifested in students' feelings of powerlessness, meaningfulness and estrangement. It discusses changes that some students have suggested might be helpful in attempting to reduce student alienation.

The final chapter presents conclusions drawn from the interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data. It places changes suggested by students into the context of the phenomenon of resistance to change in schools. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further investigations in areas of student alienation.
Attention turns now to the theoretical underpinnings of the present study. The first focus in this section will be elements of youth theory relevant to the present investigation. These will be discussed in the context of a description of aspects of Australian life in the 1990s.
2. CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Youth theory

In this section, issues pertaining to ‘youth’ will be explored in the context of the wider Australian society. The phenomenon of unrelenting change in Australian society will be considered, and it will be argued that the impact of this change is felt by youth no less than by adult members of society. Any attempt to study young people’s perceptions of their experiences of schooling needs to acknowledge the economic, social, family and personal implications of societal changes in Australia. A consideration of contemporary Australian society, therefore, provides an essential backdrop to this investigation.

Aitkin (1999) has described conditions in Australia between 1959 and the late 1980s as follows:

On the whole, there has been a sense of the national project, there has been confidence about the future, there has been a strong sense of ‘us’ rather than of ‘me’. There has not been an extraordinary concentration on the economy as the be-all and end-all, there hasn’t always been a sluggish economy, and there has often been a fiscal increment. (p. 2)

His description of Australia in the early 1990s is quite different. He claims that all of these elements of Australian society have changed, and comments that “they were all positive contextual elements of government in our society and we do not have them now” (p. 3). In presenting the differences in the political and philosophical context of the Australia of the 1990s, Aitkin makes the following observations:

First of all, there is not in our country at the moment any sense of the ‘national project’. We are not shaping or building Australia in any conscious way . . . Secondly, there is a lack of confidence and
optimism about the future... Thirdly, there is a pronounced sense of individualism in our society, and a lack of interest in the condition of the whole. Fourthly, there is an extraordinary concentration on the 'economy' as the engine of everything... Fifthly, we have a generally sluggish economy with high unemployment. Sixthly, there is no fiscal increment... each year governments are facing rather larger social welfare problems than they faced the previous year, and the money supply to deal with them is less than it was. (p. 2)

The concept of societal change, particularly in the area of Australia's employment patterns, has been stressed by Edwards (1999), Spierings (1999) and Wooden (1998). Edwards, for example, refers to "a period of huge change... massive change in a very short period of time" (p. 1). In this claim, Edwards is supported by Spierings' description of the increasing complexity of young people's transition from schooling to work, and, in particular, by his comment that "the certainties of stable work and easy access to jobs that assisted an earlier generation of young Australians in their process of transition (to adulthood) no longer exists for most young people" (p.3). Wooden goes as far as claiming that "it is very difficult to overstate the magnitude of change that has affected the teenage labour market over the last quarter of a century" (p. 25). Discussion of these changes will provide a context for consideration of young people's transition to adulthood in Section 2.1.5.

Eckersley (1997) describes the differences between 'modern' and 'post-modern' western society and draws attention to the apparent failure of contemporary culture "to provide an adequate framework of hope, meaning and moral values in our lives" (p. 246). Concerns about the implications of such a societal climate are discussed in Section 2.1.10.

The focus on societal change and its implications for members of a changing society has been shown to be a feature of the recent literature. These insights and
concerns are reflected in popular sociology, as evidenced in Mackay’s (1993) concept of “reinventing Australia” as a description of societal changes in the past two decades.

2.1.1 The reinventing of Australian society

Mackay (1993) uses the phrase “reinventing Australia” to epitomise his analysis of Australian society in the 1980s and early 1990s. The theme resounding through his writing is one of constant, unremitting change. His interviews, conducted with a variety of Australian groups and individuals, reveal a generalised feeling of angst related to this phenomenon. The platitude that ‘the only constant is change’ has become an anxiety-producing reality for many Australians. Mackay likens this ‘change-angst’ to the experience of a person who migrates to a new country in which very little of the culture is familiar.

What are these changes which have the power to render alien an Australian culture once familiar? Traditionally, Australia has been a place of employment opportunities, a society with a workable social-welfare system adequate to support financially disadvantaged people. Further, Australia was considered to be an egalitarian society, particularly by comparison with such ‘classed’ societies as Great Britain (Mackay, 1993). Australia was a multicultural nation in which new arrivals were regarded with tolerance, even if not always the warmest of welcomes. “The Lucky Country” seemed a reasonable description of Australia (Horne, 1964).

In the 1990s, individuals, governments and welfare agencies are caught in the vortex of a change tornado which is sweeping away many of the structures previously regarded as permanent, and considered essential to the Australian way of
Mackay (1993) describes the 1990s as Australia's 'Age of Anxiety', but claims that this anxiety is:

nothing more than a symptom of the fact that what we are really living in is the Age of Redefinition. Since the early 1970s, there is hardly an institution or a convention of Australian life which has not been subject either to serious challenge or to radical change. The social, cultural, political and economic landmarks which we have traditionally used as reference points for defining the Australian way of life have either vanished, been eroded or shifted." (p. 17)

Australian society in the late 1990s is characterised by widespread unemployment, and by family breakdown. Adults suffer, and children struggle to survive the daily trauma of dysfunctional family life. There have always been some families affected by unemployment, by relationship problems and by various aspects of dysfunction. These phenomena are by no means unique to the 1990s. What is new, however, is the wide range of families involved. A school counsellor, for example, is not surprised when a 16-year-old girl tells her that she is aware of only eight people in her form who still live with both of their birth parents (private interview with author, 1999).

Economic rationalism is wreaking havoc in individual lives as 'rationalisation' of industry, commerce and government departments leads to retrenchments. Although, for some employees, this rationalisation has meant redundancy packages, a 'nouveau pauvre' is being created as recipients of the 'golden handshake' realise, belatedly, that the gold is soon dissipated. As a result, they fear for their financial future. Many of these redundant workers are in the over forty-five age group, and the likelihood of finding new employment opportunities is minimal. Because of the probability that at least some of the redundant workers in this age group are parents of senior-school students, the variable of having an
unemployed parent is considered in the statistical analysis of survey data in the present study.

The age pattern of Australian society is changing. Because of advances in medical science and improvements in health care for the aging, people are living longer. In economic terms, this means a retirement life averaging more than twenty years. At the same time, more and more youth and adults under the age of 65 are unemployed, and therefore not contributing much to the nation's taxation income. People in full-time employment are a diminishing group that is not paying enough in taxes to be able to support the kind of welfare system to which Australians have become accustomed.

One impact of this situation has been the gradual increase of the pensionable retirement age for women from 60 to 65. From time to time, media articles predict that the gradual erosion of the aged pension, already in progress, will eventually lead to the abolition of the pension system for senior citizens who will then need to rely on their personal superannuation plans for retirement income. Conversations with elderly people lead rather naturally, in the late 1990s, to discussions of the difficulty of making less money last over an extended retirement period. Exacerbating this situation is the erosion of retirement capital as interest rates on investment accounts are no longer high enough to provide the 'money to live on' promised by financial institutions' advertising campaigns in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The social consequences of what Pusey (1991) describes as economic rationalism are relevant to the present enquiry. Governments are selling off utilities in attempts to raise capital for major development projects or to pay off
accrued public debt. Such privatisation appears to generate public interest and financial commitment, as the newly available shares are bought up. Promotion of the sale of shares does not draw attention to the increased unemployment which usually stems from the changes in management and staffing that accompany the process of privatisation.

2.1.2 Youth in Australia

A serious consideration of youth in Australian society in the 1990s must give due attention to the facets of Australian society described above. White (1993) describes the wider society in which youth participates as a "complex social universe (which) has a multitude of expressions at the level of lived experiences and behaviour" (p. ix).

The youth issues to be discussed below belong, inevitably, in the context of contemporary Australian society. Three examples will serve to illustrate this point.

First, it is acknowledged that youth unemployment is part of the general phenomenon of extensive unemployment across the age-range of Australian society (Wright & Martin, 1998). Secondly, the issue of youth homelessness needs to be considered in the contexts of home, family and the wider community. For many young people, homelessness is the byproduct of family dysfunction. Parental and youth unemployment, substance abuse, relationship problems, breakdowns of communication, financial crises and problems in ‘blended’ families, all contribute to the phenomenon of homelessness (Goldman & La Castra, 1998; Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 1996). Cycles of aggression, pain, defiance, grief and helplessness magnify and multiply the problems of youth homelessness.
Thirdly, the general anxiety or 'angst' described by Mackay (1993) is the experience of many young people. The present research project began with the author’s informal observations of senior students’ behaviour, and her reflections on their comments about school, family life, and the society in which they lived.

Many of these students appeared to be expressing, verbally or through their behaviour, such feelings as a generalised anxiety, a vague apprehension, or a sense of insecurity.

As so many different, although related, expressions of angst were observed in senior students, it seemed that the senior school environment itself might be a contributing factor to this phenomenon. The present study investigates students’ experiences of angst as these are expressed as estrangement, powerlessness and meaninglessness. It focuses, in particular, on the impact of the senior-school environment on these experiences.

'Angst', and, in particular, 'teen angst' or 'youth angst' is not a new concept. It is well documented not only in the printed literature, but also on the World Wide Web. A search for the topic of 'angst' in March, 1999, yields almost 55,000 Web Search Results. One of these, representing a newsgroup identified as 'alt.angst' is a site on which people can express their own experiences of angst. The introductory section of the web site describes angst as arising “from the notion that life is essentially pointless and absurd, and that our miserable existences count for very little in the grand scheme of things” (p. 1).

Youth angst is the focus of a site identified as “the favorite teenage angst bookroom”. In this site, books are reviewed under the following headings: sex and love; fitting in; mixed-up families; journeys; awakenings; creativity; pressure;
healing from pain; sports; and out of bounds. This site is updated monthly. A continuous stream of new books dealing with issues of youth angst are being published – a testimony to the significance of the phenomenon. The bookroom site also offers links to “other angst-friendly sites”. These sites do not argue the existence of ‘teen-angst.’ Proceeding from an assumption of the existence of the phenomenon, they provide information, support and a ‘world-wide ear’ to listen to young people’s expressions of personal angst.

The present research project enriches the discussion of youth angst by means of an increased understanding of senior students' perceptions of schooling, and insights into the possible impact of the school environment on their experiences of senior schooling.

In the discussion that follows, various aspects of the concept of ‘youth’ will be considered. This discussion will include the proposition that heterogeneity, rather than homogeneity, is a feature of ‘youth’. In a section focusing on ‘youth as transition to adulthood’, the meaning of the term ‘adult’ will be examined in the light of Australia’s widespread unemployment. It will then be argued that, in the kind of Australian society described in the above discussion, the estrangement, or marginalisation, of large numbers of young people is almost inevitable. The effects of that marginalisation will be discussed in terms of two phenomena: dissatisfaction with the present, and concerns for the future.

2.1.3 Youth as an age-related process

Youth culture theory is focused on the transitions young people encounter in becoming adults. The conceptualisation of youth as an age-related process, rather than as a series of adolescent developmental tasks, opens up the study of ‘youth’ to
an explanation of the different experiences of young people from different social
groups as they approach adulthood (Jones, 1988).

It is reasonable to assume that, in contemporary Australian society, various
groups of young people have different perceptions, and indeed, different objective
experiences, of such social processes as senior schooling, families and the labour
market. An approach to ‘youth’ theory which acknowledges such differences varies
considerably from the concept of adolescent developmental tasks - a
conceptualisation based on assumptions of age-based biological, mental and social
similarities amongst young people of a particular age range. Some of these
traditional developmental approaches (Erikson, 1950; Piaget, 1954; Kohlberg,
1984) are discussed in section 2.2.

An element of ethnocentricity is apparent in ‘developmental-task’
approaches to an understanding of young people and their behaviour such as that
proposed by Erikson (1950). While there are some obvious ‘universals’ which are
biologically based, other so-called ‘developmental tasks’ are culture-bound. The
‘universals’ include such ‘givens’ as human infants’ having a period of suckling
nutrition before being able to digest more solid food, and most human infants’
inability to walk independently under the age of 12 months. Such development is
consistent across social and cultural boundaries.

Other elements of development are, however, related to the social or cultural
environment in which young people are living. A simple example of cultural
differences is the continuum between ‘nuclear family’ and ‘extended family’. A
young person living, for example, in a white, middle-class Australian family will
undertake certain tasks related to ‘adolescent identity formation’. These tasks are
very different from those of a young person of equivalent chronological age living in an extended family in rural Italy or Greece, or in an Eskimo extended kin family. It is also noted here that the social and economic situation of the young person in that Australian family in the late 1990s is likely to be quite different from that in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was in the context of this era that Erikson's (1950) model of the eight stages of human development was developed. The continuing relevance of traditional developmental theory will be considered in greater detail in section 2.2, which focuses on developmental theories of adolescence.

2.1.4 The question of homogeneity

In approaching the phenomenon of 'youth', an early problem arises. This has to do with the assumption of homogeneity amongst individuals who can be described collectively by the word 'youth'. It is not difficult to define the term in such a way that one can tell by a glance at a birth certificate who belong to the category of 'youth'. For some writers, 'youth' are identifiable as young people aged between 15 and 21 (e.g. Walker, 1993). Such simple definitions of the term do not, however, solve the problem.

To use a term coined by White (1993), the focus group of 'youth theory' covers "a wide range of lifeworlds" (p. iv). White is referring to the lack of homogeneity within this group, and claims that there are as many, if not more, differences than similarities amongst them. This claim is supported by Walker (1993) who highlights characteristics that differentiate youth who share little in common apart from the decade, or even the year, of their birth. Walker refers, in particular, to differences in intellectual capacities, social class and gender.
Even within populations of young people who appear to share a ‘common’ life experience, the assumption of homogeneity needs to be questioned. White’s (1993) description of homeless young people living on city streets, for example, includes the insight that they have many varied reasons for being there. White recognises that they do have a number of shared experiences, such as being young and not having a set place to sleep. He describes these, however, as “meagre grounds to delineate a discreet, counter-hegemonic subculture or to validate the existence of a specific consciousness” (p. x).

Reference to a lack of homogeneity amongst ‘youth’ is widespread in the literature (Wyn & White, 1997; Jones, 1988; Liebau & Chisholm, 1993; Chisholm, 1993; Baines, 1997). Baines (1997), for example, claims that the differences separating the life worlds of young women and young men are greater than the similarities the two groups share as ‘youth’.

There are at least as many differences among young people as there are similarities. These areas of difference include gender, ethnicity, social class, socio-economic status, intellectual capacity, family composition and spirituality, to name but a few. Graycar and Jamrozik (1989) identify major gender- and class-based differences in housing, family relationships, education, the labour market and cultural activity. Stewart (1998) identifies differences in “gender, race, sexuality, class, ability and geographical location” (p. 36). She claims that these significant differences are often minimised or ignored because of the tendency of the youth sector to be “organised around the social category of age despite the fact that this is not the most stratifying factor in most young people’s lives” (p. 36).
Chisholm (1993) relates such differences to the problem of matching educational policy to the needs of the target population referred to in that policy, and calls for "taking young people and their lives into serious account" (p. 8). Her expectation is that such "serious account" will inform policy makers that the young educational population is not a mainstream, homogenous group. Policy, in order to approximate meeting the needs of the target population, must be underpinned by an understanding of heterogeneity, rather than by an unsupportable assumption of homogeneity.

Wyn and White (1997) argue a need to redefine 'youth' in order to clarify the content of 'youth theory' and thus make it more likely that policy related to 'youth' is appropriate to their perceived needs. "Rethinking youth", they claim, "means rethinking the very role that young people have in society and the responsibilities that society has for youth" (p. 120). Stewart (1998) extends this approach to include the concept of "axes of oppression" (p. 39), and points out that "young people are affected by these axes in non-compartmentalised ways, and that young people may experience simultaneous oppression" (p. 39). Her insights are important, particularly in a society that tends to welfarise problems. The welfarising approach leads almost inevitably to simplistic labeling of problems or, to use Stewart's term, "oppressions". The overlaps and the interrelationship amongst overlapping problems needs to be taken into account in any attempt to come to some understanding of the 'life-reality' of youth.

An understanding of this lack of homogeneity, and, in particular, of the phenomenon of young people's overlapping problems, is important to the present study of senior-school students because it highlights the need to question some of
the ways in which schools are organised and managed. If some schools take a
simplistic organisational approach in which homogeneity is assumed, not only
amongst senior students, but amongst students with age ranges of 12 to 18 or 19
years, then problems in areas of management and discipline are predictable, if not
inevitable.

2.1.5 Youth as transition to adulthood

Wyn and White (1997) claim that the period of youth as “the threshold to
adulthood” is “problematic largely because adult status itself is problematic” (p. 9).
A fundamental issue in any argument that assumes ‘youth’ to be a period of
transition to adulthood is the definition of ‘adult’. If ‘youth’ is a transition, then
that period of transition must have an anticipated end-point. The endpoint of this
particular transition is to become ‘adult’.

In the 1960s and 1970s, this endpoint was signified for most youth when
they gained employment and, thereby, a degree of economic independence. This
has changed over the past 20 years in Australia. The changes are due, primarily, to
the economic climate of widespread unemployment and the prolonged dependence
of many young people on their families (Mass, 1990).

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum publications (1998, 1999) include several
discussions of young people’s transition to adulthood. Sweet (1998), for example,
highlights the obstacles to be overcome by young people in the 1990s in order to
make this transition:

Young people face several hurdles in their efforts to gain adult
status. They have to find work, complete their initial education,
leave the parental home, set up new living arrangements and form
stable personal relationships outside their family. Finding stable
employment markedly affects the chances of youth achieving the
other transitions to adulthood. A successful move for young people from full-time education to full-time work is a crucial step in their efforts to become independent adults. (p. 2)

Much of the discussion in the 1999 Dusseldorp Forum publications refers to the transition from full-time education to full-time work, and to the great changes in patterns of transition in the past twenty-five years. Spierings (1999) considers the implications of those changes on another transition – that between adolescence and adulthood, and claims that the pattern of transition from adolescence to adulthood via the labour market is undergoing radical change . . . The certainties of stable work and easy access to jobs that assisted an earlier generation of young Australians in their process of transition (to adulthood) no longer exist for most young people. The notion of clear pathways to obvious destination points in adulthood has dissolved, and young people must now negotiate a new labour market and learning landscape in order to achieve stable and sustainable employment. (p. 3)

Edwards (1999) expresses several concerns about the impact of the changes described above. One of these concerns is the economic insecurity faced by young people in their journey towards full-time work. Edwards links these economic implications for young people with high rates of insecurity leading to low morale and low productivity. She describes their pathways to adulthood in the following way:

They stay at home until a later age, if they are in the education system until a later age and marry later. They are then facing a HECS debt, if not fees, at the same time as having to scrape up money to buy a home – ownership purchase rates have come down amongst young people. So young people today have a much more insecure path into their future than we might have faced. (p. 3)
The concerns raised by Sweet (1998), Spierings (1999) and Edwards (1999) are reminiscent of Wyn and White's (1997) discussion of the importance of the changing patterns of transition from youth to adulthood:

During the last 20 years, the processes involved in ‘growing up’ and establishing a livelihood have undergone fundamental change. The traditional processes, such as finding a job, have become much more complicated . . . Although economic and labour market restructuring has had an impact on all groups, it has had a specific effect on young people, some of whom, as the Australian research illustrates, are systematically denied access to establishing a livelihood. (p. 109)

In such an economic climate, how does one redefine the concept of ‘adult’? If ‘adult’ includes the assumption of paid work or ‘livelihood’, does the unemployed person remain a ‘youth’ for life? What is the meaning of ‘working class’ in a society where unemployment is common, not only amongst young people, but also amongst older people? Wyn and White (1997) report an insightful (and provocative) comment from a young person who questions the description of his local area as ‘working class’: “It’s not a working class area – there’s no work whatsoever in this area!” (cited in Wyn & White, 1997, p. 121).

Unemployment is a ‘present’ problem that casts its shadow over youth projections of their own future life. ABS statistics from 1997 indicate that one in eight Australian families (almost 600,000 families in all) includes at least one unemployed member. The breakdown of the labour force and unemployment statistics for 1997 reveals that about 75% of these were ‘traditional’ families headed by couples, in which parents or children, or both, were out of work. A media analysis of these statistics indicates that about 700,000 children under the age of 15 were growing up in homes where no one has a job, and that, in a typical school
class of 30 children, five or six were likely to come from families who depend on welfare payments (The Age, 8/4/97).

Such a life experience for a child is not likely to engender comfort in the present or hope for the future. The ABS labour force and unemployment statistics (1997) reveal that 40% of the unemployed were youth between the ages of 15 and 24. This percentage represents more than 362,000 young people, including a substantial number who were still searching for their first job.

In this section, it has been argued that ‘youth’ is a comparative concept – a concept constructed against the backdrop of ‘adulthood’. Wyn and White (1997) describe the “fragmentary, unstable and disjointed nature of the transitions to adulthood in industrialised countries” (p. 147), and claim that these phenomena create a powerful challenge to the concept of adulthood as a point of arrival. They also claim that wide-scale unemployment has “undermined the taken-for-granted meaning of adulthood” (p. 147).

In the light of the 1997 ABS statistics discussed above, the implications of unemployment on the transition to adulthood become clear. The end points of the transition have become blurred. New definitions need to be developed for both ‘youth’ and ‘adult’.

The above argument raises more questions. In a society in which, traditionally, adult membership, or citizenship, depends on being gainfully employed, many adults are being marginalised. If they are no longer employed, do these people, many over the age of 45, cease to be adults? If so, what do they become?
Over the past two decades, the nature of the Australian economy has changed. The labour market has changed. The social welfare system has changed. The health system has changed. The education system has changed.

It is suggested here that, in such a changing society, there need to be related changes in the concepts of ‘youth’ and ‘adult’.

2.1.6 Influences on youth

The discussion that follows will explore a variety of issues which have found their way into the media and into the literature of youth theory.

In 1997, the Melbourne-based Herald-Sun reported the results of a survey of 400 students from state and private schools, in both suburban and regional areas. The respondents were Year 10 and Certificate of Education students. Asked to list the main problems facing youth, 80% named drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment was nominated by 40% and school-related issues by 22% (17/3/97, p. 14).

Writing about problems confronted by young people, Eckersley (1997) focuses on ‘futures issues’ and claims that “young people’s relationship with the future is complex and contradictory” (p. 243). His study of Australian youth focuses on 15 – 24 year-olds, and compares their attitudes with those of two generations earlier. Contemporary young people, according to Eckersley, tend to lose their general sense of optimism as they get older. Their responses indicated to the researcher that this loss is due, not only to becoming older, but also to the escalation of pressures which they experience as associated with that ‘aging’ process.
Eckersley (1997) reports increase in crime rates, drug abuse and suicide among young people. His interpretation of these trends draws attention to conflict in families, high unemployment levels and changes in youth culture. From this study emerged two notable beliefs held by the young people who were surveyed: a belief that society’s problems are so great that governments are incapable of solving them, and a belief that young people themselves are powerless to change conditions in society.

Such negative attitudes towards society and, sometimes, towards life itself, are not uncommon in the literature. Recurring themes are dissatisfaction with the present and fear for the future. Each of these themes becomes a framework for sections of ‘youth theory’, and will be expanded below.

2.1.7 Dissatisfaction with the present

A perception of being marginalised seems to undergird young people’s experiences of dissatisfaction with their present life experiences. Marginalisation is an effect of social division. Wyn and White (1997) describe marginalisation as “aspects of life experiences through which inequality is structured” (p. 121). They argue that this process constitutes the “systematic exclusion of some groups of young people from full participation in society and its institutions” (p. 120).

Various forms of marginalisation, or social exclusion, overlap and interrelate. The young person, for example, who is excluded from the institution of work, is thereby also excluded from mainstream consumer activity. This situation is exacerbated by the targeting of youth audiences in high levels of advertising for such products as ‘labelled’ clothes and expensive recreational activities.
Young people who lack finances for recreational activities tend to congregate in public places, such as malls or shopping centres. Such a presence of large numbers of unoccupied youth is inclined to generate fear in the general public, and, even in the absence of any anti-social or threatening behaviour on the part of the young people, they can become labelled as a “public problem” (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 14). Such reactions lead to what Wyn and White describe as unnecessarily controlling attention being given to youth. Their description of the marginalisation process includes the kind of exclusion described above, the panic response or reaction by ‘the public’ and by such authorities as the management personnel of shopping centres. Next comes a more generalised ‘moral panic’ generated, to a large degree, by media presentations of ‘youth as problem’. This ‘moral panic’ leads to intensified scrutiny of young people by security personnel. The outcome, according to Wyn and White (1997) is that, through a process beginning with exclusion from financial independence, excluded young people can be “criminalised” (p. 140). In effect, this means the criminalisation of youth unemployment.

Public fear leads to the virtual banishment of groups of young people from public places. This banishment is described by Wyn and White (1997) as “spatial apartheid” (p. 139). White (1998) has further tackled this phenomenon through an Australian Youth Foundation project in which positive strategies are suggested for involving young people in the planning, design and creative use of public spaces. Such projects are a proactive approach to the ‘public space problems’ and two significant features of them is the empowering of youth and the practical demonstration of respect for young people’s ideas and energy.
Basic to the process of marginalisation is the disempowering of youth. As Tait (1992) observes, the burgeoning of one person’s or group’s power has to be at the expense of another’s increasing powerlessness. Recognition of the power deficit in the lives of marginalised youth can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies of continuing deficits as youth problems are welfarised and ‘treated’. “While youth workers may not blame young people for not having power, their notion that many young people do not have the necessary skills, knowledge and qualities to exercise influence . . . is an implicit deficit analysis” (Flowers, 1998, p. 37).

Sercombe (1993) notes that “power is, in itself, an unequal relation, and structures operate which are designed to concentrate power” (p. 10). This observation is supported in Flowers’ (1998) contention that the best of welfare intentions can lead to a concentration on creating opportunities for young people to exercise power, when a more basic issue is the impact of wider social structures that exclude young people from power in the first place. The process of marginalisation, disempowerment, and criminalisation presented above is described by Wyn and White (1997) as “a clear social control agenda” (p. 135). They continue:

The use of state repression against the most marginalised strata of the population is symbolically important in terms of keeping the lid on social unrest, and deflecting attention away from the structural reasons for poverty and unemployment in the first place. (p. 135)

Marginalisation is not limited to the sphere of the wider society. It is the perceived experience of many young people who are school students. School-based marginalisation has many facets. One has to do with academic failure. The links between academic failure and the two-sided coin of ‘dropping out’ and ‘reluctantly staying on’ will be discussed in a later section (2.5.3).
The impact of social class on school-based marginalisation has been investigated by Bourdieu (1977) and, more recently by Walker (1993). Bourdieu highlights the “embodiment of social class . . . in the presentation of self, in movements, facial expressions and posture” (p. 87) and argues that working-class embodiment is valued less highly than that of the middle class. Walker (1993), in an article detailing and discussing research findings published in preliminary form 10 years earlier (Samuel, 1983), claims that female working-class students perceived that their opinions, personalities, abilities, and general ‘personhood’ were undervalued in the school. Not only were these students lacking the status apparently endowed by masculinity, but, to use Bourdieu’s term, they were also lacking “middle-class cultural capital” (p. 87).

The result, according to Walker (1993) was a subtle process of marginalisation in which the marginalised became identified as troublemakers in the school. Teachers’ perceptions of these students was that they were resistant to schooling, and that they were not interested in learning. In the course of the research project, however, students conveyed to Walker the message that their “resistance entailed a demand for education” and that “they cared a great deal that their academic progress was insufficient and that they were under threat of having their education curtailed” (p. 146).

An important issue being raised by Walker’s (1993) ethnographic study is the similarity of these working-class students’ educational goals with those of their school. Her findings are supported by comments made by some of the students interviewed in the present study (See Section 6.2). The assumption that certain students do not want to learn, and therefore engage in ‘school-resistant behaviour’
is not accurate for many of those students. It seems more accurate to describe the situation in terms of school administrators, executive staff, classroom teachers and students all living in different 'realities', despite the fact that they are sharing the common physical environment of the school.

The resulting 'reality gap' can lead to misunderstandings. These can include situations such as those described by Walker (1993) in which students' behaviours and motives are misinterpreted by teachers who are trying, in their own way, to cope with the daily problems of teaching the 'new clientele' of the senior school. As Walker explains, these students want an education – they want to learn, and they want the life advantages that are out of reach for the uneducated – but they cannot fit into the stereotypic roles required of them as student members of the school community.

Related to such alienating experiences of schooling is the marginalisation of young people in the decision-making processes in their schools. Vick (1993) claims that this situation rests, at least in part, on the "reproduction and circulation of discourses which construe them as subordinate, passive objects of others' knowledge and actions" (p. 30). Such a situation seems incongruous with the general thrust of democratic-rights discourses in the wider society. Sherington and Irving (1989), and also White and Wilson (1991) have analysed issues in Australian youth policy, and their common finding is that youth policy tends to be concerned with controlling and managing youth, rather than with offering them significant roles in the decision-making of institutions such as schools.

For this situation to change, making schooling, and, in particular, senior schooling, more amenable to the exercise of students' individual freedom of choice,
it is recognised that educational systems would need to work towards promoting sets of real options for students (Walker & Crump, 1996). It seems that such an approach would also maximise students' development into participating members of a democratic society.

The concept of student participation as a kind of apprenticeship for democratic citizenship is supported by Holdsworth (1996) and Brennan (1996). Brennan, for example, argues that the school has the potential to become a place of active learning about citizenship. She suggests that students should participate in defining both the culture and the organisation of the school, and thus have practical experience in the skills of citizenship. When schools do not operate in this way, students learn other lessons about belonging and participation. The school operates as a mini-society. In it, students train for wider-society citizenship and participation. If young people experience alienation from the school institution, from the values of the organisation and from the organisational methods employed, then this experience is likely to have a negative impact on the style of citizenship that can be anticipated from them in later years.

Another powerful example of youth marginalisation, discussed briefly in an earlier section (2.1.2) is the phenomenon of youth homelessness. Despite the wide range of differences that exist amongst the population of the 'homeless young', one fact of life they share in common. This is their perception that they do not belong in a conventional home setting, and that they will be better off, in some way, if they move away from the situation where they experience this deficit of belonging.

The problem of youth homelessness is not showing signs of improvement. Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) have demonstrated that, in 1994, 100,000
Australians aged between 12 and 24 years experienced homelessness, with 37,000 being homeless on any one night, twice as many as three years earlier. Horn (1998) has documented that youth homelessness has doubled between 1993 and 1998.

In the light of the above information, it is reasonable to claim that, for many young people in Australia in the 1990s, present life experiences are frustrating, emotionally painful, economically precarious and lacking in positive expectations for the future.

2.1.8 Young people and self-efficacy

The young people described above are coping with life according to the knowledge and power they have, or believe themselves to have. Bandura (1984, 1989, 1994, 1995) places the concept of coping behaviour into the context of expectations of personal efficacy. His research supports the hypotheses: “that expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behaviour will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (1984, p. 191).

Bandura’s early work led to the assertion that an individual’s perception of an experience is developed in the context of previous experiences, the situational environment of the present incident, and the value placed by the individual on the rewards or sanctions representing the consequences of the behaviour. Thus, the consequences flowing from one piece of behaviour become motivating forces for other behaviours in the future.

People process and synthesise feedback information from sequences of events over long intervals about the situational circumstances and the patterns and rates of actions that are necessary to produce given outcomes. Since consequences affect behaviour through the influence of thought, beliefs about
schedules of reinforcement can exert greater influence on behaviour than the reinforcement itself. (Bandura, 1977, p. 192)

Bandura here represents reinforcement as “a motivational device rather than as an automatic response strengthener” (1977, p.193). This insight is relevant to the theory underpinning the present investigation, particularly when it is considered in the light of developmental theory. It has been argued earlier in this chapter that it is likely that most senior students will be at a stage of cognitive and moral development where they can think through the implications of behaviour and its consequences in the light of their understanding of what is reasonable and fair, and make their decisions based on the outcomes of their own reflection.

It can therefore be seen that, if a school is organised in such a way that reinforcement in the form of rewards and sanctions is expected to exert a controlling influence over the behaviour of senior students, the anticipated outcome will not necessarily flow. Such a discipline system is likely to be effective only for those students who share the social, educational and moral values espoused by the formulators of the school’s organisational system. That such value-sharing is not a feature of the lives of many senior-school students is illustrated in the interviews that form a part of the present study.

This situation leads to the need to consider what kinds of self-efficacy and coping behaviours may be adopted by students who are not influenced in the way the school would prefer by the reinforcers offered by the school. Bandura describes an efficacy expectation as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce the outcomes” (1977, p. 193). It seems likely that the outcomes required by, or expected by, some senior-school students, particularly those who have no intention of post-schooling formal education, will differ from
those of students with academic aspirations beyond schooling. Not only so, but many of the ‘staying-on’ students who would prefer to be in the workforce, were work available, may see the rewards being offered by compliance to the school’s expectations and rules as unattainable, due to their perception of their own academic ability and their perception of the employment situation for school-leavers.

If various groups of senior students are facing widely differing expectations of outcomes from the schooling experience, it would seem naive to believe that an organisational and discipline system based on outcomes clearly beyond the reach of a majority of the students will lead to a cohesive community. Where the stated outcomes of schooling remain irrelevant to, and unreachable by, a large number of senior students, the phenomenon of what Bandura describes as “outcome-based futility” (1977, p. 205) becomes a feature of the senior-school. This phenomenon is closely related to Seeman’s (1959) description of ‘powerlessness’ as “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcement, he seeks” (p. 784).

If certain student behaviours are perceived by some school administrators as ‘alien’ to the culture of their school, the question of change must arise. If the way the school is organised and run is being disrupted by the behaviour of students who are alienated from the official mores of the school, something needs to change for community cohesion to be a possibility. It is easy to identify this need for change, but much more difficult to determine who, or what, needs to change.

Bandura (1977) identifies “two separable expectancy sources of futility, having quite different antecedents and remedial implications” (p. 205). His
statement concerning behaviour change for individuals and groups, and therefore community-change, can readily be interpreted into the senior-school setting:

To alter efficacy-based futility requires development of competencies and expectations of personal effectiveness. By contrast, to change outcome-based futility necessitates changes in prevailing environmental contingencies that restore the instrumental value of the competencies that people already possess. (p. 205)

The issue Bandura (1977) has raised here involves the need for various kinds of futility to be studied and for the results of such study to inform negotiations for change. This would appear to be of particular importance in the setting of the senior school. Where changes are indicated, it is important for the subject of change to be chosen on the basis of empirical evidence. In the case of the senior school, such investigation will lead to a consideration of what kinds of changes are likely to be appropriate and effective, as well as practicable - changes in students and their attitudes, or in the organisational environment, or perhaps, both.

Bandura (1998) upholds the importance of self-efficacy theory as a way of understanding human agency:

Perceived self-efficacy operates as a central self-regulatory mechanism of human agency. People's beliefs that they can produce desired effects by their actions influence the choices they make, their aspirations, level of effort and perseverance, resilience to adversity, and vulnerability to stress and depression. (p. 51)

Bandura's work in recent years has produced several findings of particular relevance to the present study. In his discussion of self-regulation as a function of practical self-efficacy, for example, Bandura (1996) rejects the argument that 'inappropriate' or 'transgressive' behaviours indicate a breakdown in self-regulation. He argues that disengagement can indicate a process of selective behaviour based, rather, on an efficient self-regulation system. Such an understanding of behaviours regarded by schools as 'inappropriate' demonstrates a
way in which students may choose those behaviours as meeting their own needs – as helping them to cope with their schooling experiences – despite their knowledge of the school rules and expectations.

This exploration of Bandura's self-efficacy theory has introduced the concept of coping behaviours. In the next section, the focus will be on young people's coping in particular.

2.1.9 Young people's coping patterns

According to Frydenberg and Lewis (1991), "a clear understanding of the coping patterns of adolescents in an Australian context is significant for the role it can play in facilitating the development of cognitive and behavioural strategies for effective management of life concerns" (p. 80).

Their comment follows a discussion of various theories of coping. These include deficit approaches such as the concept of 'learned helplessness' (Hiroto & Seligman, 1975) and measures of stress and anxiety as evidence of inability to cope (Selye, 1980; Spielberger, 1970).

The approaches described above are negative in focus. They concentrate on the individual's weaknesses. There is a viable alternative to such approaches. This is to concentrate on behavioural competence rather than on behavioural deficit. This is the approach taken by Frydenberg and Lewis (1991) who base their research on people's capacity to cope. They describe two emphases in psychological theory - one on maladaptive behaviour, and another on more adaptive aspects of human behaviour. Their research into adolescent coping is based on the latter emphasis, and they describe how such an approach can be effective in educational settings:

Objectives are related to learning and adaptation rather than the investigation of disability and deficit - the 'ability' approach to behavioural investigation seems to provide a more useful framework within which to examine human behaviour . . . an orientation focussing on what a person does and what capacities individuals
have to cope with their problems ... adaptation rather than the maladaptive responses of an individual. It represents the healthy normal aspects of behaviour rather than the pathological or abnormal aspects. (p. 66)

Their theory of coping incorporates elements of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1984) and a cognitive phenomenological theory of coping (Lazarus, Averill & Opton, 1974) where the focus is on how individuals perceive their capacities to manage problems. The theoretical model developed by Frydenberg and Lewis (1991) encompasses the individual both as an active shaper of stress experiences and as a respondent to the environment:

Coping represents one aspect of psychosocial competence. It is characterised by the cognitive and behavioural strategies that are used to deal with both the demands of everyday living and the demands that are placed on an individual during his or her passage through the life-span. (p. 66)

Friedenberg and Lewis (1991) write that the measurement is built on the hypothesis:

that individuals and their environments reciprocally affect each other. It is a measure of a process and as such it describes what is happening in any particular encounter. No strategy is considered inherently better or worse than any other strategy. (p. 68)

Frydenberg and Lewis (1991) set out to determine adolescent coping in Australia, and developed the Adolescent Coping Scale, a measure which they claimed to be more appropriate to the adolescent age-group and to the Australian culture than the "Ways of Coping Checklist – Revised" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The psychological literature includes claims that coping has to do with problem-solving in specific situations (Lazarus et al., 1974), and that it is a measure of the process in which individuals and their environments interact with each other (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991). It would seem likely, then, that any attempt to increase understanding of the attitudes and behaviour of adolescents in the senior-
school setting would need to investigate characteristics of the environment as well as characteristics of the students.

2.1.10 Youth and the future

Young people who experience the kinds of life-experiences discussed in earlier sections of this chapter are likely to approach the future with little optimism or hope. Their personal and family experiences of unemployment that soon appears to mutate into unemployability, make it difficult for them to see any purpose in doing what seems necessary to fit in to the school environment. They have few, if any, expectations of future rewards from present application to education.

Their pessimism about future employment and financial independence is, for many young people, combined with a growing fear that the earth itself has a precarious future, and that, even if the earth survives, life on the planet may not. According to Wilson and Wyn (1993),

The growing fear of environmental degradation has had considerable implications for the perspectives on the future which have been expressed by many young people. The threat of a nuclear holocaust has been particularly important in shaping these attitudes, but as that threat has declined in immediacy, other environmental issues have become more prominent. (p. 37)

Such lack of hope for the future has a depressing impact on many young people in the 1990s. The proposition that “for want of vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 20:18) is played out, symbolically, and sometimes literally in young people’s lives. “Young people in our society are battling with independence and future-planning while facing factors such as high youth unemployment, increased tertiary training requirements for many of even the simplest occupations, and family break-up and dysfunction” (Wright & Martin, 1998, p. 11).
Lack of expectation of a viable future leads many young people to centre their thoughts and their behaviour on the present, without consideration for possible consequences. For increasing numbers, hopelessness leads to self-harm of various kinds. This is due to "exhaustion of problem-solving ability associated with ... hopelessness. ... Their inability to see different ways out of a problem may lead them into a cycle of hopelessness and eventual self-harm" (McLaughlin, Miller & Warwick, 1996, p. 531).

Self-harm can take a variety of forms, including alcohol- or other drug-abuse, eating disorders, suicide ideation or suicidal behaviour (Mallett & Swabey, 1997; Cantor, Turrel & Baume, 1996; Davidson, 1989). Far from indicating a lack of motivation, such behaviours are motivated by individuals' needs to cope with tragic elements of their lives by taking action that they believe will diminish their pain.

There is no such thing as unmotivated behaviour. All human behaviour is aimed towards meeting an individual's needs, sometimes instinctive, sometimes subconscious, and sometimes perceived. Clark and Reid (1998) argue that:

young people want to be competent in managing their own lives. They expect others to recognise the importance of being able to do things for yourself, to make choices and be respected for the choices you make. They want time and affection and to belong. They do not always articulate these needs in ways adults can readily hear. When these needs are not met they seek to meet their needs in a range of destructive ways, that include self-harm and suicide. What we do know is that they will meet their needs whether they make constructive or destructive choices. (p. 17)

Such a statement is relevant to the study of the phenomenon of school-based powerlessness introduced in Chapter One. The very issues raised by Clark and Reid (1998) as important to young people are problematic to senior students who
perceive themselves to be powerless in the educational setting. They may be aware of a personal need to demonstrate their competence to manage their own lives. They may want to be free to make meaningful decisions about their lives and to be respected in those decisions. They may need "time and affection and to belong" (Clark & Reid, 1998, p. 17), but observations of senior students in the early days of this project indicated that there were at least some of them who did not experience the school as a place where these needs were being met.

Feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement seemed to be undermining the possibility of a positive and productive experience of senior schooling. It seemed that something about the school environment itself might be contributing to those feelings. As indicated in Chapter One, both students and teachers, in informal discussions with the researcher, have indicated their concern about organisational and disciplinary methods in the senior school. Their comments emphasise the question of age-appropriateness.

Although some of the limitations of developmental theory have been discussed above (section 2.1.3), that theory needs to be discussed more fully here, because it is likely to be relevant to the climate of schools. It would probably be true to say that the majority of teachers in New South Wales secondary schools have studied developmental theory as part of their teacher-training. In the 60s and 70s, and maybe beyond the 70s, this body of theory was thought to be useful to give teachers some idea of the expectations they might have of the 'average' student at particular ages. It seems, however, that many of the organisational structures of schools, and particularly the disciplinary systems within those structures, cannot be defended as age-appropriate for senior secondary students when the descriptions of
adolescent' stages psychosocial development, cognitive development and moral development are considered. A brief presentation of such developmental theory follows.

2.2 Developmental theory: adolescent psychology

The term adolescence comes from the Latin word 'adolescere', meaning "to grow into maturity". The Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) defines the adolescent as "a person between childhood and maturity", and adolescence as "the process or condition of growing up; the growing age of human beings; the period which extends from childhood to manhood or womanhood" (p. 170). The concept of adolescence is connected to the concept of puberty by virtue of the fact that the physical changes of puberty generally occur in the early stages of adolescence. Adolescence itself, however, is a period characterised by movement towards social maturity. This maturing process is evidenced in personality, social, cognitive and moral development. Traditionally, issues of adolescent psychology have come to be expressed in terms of developmental characteristics commonly observable during that maturing process. A brief outline of three developmental theories (Erikson, 1950; Piaget, 1954; Kohlberg, 1984) will follow. While these theories are dated, it is claimed here that they form a foundation for many practising teachers' understanding of the development of children and young people. These outlines will lead to a discussion of the impact of the developmental tasks of adolescence on senior-student alienation.
2.2.1 Theory of psychosocial development - Erikson

Erikson (1950) identifies the psychosocial crisis of the adolescent stage as "identity versus confusion" (1950, p. 234). Erikson's developmental theory presents the concept of the human life span's consisting of eight stages, each with an associated 'crisis' which most individuals will work through at that stage. According to this theory, the first stage, usually belonging to the first year of life, is characterised by the 'trust versus mistrust' crisis. The second stage, 'autonomy versus doubt', usually belongs to the second and third years. Between the ages of four and six, most individuals work through the stage of 'initiative versus guilt', followed by the 'industry versus inferiority' stage which usually lasts until the onset of puberty. The adolescent stage, already described, is followed by the stages of early adulthood ('intimacy versus isolation'), middle adulthood ('generativity versus self-absorption') and the aging years ('integrity versus despair').

The 'identity versus confusion crisis' of adolescence is described by Erikson (1950) in the context of the adolescent's oscillation between trying to meet the demands of childhood and those of adulthood:

The growing and developing youths, faced with this physiological revolution within them, and with tangible adult tasks ahead of them, are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational prototypes of the day . . . (p. 235)

Weiten (1992) describes this struggle to form a clear sense of identity in terms of "working out a stable concept of oneself as a unique individual and embracing an ideology or system of values that provides a sense of direction" (p. 403).
2.2.2 Theory of cognitive development - Piaget

The developmental stage theory of cognition described by Piaget (1954) and by Piaget and Inhelder (1955) proposed four stages: (a) the 'sensorimotor stage' (approximately birth to the age of two years); (b) the 'preoperational stage' (approximately two to seven years); (c) the 'concrete operational stage' (approximately seven to eleven years); and (d) the 'formal operational stage' which extends from the age of about eleven through adulthood.

According to this developmental theory, most adolescents are likely to come into Piaget's (1954) formal-operational period. This is the period in which individuals are able to apply mental operations to abstractions, and to develop the processes necessary for logical and systematic thinking without recourse to concrete representations. About this period of cognitive development, Weiten (1992) comments that:

many adolescents spend hours mulling over hypothetical possibilities related to abstractions such as justice, love and freewill ... Adolescents in the formal operational period become more systematic in their problem-solving efforts. Children in earlier developmental stages tend to attack problems quickly, with a trial-and-error approach. In contrast, children who have achieved formal operations are more likely to think things through. They envision possible courses of action, and try to use logic to reason out the likely consequences of each possible solution before they act. Thus, thought processes in the formal operational period can be characterised as abstract, systematic, logical and reflective. (p. 393)

2.2.3 Theory of moral development - Kohlberg

Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development focuses on moral reasoning. He developed his model of moral development by presenting subjects with moral
dilemmas and analysing their responses. The model consists of three levels of morality, each consisting of two stages, as depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1: Kohlberg's Levels of Moral Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KOHLBERG'S LEVELS AND DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE OF CHARACTERISTIC REASONING REGARDING THE DILEMMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1. PRECONVENTIONAL MORALITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1. Punishment orientation</td>
<td>Compliance with rules to avoid punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2. Naive reward orientation</td>
<td>Compliance with rules to get rewards, sharing in order to get returns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEVEL 2. CONVENTIONAL MORALITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3. Good-boy/good-girl orientation</td>
<td>Conformity to rules that are defined by others' approval/disapproval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4. Authority orientation</td>
<td>Rigid conformity to society's rules, law-and-order mentality, avoiding censure for rule breaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEVEL 3. POSTCONVENTIONAL MORALITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5. Social contract orientation</td>
<td>More flexible understanding that people obey rules because they are necessary for social order, but the rules could be changed if there were better alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6. Morality of individual principles and conscience</td>
<td>Behaviour conforms to internal principles (justice, equality) to avoid self-condemnation, and sometimes may violate society's rules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(From Weiten, 1992 p. 395.)

According to Kohlberg's model, most adolescents would be likely to oscillate between the conventional level of moral reasoning and the postconventional level. The two stages of the conventional level are "mutual interpersonal expectations" and "social system and conscience" (1984, p. 175).
outlining the characteristics of the first of these stages, Kohlberg describes the
individual’s understanding of ‘what is right’ in the following way:

living up to what is expected by people close to you or what
people generally expect of people in your role as son, brother,
friend, etc. ‘Being good’ is important and means having good
motives, showing concern about others. It also means keeping
mutual relationships, such as trust, loyalty, respect and gratitude.
(p. 175)

‘What is right’ in the second stage of the conventional level is, according to
Kohlberg, “fulfilling the actual duties to which you have agreed. Laws are to be
upheld except in extreme cases where they conflict with other fixed social duties.
Right is also contributing to society, the group, or institution (p. 175).

Weiten (1992) describes individuals at the conventional level of moral
reasoning as seeing rules to be necessary if social order is to be maintained as they
“internalise the rules, not to avoid punishment but to be virtuous and win approval
from others. Moral thinking at this stage is relatively inflexible. Rules are viewed
as absolute guidelines that should be enforced rigidly” (p. 396).

The alternative title offered by Kohlberg for the post-conventional level of
moral development is the ‘principled’ level. He describes the individual’s
awareness of the existence of differing values and opinions, and claims that the
‘principled’ individual is aware:

that most values and rules are relative to your group. These
relative rules should usually be upheld, however, in the interest of
impartiality and because they are the social contract. Some non­
relative values and rights like life and liberty, however, must be
upheld in any society and regardless of majority opinion. (p. 175)

Weiten’s (1992) description of the postconventional level, to which young
people tend to move during adolescence is that it:
involves working out a personal code of ethics. Acceptance of rules is less rigid, and moral thinking shows some flexibility. Subjects at the postconventional level allow for the possibility that someone might not comply with some of society’s rules if they conflict with personal ethics, for example, subjects at this level might applaud a newspaper reporter who goes to jail rather than reveal a source of information who was promised anonymity. (1992, p. 396)

It is important to keep these developmental models in perspective as models. They are not prescriptive. They are descriptive theoretical constructs built on trends emerging from the observations and research studies of their designers.

These models, then, provide useful frameworks within which the attitudes and behaviours of adolescents may be studied. It must be kept in mind, however, that theorists such as Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg had little to say about individual differences in development or in theoretical problems inherent in individuals’ simultaneous displaying of patterns of thinking characteristic of several different stages (Flavell, 1982). Whereas they can provide some diagnostic information, care must be taken not to stretch the implications of developmental theories beyond their descriptive role.

Indicators of student alienation in the senior school will now be discussed in the context of adolescent psychology.

2.2.4 Alienation and the developmental tasks of adolescence

To develop greater understanding of alienation amongst adolescents, it seems important to consider the impact of adolescent developmental stages, and, in particular, the impact of what have been described as ‘adolescent developmental tasks’ on young people’s experiences of life, and especially, of schooling. The discussion will now move to an outline of developmental theories pertaining to
adolescents, and will include some discussion of how developmental tasks of adolescence might influence levels of senior-student alienation.

Fetro (1985) discusses adolescent alienation in the context of adolescents' developmental tasks in the process of transition from childhood to adulthood. She draws attention to external pressures that may influence this process of identity-establishment and moving towards independence. These pressures include decreased family stability, changes in family structure including one-parent families, increased mobility of families, increased adolescent unemployment and changing standards of sexual behaviour. She acknowledges increased truancy, dropout, pregnancy and suicide rates for teenagers. From this background information from the literature, she develops an instrument to measure what she describes as three 'components' of alienation: social isolation, powerlessness and normlessness in young adults (ages 10-14).

When manifestations of alienation in adolescents are considered in such terms as powerlessness, and normlessness, it is clear that a tension is likely to exist between adolescent experiences of alienation and developmental tasks of adolescence.

The psychosocial crisis of adolescence as described by Erikson (1950) is "identity versus confusion" (p. 234). Weiten's (1992) description of this psychosocial struggle identifies the adolescent's task of working out a self-concept as a unique person, and finding a values-system that seems worth embracing in order to have a sense of direction. Seeman's (1959) description of powerlessness includes the individual's expectation that what he or she does will not determine the outcomes or reinforcement that follow the behaviour. For an individual to whom such powerlessness leads to a high level of personal frustration, it is clear that the task of developing a viable self-image will be hampered by the perception of being inevitably controlled by others.
Normlessness, according to Seeman (1959), is likely to lead individuals to reject socially approved behaviours and ‘common’ values. This experience will interfere with their capacity to find personal values-systems which are compatible with the values of the school, or maybe of the wider society.

A perception of personal powerlessness will also affect an adolescent’s cognitive functioning at the formal-operational level. If, as Weiten (1992) suggests, this stage of cognitive development includes the individual’s thinking through of hypothetical questions related to such abstractions as love, justice and freewill, the impact of an experience of personal lack of power is clear. Powerless people, or people who perceive themselves to lack power in a given situation, may be free to work out solutions to problems, but lack the confidence, and sometimes the opportunity, to put them into practice. When the consequences of their actions seem to them to be out of control, the task of developing logical reasoning skills becomes, at best, complicated, and, at worst, impossible.

Adolescent experiences of normlessness in the school situation will clearly affect their development in moral reasoning as outlined by Kohlberg (1984). Normlessness, according to Seeman (1959) implies a conflict between common values and private interests. It can lead to individuals’ satisfying private interests by any means that are available and effective. For individuals engaged in the tasks of the conventional level of moral development, normlessness is clearly a complicating variable. It is difficult to live up to what is expected by others when the individual has rejected the values undergirding those expectations. If individuals within an institution (in this case, the school) are experiencing estrangement from the values and goals of that institution, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to behave as contributing members of the institution.

On the other hand, adolescents who have moved on to the post-conventional level of moral development are likely to be able to explain their ‘inappropriate’ school behaviour in terms of the conflict between the school’s rules
and their own personal beliefs or values. This may seem quite reasonable to these students, but, if those personal beliefs run counter to the ethos of the school, the resultant behaviour is likely to lead to sanctions which will then be regarded by the students as illogical or unfair.

The feelings described by young people experiencing school administration and school rules in this way demonstrate the phenomena of meaninglessness and estrangement. Some of these feelings flow from their general perception that they are powerless in the school situation. These are the three manifestations of alienation that are the focus of the present study. The discussion will now turn to the literature of ‘alienation’.

2.3 Alienation theory

It has already been noted in Chapter One that attitudes and behaviours exhibited by some senior students can be described in terms of estrangement, powerlessness and meaninglessness. These phenomena were also recognised as manifestations of alienation identified in Seeman’s (1959) analysis of extant alienation literature. Drawing on this analysis, Seeman concludes that any of these phenomena, or any combination of them, indicates an experience of alienation. The section below will discuss the construct of alienation in the context of the variety of interpretations of alienation to be found in the literature.

2.3.1 Early meanings of ‘alienation’

The word ‘alienation’ derives from the Latin verb *alienare*, which means to remove something, to take it away and transfer its ownership to another. Klein (1966) traces this meaning to the Latin noun *alius*, meaning ‘another’ and to the adjective *alienus*, meaning ‘belonging, or pertaining, to another’.
Schacht (1971) refers to three traditional uses of the English term ‘alienation’ which have their roots in Latin usage and go back to the Middle-English period (c. 14th century). The first is a legal term concerning the transfer of ownership of something to another person. The second is a medical term. In Middle-English, a person could be described as “aliened of mind or understanding: or “aliened and turned from reason” (Kurath & Kuhn, 1956, p.192). This English usage of the word derived from the Latin alienatio mentis. This term referred to unconsciousness or loss of a person’s mental powers or senses.

The third traditional use of ‘alienation’ refers to a specific meaning of alienare in which a warm relationship with another loses its closeness, and a separation results. The Middle English Dictionary (Kurath & Kuhn, 1956) describes this use of the word as being almost exclusively related to a theological concept of separation. Illustrations of the term in this dictionary refer to persons being “aliened from God” and to the state of “parting between God and man” (Kurath & Kuhn, 1956, p.192).

Vince’s (1988) article on ‘alienation’ in the New Dictionary of Theology, includes a description of alienation as “the experience of being a stranger . . . estranged from others and from oneself” (p.15). He claims this state of estrangement to be based on “mankind’s alienation from God, creation, his fellows and himself” (p. 15). Biblical teaching, in both the Old Testament and the New, emphasizes this theme, which is probably best illustrated in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son. Jones (1965) has described this parable as “a microcosmic anatomy of estrangement” (p. 176).
The concept of alienation which has come into common usage in modern English, and which has figured in both the sociological and psychological literature, is based on this third Middle-English usage. Whereas it no longer refers, as in Middle English, exclusively to a theological sense of separation, it continues to express the loss of a relationship.

The next section presents a brief review of the construct of 'alienation' in the literature. It commences with problems of definition surrounding the term.

2.3.2 The construct of 'alienation' in the literature: Problems of definition

The review below (Section 2.3.3) will present issues explored by various writers in describing the human phenomenon of alienation. It will become clear to the reader that this review does not present a 'developing theory of alienation'. On the contrary, this survey of the various theories of alienation highlights the lack, not only of central themes, but also of the emergence of a sophisticated theory over the years.

It is this problem of definition and theory that led Seeman (1959) to undertake the task of identifying the various meanings attributed to 'alienation' in the literature. The list of meanings identified by Seeman was introduced in Chapter One of the thesis: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. To further clarify Seeman's contribution to the study of the construct of alienation, and to underline the relevance of his work to the present study, a more detailed discussion of these five manifestations of alienation will now be presented.

'Powerlessness', to Seeman, means "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcement, he seeks" (1959, p.784). This social-psychological
view of powerlessness focuses on the subject’s perception of a situation or an experience.

Such an approach allows for a variety of perceptions of any given objective condition. Two individuals, for example, may have such diverse perceptions of the same objective conditions that their associated alienation levels, measured as their sense of helplessness in determining outcomes, may be completely different.

The experience of powerlessness will also be affected by an individual's personal frustration level at feeling unable to control outcomes and on the value of control to that individual. Seeman concludes that:

in this version of alienation, the individual's expectancy for control of events is clearly distinguished from (a) the objective situation of powerlessness as some observer sees it, (b) the observer's judgment of that situation against some ethical standard, and (c) the individual's sense of a discrepancy between his expectations for control and his desire for control. (1959, p. 784)

Seeman (1959) argues that the concept of powerlessness should be confined to "expectancies which have to do with the individual's sense of influence over socio-political events - control over the political system, the industrial economy, international affairs, and the like" (p. 785).

The term 'meaninglessness' is used by Seeman (1959) to describe perceptions of situations in which the individual's alternatives are, or appear to be, externally narrowed to preclude the intelligent choice of appropriate alternatives in given situations. He describes a "low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about future outcomes of behaviour can be made" (p. 786). This is so especially where the external constraints seem to the individual to be unreasonable, unfair or unnecessarily restrictive. In such situations, individuals are likely to experience meaninglessness in the areas of their social environment affected by those constraints.
Mannheim’s influence on Seeman’s thinking about the concept of meaninglessness is acknowledged by Seeman (1959). Mannheim (1940) had discussed the decline of ‘substantial rationality’ which appeared to him to accompany an increase in what he termed ‘functional rationality’. This can be seen to be pertinent to a discussion of the phenomenon of meaninglessness when one considers Mannheim’s description of increased functional rationality. He describes this increase as involving a commitment by political leaders in a society to certain processes of social organisation whereby ends, which they perceive to be beneficial to the society, will most efficiently be realised. Being organised in such a manner takes from individuals in that society the opportunity, and the right, to make and act on personal decision-making on many issues. Mannheim’s argument is that, as the level of social organisation increases, it is accompanied by a commensurate decrease in the level of the individual’s "capacity to act intelligently in a given situation on the basis of (personal) insight into the interrelations of events" (Mannheim, 1940, p. 59).

Seeman (1959) agrees with Mannheim’s (1940) argument, identifying in it the element of impaired capacity for informed decision-making which he describes as a feature of meaninglessness. This has to do with individuals’ understanding of situations and events in which they are involved. Seeman describes high alienation, in the sense of meaninglessness, to be present:

when the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe - when the individual’s minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met . . . The individual cannot choose appropriately among alternative interpretations because the increase in functional rationality, with its emphasis on specialisation and production, makes such choice impossible. (p. 786)

‘Powerlessness’, then, has to do with perceptions of individuals’ ability to control outcomes, while ‘meaninglessness’ refers to individuals’ perceptions of
being able to predict behavioural outcomes. It can be seen, as Seeman points out, that these two versions of alienation are logically independent of each other.

Seeman does, however, identify some connections between the two concepts. The less intelligible (or more meaningless) the perceived environment, the lower one's expectancy of control. This leads to Seeman's observation that these two varieties of alienation - powerlessness and meaninglessness - while having independent existence, are connected in the perceptions and behaviour of the individual.

The concept of 'normlessness' is described by Seeman (1959) in terms of a conflict between common values and private interests. He claims that this conflict leads individuals to seek the satisfaction of the private interests by virtually any means that are effective. He therefore claims that a significant feature of normlessness is the belief that given goals cannot be achieved through socially approved behaviours. The obvious outcome, according to Seeman, is that the person has to make a choice: to relinquish those goals, or to use socially unapproved behaviours in order to pursue those goals.

In his discussion of normlessness, Merton (1946) refers to distrust as one of its products. He claims that the tension between common values and private interests leads to distrust amongst individuals and an associated feeling of emotional isolation. He claims that this tension produces a "climate of reciprocal distrust which, to say the least, is not conducive to stable human relationships ... The very same society that produces this sense of alienation and estrangement generates in many a craving for reassurance" (p. 143). Merton thus draws attention
to what he perceives as an inevitable conflict within the individual whose goals are incompatible with those of the society.

'Isolation', as defined by Seeman, is an intellectual, rather than a social phenomenon. He states that "The alienated in the isolation sense are those who . . . assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society" (1959, p. 789). This kind of alienation may well produce rebellion, as 'isolated' individuals attempt to establish a greatly modified social structure that seems to them likely to meet their needs.

Seeman describes 'self-estrangement' as "the inability of the individual to find self-rewarding activities that engage him" (1959, p. 790). A lack of intrinsic meaning in life-activities seems to underlie this experience of self-estrangement. Seeman's (1959) attempt to identify the various meanings given to the word in the literature has been criticised by Browning, Farmer, Kirk and Mitchell (1961). They reject the five meanings as independent concepts, preferring to describe alienation in terms of three sequential stages: the predisposing stage, the stage of cultural disaffection, and the stage of social isolation or self-estrangement, depending on how the individual reacts to the experience of disaffection.

The phenomena of powerlessness, meaninglessness and normlessness identified by Seeman (1959) are described by Browning et al. (1961) as three successive phases of the predisposing stage. Their argument is that, phenomenologically, experiences of alienation seem to occur in this order. Frustration and inability to cope lead to a sense of powerlessness. This leads to social frames of reference being seen as meaningless. Eventually, the person begins to feel that the social normative structure is no longer a binding force.
Cultural disaffection is reached when the disillusionment described above leads to the choice to reject the relevant cultural norms, and to the choice of isolation from those who accept them.

The stage of social isolation occurs when people undertake forms of adaptation which cut them off socially. For some, such open opposition to societal norms is repugnant, and they may choose to adapt by rejecting cultural goals while still adhering to the institutional means. Browning et al. (1961) describe the self-estranged individual as having “one foot in and another outside of the social system, which makes him a marginal man” (p. 780).

In response to this criticism, Seeman (1961) accepts that “the three stages and their sub-phases probably happen to some people in the manner described”, but regards the attempt to present such a tidy description of alienation as simplistic.

The task undertaken by Seeman (1959) was to draw attention to the multiple phenomena assumed by writers to belong to the construct of ‘alienation’. There is no suggestion in his discussion that any one of these meanings is a more accurate depiction of alienation than any of the others. His intent is to highlight the need for those researching ‘alienation’ to begin by clarifying the specific manifestation(s) of alienation they are investigating.

Such concern for definitional clarity concerning ‘alienation’ is not restricted to Seeman (1959). Clark (1959), for example, writes that “as the list of authors grows, so does the variety of definitions”. He then provides a general definition of ‘alienation’ as “the degree to which man feels powerless to achieve the role he has determined to be rightfully his in specific situations” (p. 849). Kon (1967), Kaufmann (1971) and Lee (1972) have all drawn attention to the diversity of
meanings attaching to the term ‘alienation’ in the literature, as have Schacht (1971) and Williamson and Cullingford (1997).

There are at least two directions in which researchers could proceed from the above discussion of the multiple meanings of the term ‘alienation’ in the literature. They could dismiss the term as definitionally defective on the grounds of its history of varied meanings and interpretations. On the other hand, they could take these variations and the frequency of the literature’s focus on aspects, or variants, of alienation as an indicator of both the importance of the general construct, and the need to define clearly the meanings of alienation being addressed in their writing. In the current research, the latter direction has been taken.

There follows a brief review of ‘alienation theory’ in the literature.

2.3.3 Review of alienation theory

The literature of the late-18th and early-19th centuries includes early references to alienation in the writings of Rousseau, Schiller and Hegel. Rousseau (1947, 1954) describes the human need of belonging to community, and the need for individuals who delegated sovereignty to a government to retain the power with which they had exercised that delegatory choice. He claims, further, that separation from social community and experiences of powerlessness undermine human contentment.

Schiller (1954) emphasises the themes of human dignity and spiritual freedom, and Hegel (1977) the themes of the value of individual perception of life and belongingness to community. To Hegel, alienation was portrayed as the individual’s separation from society, or from some important element of society.
Israel (1979), in his discussion of Marxist alienation theory, outlines various concepts of alienation which preceded Marx and which appear to have influenced Marx's thinking on the topic. Foremost among these concepts are those proposed by Rousseau, Schiller and Hegel. According to Israel, any discussion of alienation theory must be preceded by an attempt to understand underlying views of human nature and the nature of society. Rousseau, Schiller and Hegel bring such philosophical frameworks to the notion of alienation.

The influence of these writers can be traced in the alienation literature of the mid- to late-20th century. Echoes of Hegel (1977) can be found in the writings of Fromm (1956) and Kahler (1957). Fromm emphasises the powerlessness experienced by individuals in a technological society, and claims that:

Alienation as we find it in modern society is almost total; it pervades the relationship of man to his work, to the things he consumes, to the state, to his fellow-man and to himself. Man has created a world of man-made things as it never existed before . . . The more powerful and gigantic the forces are which he unleashes, the more powerless he feels himself as a human being. (pp. 124-125)

Kahler's (1957) focus is on people's experiences of alienation as 'not-belonging' or uncomfortable separation from aspects of their society. He discusses their efforts to change aspects of society which they perceive to be conducive to alienation.

A constant theme in alienation theory, commencing with Hegel, has been the antithetical concepts of social belonging and social separation.

In the 1940s, alienation is discussed in the setting of escalating social organisation and control. One social control theorist presents alienation as an experience of normlessness (Merton, 1946). Merton claims this experience to be based on individuals' feelings of personal frustration and distrust of societal control.
and the superimposing of social rules perceived by individuals as undermining their personal rights and freedoms. In another theory, alienation is described in terms of individuals’ losing personal integrity and power as the level of social organisation increases. (Mannheim, 1940). There are echoes of Rousseau’s theory of alienation in Mannheim’s writing. Rousseau (1954) had written, in 1762, about the negative impact of powerlessness on individual contentment. Mannheim (1940), in similar vein, describes elements of powerlessness and meaninglessness in a highly-organised society as operating to diminish the quality of human life.

The concepts of powerlessness and meaninglessness are featured in Fromm’s (1956, 1961) writings. Fromm indicates alienation to be a negative experience of powerlessness and meaninglessness. He describes people in a technological age as being out of control. This, he claims, is because of the control being exerted over people by the very technology which had originally purported to improve their lives.

Another presentation of negative aspects of alienation is that of Keniston (1965), who focuses attention on the theme of conflict between the values and norms of individuals and society, and develops theories of alienation which describe this conflict as having negative impact on human life. Both Fromm (1956) and Keniston (1965) describe such conflict as finding resolution only by individuals’ surrendering personal beliefs and values in order to belong, or by individuals’ accepting the ongoing experience of separateness from society in order to hold on to personal beliefs.

The concept of alienation was probably first introduced into sociological theory by Marx (1963). Although Marx changes in his understanding of human
nature between his earlier and later writings, one important concern remains constant - the theme of emancipation, of human self-realisation. According to Israel (1979), Marx’s earlier concept of man led him to an individualistic attitude, which changed later to a sociological concept. He cites Marx’s claim that “man is in the most literal sense a *zoon policon*, not merely a political animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society” (p. 5). Israel proposes that the central tenet of Marx’s theory of alienation is the question of whether human beings have power to control their environments, both social and natural, or whether they are helpless victims of uncontrollable forces.

Coser (1956) tackles similar questions in constructing his two-category classification of theories of society. He describes the first category as being based on an assumption that a state of balance is a natural state, and includes an assumption of the necessity of consensus. In such a theory, conflicts are defined as disturbing factors. This is not so in the second category, which assumes the natural existence of conflicting interests, and includes a belief that states of balance are nonachievable. Here, conflict is seen as natural, and periods of apparent equilibrium as temporary.

An important insight into alienation theory is provided by Israel’s (1979) differentiation between individual-oriented and society-oriented elements of alienation theory. These two elements can be otherwise described as psychological and sociological approaches to alienation. In a psychological approach, an attempt is made to identify and analyse psychological experiences associated with the individual’s relationships with other persons and things, and may be extended to include studies of individuals’ perception of certain aspects of their life in what is
experienced as an alienating society. A sociological approach focuses on attempts to “describe and analyse the economic-sociological processes which affect the individual and his role in society”. Commencing with an acceptance of certain social structures as given, such investigations include studies of processes affecting individuals’ relationships to work, to other people, and to objects (Israel, 1979, p. 6).

Langslet’s (1963) description of post-1940 alienation theory identifies a further element of differentiation in alienation theory. He demonstrates a bi-directional development in alienation discussion, the first based on alienation as an ‘ontological-ethical problem’ and the other as a ‘psychological-sociological problem’. The first represents the alienation theory of existential philosophy, and is sometimes connected with theological arguments on the nature of man - arguments such as those of Tillich (1968, 1969). These arguments hold that there is a basic unsettledness in people, and that alienation is inevitable, independent of prevailing social conditions.

The second direction, which includes the assumptions underlying the present inquiry, sees alienation in sociological terms, in that a person’s alienation depends upon that person’s being alienated from something. While no normative judgments are being passed here on the value of that ‘something’, alienation is seen as deviation from ‘normal’. In his discussion of this phenomenon, Israel (1979) comments that the word normal may refer to nothing more than a “state which is common in a statistical sense” (p. 11). A psychological-sociological approach adds to this deviation theory the concept of the individual’s perception of the ‘normal state’ as being incompatible with personal needs and goals.
In terms of conflict, alienation can be seen to be inevitable where there are “antagonisms considered to be caused by assumed demands which are made by both the individual and the society, but which are incompatible with each other” (Israel, 1979, p. 11). Alienation must develop where these incompatible demands or needs cannot co-exist harmoniously.

There are two basic ways of conceptualising such conflict between incompatible demands. One is based on the question of how society can be changed in order to make it possible for individuals to reach their goals, while the other is based on the question of individuals’ social adjustment. Social-adjustment theories rely on normative assumptions - for example, the hypothesis that, for there to be any social organisation, certain common goals must exist for all members of society. The concept of consensus on values and goals is important to the theoretical basis of the present inquiry. This is because it explores the problems of conflict and alienation which may arise in the absence of such consensus within the senior school.

It is not difficult to see how social-adjustment theory can become authoritarian in stance. An authoritarian approach is likely to be based on collectivist notions of the need for the individual to subordinate personal interests to the interests of the society. Thus, for example, Simon (1962) describes the “most essential function of authority” to be “the issuance and carrying out of rules expressing the requirements of the common good considered materially” (p. 57). In the authoritarian approach, there is an expectation that authority and obligations will be associated. Watt (1982) describes this expectation, and continues: “... one
person may be said to have a right to issue commands which others have an obligation to obey" (p. 75).

In the light of this expectation, the alienated person who questions the validity both of the 'right' and of the 'obligation' is viewed as deviant from a desirable norm, and alienated behaviour is likely to be subject to sanctions (Martin, 1976). The implications of such a climate in the senior-school environment will be explored later in this chapter.

The above discussion has presented elements of alienation theory from the literature. The next section will demonstrate a theoretical link between the constructs of 'locus of control', and 'alienation' presenting as powerlessness.

2.3.4 Locus of control: externality and powerlessness

Locus of control is "a generalised expectancy about the degree to which individuals control their outcomes" (Weiten, 1992, p. 449). The personality construct of 'locus of control' was introduced by the social-learning theorist, Rotter (1966) and developed in his further work (cf 1975, 1990). Although usually described in terms of the poles of 'externality' and 'internality', the construct is better understood as a continuum, with 'externality' and 'internality' at the ends. Most people would belong somewhere between these two poles.

Individuals closer to the 'externality pole' tend to feel that they are powerless to exert any influence on the outcomes of their behaviour. They believe that external factors such as fate or chance govern their successes and their failures. Outcomes are perceived by them as being beyond their control (Rotter, 1966). Weiten (1992) describes this belief in terms of individuals' feeling like "pawns of fate" (p. 449).
In contrast, individuals closer to the ‘internality pole’ believe that their own abilities and actions determine their successes and failures. They believe that they have more influence over their outcomes than do ‘externals’ (Rotter, 1966). There is a clear connection between the concept of externality and the concept of alienation experienced as powerlessness. Seeman’s (1959) definition of ‘powerlessness’ as "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcement, he seeks" (p.784) could well be adopted as a definition of Rotter’s (1966, 1975, 1990) ‘externality’.

Moving in the direction of the external pole of the continuum is one way to describe the adaptive behaviour of many Australian young people in the 1990s. This position is taken by Eckersley (1997) who defends his position by citing one of the finding of the Australian Commission for the Future Study:

The Commission study says, ‘Youth seem unusually apathetic about the future. They are not negligent or ignorant of the challenges; they just feel powerless to do anything about it. It is a sense of being disenfranchised and disengaged, awaiting the outcome of events rather than anticipating a role in them.’ (p. 248)

Nunn and Parish (1992) have explored the significance of these similarities in their study of students considered to be at risk of academic failure. At-risk students were found to be significantly more externally oriented than students in the control group. Nunn and Parish comment that the external orientation of at-risk students meant that they believed that their own behaviour to have little or no effect on their schooling outcomes: “This is like believing that the ‘winds of fate’ control one’s destiny, rather than that one has the ability to bring about change” (p. 438). Aligned with this finding were two others: that at-risk students tended to have a
negative self-perception of academic competency, and that their styles of learning indicated low motivation toward achievement. They conclude:

Therefore, in the case of at-risk students, experiences appear to be filtered through a belief system which included a marginal sense of personal empowerment for effecting change, coupled with a devaluing sense of personal competence and deflated confidence. It is apparent that efforts which attempt to systematically change such dysfunctional views of self, personal control and learning are important for these students. (p. 438)

The above discussion of the likely impact of internality or externality on senior students’ motivation to stay on at school, and on their experiences of senior schooling, leads to consideration of the construct of motivation. The discussion that follows demonstrates the relevance of motivation theory to this study of senior-school student alienation. It proceeds to describe various sub-theories of motivation, and culminates in a detailed discussion of two of these, Maslow’s (1973) theory of hierarchical needs in humans and Ainslie’s (1992) picoeconomic theory.

2.4 Motivation theory

Motivation theory is important to a study of student alienation because of the links between motivation, feelings and behaviour. As defined by Weiten (1992), “motives are the needs, wants, interests and desires that propel people in certain directions . . . Motivation involves goal-directed behaviour” (p. 340). ‘Intention’ is an important construct in some theories of motivation. Lennon (1990), for example, bases her discussion of human motivation on the phenomenon of ‘intentional content’ and argues that “what distinguishes intentional acts from mere bodily movements is their susceptibility to a certain kind of explanation - explanation in terms of the agent’s intentional states” (p. 60).
The sub-theories of motivation theory are many and varied. Drive theory (Hull, 1952), for example, explores the energizing of activity based on a perceived deficit in the individual's life. Mowrer (1939) has analyzed anxiety in terms of stimulus-response, drawing attention to its role in reinforcement of behaviour.

Early theories of motivation include instinct theories (e.g. McDougall, 1908) and sociobiological theories descended from them (e.g. Wilson, 1975). Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) focuses on situations in which individuals hold two incongruent beliefs - beliefs leading to contradictory conclusions and creating motivational ambiguities unless dissonance reduction can be achieved.

Incentive theories can be contrasted with drive theories, in a way that Weiten (1992) describes as "push versus pull" (p. 342). Drive theories emphasize the ways in which internal states of tension motivate behaviour (by 'pushing' the individual from within), while incentive theories (e.g. Skinner, 1953, 1971; McClelland, 1975) describe external stimuli 'pulling' the individual towards certain behaviours. Various other motivation theories focus on human biological needs and social needs, and how they impact on individuals' behaviours. Maslow (1970) adds a new dimension to earlier theories by presenting competing human needs, biological and social, as being organised hierarchically. Ainslie (1992) calls on elements of economic theory to describe human motivation in terms of 'picoeconomics', the name he has coined for a study of the human capacity for delaying gratification of perceived needs under certain circumstances.

For purposes of the present investigation, motivation theory will be considered in the context of the two sub-theories of motivation developed by Maslow (1970) and Ainslie (1992).
2.4.1 Maslow: Needs hierarchy

Motivation is a psychological concept that is described in detail in many introductory psychology texts. In such presentations, Maslow’s (1970) motivational theory is often represented in terms of a ‘hierarchy of needs’ which is depicted as a pyramid consisting of seven horizontal slices. Each slice represents a need that Maslow describes as motivational in human behaviour. This hierarchy is depicted as a diagram in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs](image)

Maslow (1970) has described the role of ‘motivating states’ as dynamic, rather than static. Using the example of the statement that a person feels rejected, he claims that, to accept this statement as a given, or static, description of the person’s feeling, would be to under-represent the scope of that feeling, and its implications:

A dynamic psychology would imply very many more things by this statement with full empirical justification. Such a feeling has repercussions throughout the whole organism both in its somatic and psychic aspects (p. 23) . . . It is clear that we will explain the state of affairs implied in the statement, “This person feels rejected” only if
we add many, many more statements about what happens to him because he feels rejected. In other words, the feeling of rejection is itself a motivating state . . . Sound motivational theory should assume that motivation is constant, never-ending, fluctuating and complex, and that it is an almost universal characteristic of practically every organismic state of affairs. (p. 24)

Maslow’s (1970) contention is that static motivation theories do not pay proper respect to either of two facts he considers important: “first, that the human being is never satisfied except in a relative or one-step-along-the path fashion, and second, that wants seem to arrange themselves in some sort of hierarchy of prepotency” (p. 25).

In forwarding the importance of these two facets of motivation, Maslow claims that various drives are not equal in potency or in probability of appearance. “This (assumption of equality) is incorrect because the probability of any one desire emerging into consciousness depends on the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other prepotent desires” (1970, p. 25).

In brief, this theory of motivation rests on the assumption that needs lower in the hierarchy represented in Figure 2 must be satisfied before the ‘higher needs’ become powerful motivators of behaviour. As many of the ‘lower needs’ are continuing, requiring regular satisfaction - the need for food, for example - there will be, in any individual, fluctuating availability to be motivated by ‘higher needs’.

According to Maslow (1973b), some people experience satisfaction of their most basic needs, but experience difficulty, or maybe complete powerlessness, in satisfying such needs as love, safety, prestige and belongingness. This is because the satisfaction of these needs requires positive interaction with other people. Some individuals perceive such interaction as unavailable to them for a variety of reasons. According to Maslow’s theory, such people will be unable to move towards self-actualisation until something changes in the areas in which they perceive their needs to
be unfulfilled. He highlights their reliance on other people who may be able and willing to help them satisfy these needs.

Describing these people as 'deficiency-motivated', he states that "deficiency-motivated people must have other people available, since most of their main need gratifications (love, safety, respect, prestige, belongingness) can come only from other human beings" (Maslow, 1973b, p. 189).

2.4.2 Ainslie: Picoeconomics

'Picoeconomics' is a term coined by Ainslie (1992) to describe the impact of individuals' motivation on their behaviour. The concept of picoeconomics is based on a study of the relationship between reward values and the individual's willingness, and capacity, to delay gratification in order to gain a reward perceived by that individual to be of higher value.

Two main assumptions underpin the concept of picoeconomics. The first is that there is a necessary distinction between motivation and cognition. The second assumption is that conflict between motivation and cognition leads to an internal bargaining process similar to that which economists might describe in terms of budgetary trade-offs.

It can be seen that picoeconomics introduces a new dimension to motivation theory. Maslow's (1970, 1973a, 1973b) theory does not account for an individual's capacity to postpone satisfaction of a 'lower need' while engaging in behaviour motivated by 'higher needs'. One example of this would be a person who will forgo a hot meal and a safe, warm place to sleep in order to queue overnight to ensure the purchase of tickets for a special concert or sporting final. Ainslie's (1992) theory of picoeconomics throws some light on such behaviour, as it presents the concept of the individual's balancing the benefits of immediate gratification against the advantages of waiting for gratification. It seems that behaviour motivated by such temporary
inversions of Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be seen to be atypical because of the individual's knowledge, or expectation, that they are, indeed, temporary. It is a very different scenario for a well fed, comfortably housed person to be voluntarily cold and hungry in the isolated situation described above, than for a person who is chronically hungry and homeless to choose concert tickets over food and warmth. In describing the perceptions and behaviour of a chronically hungry person, Maslow (1943) claims that it is a

characteristic of the human organism, when it is dominated by a certain need, that the whole philosophy of the future tends also to change. For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined very simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating. Anything else will be defined as unimportant. Freedom, love, community feeling, respect, philosophy, may all be waved aside as fripperies which are useless since they fail to fill the stomach. (p. 156)

Haslam (1993) explains Ainslie's behavioural theory in terms of the individual's decision to discount present offerings in order to gain future rewards, or to discount the future in order to gain more immediate rewards. He proceeds to outline the roles of motivation and cognition in the behaviour-moulding process, claiming that “Ainslie distinguishes between motivation, the vicissitudes of the organism's appetites and passions, and cognition, putting reason's cunning to work in counteracting some of the self-defeating properties of the motivational apparatus” (p. 29).

Ainslie's (1992) concept of motivational economy presents motivational input as distinct from rational, or cognitive, input. He argues, however, that, in the context of behaviour-budgeting, the individual is likely to be involved in self-control exercises where short-term rewards, although attractive and desirable, are sacrificed to long-term rewards which are perceived to be greater and more desirable. Thus the individual is seen to have a vested interest in forestalling impulse.
For people to be willing to forego instant gratification of their needs or wants, the rewards apparently obtainable by waiting have to be of greater value than the experience of instant gratification. Section 2.5.4 is a discussion of the implications of picoeconomic theory for senior students. The concept will also be included in the discussion of the research results.

In the section that follows, the topic of alienation will be explored in the specific environment of schools. Student alienation will be described, as will suggestions and recommendations for reducing student alienation. Some illustrative material will be presented from the 'Dropping-Out' literature from the United States of America.

2.5 Alienation in schools

2.5.1 The phenomenon of student alienation

There are many indicators of student alienation in schools. Both informal observation and the literature point to the likelihood that students may be experiencing alienation in each of the manifestations identified by Seeman (1959): powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement.

It is a concern for the author that insights into the existence of school-based alienation evident in the literature of the 1970s and 1980s do not appear to have been translated into school policies and changes in school organisation and administration likely to minimise that alienation. Some examples from a body of literature coming out of the United States in those two decades will illustrate this argument.

The phenomena of powerlessness and normlessness amongst high-school students feature in the research findings of Thomas, Kreps and Cage (1977), who argue that alienation in students is evoked primarily through the school's exercise of coercive power. Barclay (1981) describes the powerlessness generated by consistent failure in schooling. A decade earlier, this theme had been explored by Glasser (1969):
Too much of our present educational system emphasizes failure and too many children who attend school are failing . . . I see that the major problem of the schools is a problem of failure . . . we must examine the reasons why children are failing and develop an educational philosophy that leads to an atmosphere in which success is much more possible. (pp. 7, 8)

Calabrese (1987a) reports research evidence of powerlessness, normlessness and isolation in high school students, with private school students having higher levels of isolation and public school students having higher levels of normlessness. Newmann (1989) describes student alienation in terms of normlessness and self-estrangement, noting that adolescence is a developmental period during which a person looks for a balance between individuation and social integration within a community. It may be that senior students who have returned to school because they cannot yet find work could struggle to reconcile their individuation needs and their schools’ code of expectations that must be met in order to be an integral participant in the school community.

It is argued here that, despite the many organisational, social and cultural differences that exist between the schools in the United States 20 years ago and NSW schools in the 1990s, the issues raised by these researchers are still causing concern to teachers and senior students in the schools studied in the present investigation.

### 2.5.2 Suggestions and recommendations for reducing student alienation

Recommendations by researchers who have studied student alienation include Seldin’s (1989) strategies for reducing student alienation in high schools, Edwards’ (1988) mentoring process and Calabrese’s (1987b) strategies for increasing meaningfulness levels in students’ experiences of schooling.

Seldin (1989) presents five strategies designed to reduce student alienation in high schools. These are shared decision-making, the formulation of a strategic plan,
the introduction of special-topic seminars, participation in a community project, and seminars for educators. He claims that these strategies, based on the power of cooperation, have the potential to produce long-term effects on students, teachers and administrators.

Edwards (1988) argues for the effectiveness of mentoring students throughout their high-school years. The process he describes is similar to that facilitated by Year Patrons in NSW schools. In the 1980s and 1990s, it has become the custom, in state, systemic and private secondary schools, to invite teachers to apply for this mentoring and pastoral care position. The successful applicant is attached to the new Year 7 intake of students, and helps them with the transition to high school. The same teacher continues to support this group of students as they move through the school years. Ideally, the Year Patron stays with a group from Year 7 till the end of Year 12, providing continuity of care, encouragement, accountability and first-line of discipline.

The relationship that develops between the student group and the Year Patron is informed by a deeper personal knowledge base than is possible with many other members of staff who may teach a class only once or twice for a particular subject during their high school career. It therefore happens that the Year Patron develops a distinctive mentoring role with many individual students.

The role of the Year Patron involves ongoing personal contact with young people who are affected by personal or family traumas. While recognising that mentoring does not have the potential to make substantial changes in many painful areas of young people’s lives, Edwards claims that the process can contribute to the students’ personal development and can provide them with a dependable and effective support system.

Calabrese (1987b) having discussed the socio-psychological and the sociological themes in adolescent-alienation research, makes a number of recommendations for reducing adolescent alienation. These are based on the intention of providing adolescents with a sense of meaning, through enfranchisement into the
decision-making process and integration into responsible societal activities. He also
discusses the desirability of 'humanising' their environments. One of his suggestions
for achieving this goal is offering opportunities for intergenerational integration.

The suggestion that integration into responsible societal activities might reduce
alienation is supported by research (Calabrese & Schumer, 1986) in which the effects
of adolescents' involvement in community service activities were evaluated for 50
ninth-graders. Such involvement was found to reduce levels of alienation, to improve
school behaviour, to lead to improved academic grades and to foster acceptance by the
adult community. These research findings illustrate the ongoing research interest in
issues of student alienation, and indicate some directions which have been followed in
the past in attempts to counteract negative aspects and outcomes of student alienation.

The above discussion suggests that many young people may be experiencing
alienation in the senior school. This is not to say that all, or even most, triggers of
alienation in adolescents, who constitute the student population, are due to school-
based problems. It may well be that school-based triggers exist, and this is one of the
questions being explored in the present research. It is important to acknowledge,
however, other sources of alienation - other reasons why some adolescents experience
estrangement from the values and the rules of the school.

Newmann (1989), for example, identifies “the pervasive social forces beyond
school that lead to alienation - specialisation, mobility, bureaucratisation,
rationalisation, capitalism or other features of modernisation that fragment human
experience” (p. 157).

Azzram (1989) found statistically significant correlations between alienation in
male students and urban background, low family-income level and large family size.
In female students, he found significant correlations between alienation and rural
background, authoritarian control in the family and large family size.
Such findings support the suggestion made in Chapter One that alienation levels amongst senior-school students may be influenced by variables external to the school environment and its impact. It was stated there that these variables might include such family issues as ethnic background, problems of unemployment, poverty, ill health and bereavement, and such personal problems as impaired health or coping with the legacy of some kind of childhood abuse.

Such variables, external to the school, are thus acknowledged to be alienating influences for some students. Investigations of these variables and of their impact on schooling experiences and outcomes are, however, identified as being outside the range of the present study which will focus on developing a greater understanding of the impact of school organisation on students' perception of their experiences of senior schooling. The discussion will continue with an exploration of the problem of 'dropping out' in United States schools.

2.5.3 The phenomenon of dropping out

In the past two decades, United States research into student alienation has focused, to a great extent, on the problem of 'dropping out' (Howard & Anderson, 1978; O'Connor, 1985; Wehlage, 1989; Rumberger, 1987, Bryk & Thum, 1989; Patterson, 1990; Baker & Sansone, 1990; Horowitz, 1992). In this literature, most reports until the late 1980s tended to focus on the personal characteristics of the dropout, while later studies began to investigate also the impact of the school environment on students considered to be 'at-risk' of dropping out of school before graduation.

These earlier studies gradually developed a profile of students most likely to drop out of school before graduation. They were likely to be those who missed an excessive amount of school (Peng, 1982; O'Connor, 1985); those who experienced
disciplinary problems at school (Wehlage, 1989; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986); and those who earned poor grades, especially those who were graded as ‘failing’ (Howard & Anderson, 1978; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

It is possible to consider reluctant ‘staying-on’ in 1990s Australia as an inverted form of the phenomenon of ‘dropping out’ in the United States literature of a decade earlier. It could well be argued that students who are pressured, financially or socially, into staying at school in the post-compulsory years, and whose alienation from schooling is demonstrated by their lack of academic engagement and their failure to conform to behavioural expectations, have, in fact, already ‘dropped out’ of school, emotionally if not physically. Many of the characteristics observable in ‘droppers-out’ and ‘stayers-on’ are similar.

In the literature under review here, students most likely to drop out were depicted as having low self-esteem (Sewell, Palmo & Manni, 1981), external locus of control (Ekstrom et al., 1986), a sense of helplessness (Hill, 1979) and a general lack of interest in school (Peng, 1982).

Ekstrom et al. (1986) conducted a national study into the characteristics of students who drop out of high school, and, apart from such behavioural and personal characteristics as those listed above, reported on feelings expressed by students who had dropped out of high school. According to their study, the dropouts “appear to feel alienated from school life, report lower levels of participation in most extracurricular activities, have low satisfaction levels with the way their schooling is going, feel little interest in school, feel that they are not popular with other students, feel unimportant to other students, and feel that other students see them as trouble-makers” (p. 56).

Bryk and Thum (1989) comment on this emphasis on the personal characteristics of the dropout, and note that such research implies that the characteristics and behaviours identified in students who drop out of school should be
the targets for programs aimed at preventing students from dropping out. They add that "implicit in much of this research has been the assumption that dropping out is a problem of the individual student, and that understanding the characteristics of dropping-out students will help educators target resources needed to reduce the number of those who fail in the future" (p. 354). Such an approach is clearly illustrated by the recommendations of Ekstrom et al. (1986), who argue for the development of policies to help parents increase their interest in, and monitoring of, their children’s school progress. They also recommend school-based behavioural interventions to be organised into programs to be implemented at the first signs of disciplinary problems, poor grades and poor attendance.

It is interesting to note the absence, in most of this early research literature, of reference to the possible impact of the school environment - its organisation and policies - on students at risk of dropping out. This is despite the fact that earlier studies of behaviour in organisations had emphasized the impact of organisational structures, norms and decision-making on the way individuals perceive their experience of working in the environment of a given organisation (Schmuck & Runkel, 1985).

The tendency for research studies inquiring into ‘dropping out’ to focus on students rather than on organisational impact, was noted as early as 1983 by Fine and Rosenberg, who claimed that explanations which were based on individual student characteristics effectively deflected attention from processes within schooling systems which were likely to ‘produce’ dropouts.

Their argument for research attention to include organisational antecedents of dropping out is thought-provoking:

If education is presented as the path to success, dropping out can be viewed as individualistic, private and pathological - the ‘wrong choice’ or what happens to ‘bad students’. The structures of our educational and economic systems are protected, if you will, from critique. Discrimination and biases which permeate education and
support our economy are painted over with the dropping out lacquer, making 'individual' what are indeed structural problems. (p. 270)

Fitzpatrick and Yoels (1992) take up the challenge posed by this statement, and report what they describe as "the first social science effort to specify and disentangle the complex effects of policy, school structure and sociodemographic variables on state-level dropout rates" (p. 90).

Three years earlier, Bryk and Thum (1989) had commented on the little attention that had been given to differences in dropping-out rates among schools, and how aspects of school organisation might contribute to the dropping-out problem. While recognising that some benefits might be derived from the early identification of potential dropouts by reference to the attitudinal and behavioural correlates of dropping-out revealed in earlier studies, they argued for a proactive response from policy-makers. Their proposal was for specific programs to be developed - programs that would reduce these students' need to drop out. This approach shows a new emphasis, since earlier research had, for the most part, focused recommendations on targeting behaviours such as missing school and performing poorly in academic subjects. The assumption had been made that changing the behaviour would change the situation. The new approach questioned that assumption.

About the same time, Baker and Sansone (1990) had demonstrated a similar approach. They claimed that the "school behaviours, usually studied in research related to the problem of dropping out, do not occur in a vacuum" (p. 181), and challenged researchers to focus on the impact of school organisation on students.

One of the earliest attempts to study the dropping-out problem from this perspective was the work of Wehlage and Rutter (1986). From their research, they concluded that the following organisational factors influence the likelihood of dropping-out: weak adult authority, a climate of truancy, low expectations of student
behaviour and/or academic success, large school size, an absence of caring adult relationships and an absence of stimulating curriculum. They argue that the focus of new research might be productively “directed toward understanding the institutional character of schools and how this affects the potential dropouts”, having made the point that “if research continues to focus on the relatively fixed attributes of students, the effect of such research may well be to give schools an excuse for their lack of success with the dropout” (p. 72).

Rumberger (1987) raises similar questions - he asks how students’ decisions to drop out of school before graduation might be affected by school organisation, methods of school leadership, and the attitudes and behaviour of teachers. He, too, challenges researchers to pay more attention to these aspects of the dropping-out problem.

The concept of redefining the dropping-out problem in this way has been incorporated in more recent studies in the area (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Baker & Sansone, 1990). Bryk and Thum (1989), for example, investigate the effects of the structural and normative features of schools on dropping out. Their hypothesis was that “high levels of internal differentiation within high schools and weak normative environments contribute to the problems of absenteeism and dropping out” (p. 353). This hypothesis was supported by their empirical study, leading to their claim that at-risk youth are actually disadvantaged by attending certain kinds of schools.

A study by Fitzpatrick and Yoels (1992) examined the effects of state policy, sociodemographic composition and school structure on high-school dropout rates. A major contribution made by these researchers was to combine the emphasis on personal and behavioural characteristics of dropouts, with an understanding of ways in which various kinds of policies and organisational methods impact on students with those personal and behavioural characteristics. They identify a need for “state educational policies that are sensitive to the impact on at-risk groups of school processes” (p. 270).
This approach is similar to that of Miller, Leinhardt and Zigmond (1988) whose study focused on a school that had been discovered to have a lower dropping-out rate than might have been anticipated from national or local trends. Their investigations into how this particular school's climate influenced at-risk students to stay on led them to identify the "accommodating nature" of the school, and the consequent "enhancement of students' ability to become, and remain, academically engaged" (p. 465).

It is clear, from the above discussion, that student motivation is closely related to the likelihood of academic, or even institutional, engagement. Such engagement with the school as an institution, and with the academic activities of the schooling experience, is likely to lead to lower levels of school-based alienation.

The discussion will now focus on the phenomenon of motivation and the tension between present and future gratification, particularly for senior-school students.

2.5.4 Picoeconomics and senior-school alienation

The picoeconomic approach to motivation has been introduced above (Section 2.4.2). A major contribution made by this approach is the inclusion of both motivation and cognition in Ainslie's behavioural economics. Haslam (1993) describes this step as an unprecedented contribution to the understanding of behaviour. He describes cognitive accounts of behaviour as begging questions of motivation, and as oversimplifying behavioural precedents in terms of the individual's making choices among preferences and goals in a 'commonsense' way. In such an account, he claims that "such goals and preferences constitute the presumed evaluation functions for the behavioural alternatives afforded by individuals' environment and the role of practical reason is to maximise their satisfaction within environmental constraints" (p. 30).

Some behaviours may appear to an observer to be self-defeating, but may be perceived very differently by the actor. Such a situation is commonly observable in
in the senior school setting, when a student and staff member are in conflict. It is clear that sometimes teachers find the student's 'inappropriate' or 'resistant' behaviour incomprehensible.

According to Haslam (1993), this lack of comprehension is due to a cognitive and static perception of motivation. He claims that an important element is missing from such a perception – an element crucial to an attempt to understand the behaviours of disaffected people:

Also missing from cognitive accounts of motivation is an acknowledgment that the explanation of imprudent behaviour - behaviour that appears to defeat the individual's long-term best interest - might make reference to the very character of motivation. Within standard cognitive accounts, that is to say, there is no recognition that there are endogenous constraints on the optimal satisfaction of preferences and goals, in addition to those constraints imposed by the external environment. (p. 30)

Green and Myerson (1993) describe this balancing of motivation and cognition as "manifestations of adaptive self-control" (p. 37). They present an argument for adaptive models of self-control to be understood in terms of delay discounting, "the decrease, in the present, subjective value, of a future reward as a function of the amount of time until its expected occurrence" (p. 37). In support of this model, they cite research (Mazur, 1987) in which it is demonstrated that greater delay to the larger reward leads to indifference between the two rewards, which may have appeared, in the beginning, to have been greatly different in desirability.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that a picoeconomic approach implies an understanding of the interplay between short-term and long-term rewards in the determining of an individual's behaviour. This means that motivation is likely to be influenced not only by external 'realities', but also, and more significantly, by individuals' perceptions of those 'realities' in the context of personal priorities at the time.
Mele (1993) describes a person's "main concern in interpreting reality "as deciding "how to pace his self-reward activity over time" (p. 20). Consequently, discussion of the attitudes and behaviour of senior-school students involved in a process of interpreting their reality must include an attempt to understand their perceptions of available short-term and long-term self-rewards. Moreover, the research findings of Mazur (1987) indicate a need to understand the implications of the time-spans involved in waiting for the long-term rewards identified.

The relevance of such considerations to the present discussion is clear. The phenomenon of the disengagement of many senior-school students from the traditional culture of schools is documented in the literature and supported by the findings of the present study. This disengagement manifests itself in a variety of ways, including withdrawal and acting-out behaviour. Traditionally, any such manifestations which contravene school rules, or which lead to academic failure, are dealt with by the school administration as behaviour which needs to be modified in order for the individual to fit in with the school's requirements. Disciplinary measures or remediation activities are common responses to such problems in the senior-school.

The present discussion, however, raises other possibilities for consideration. The traditional approach rests on certain assumptions which may now be called into question. These include the assumption that there are long-term rewards available to the student who adjusts to the school's demands, rewards which the student should be able to see as preferable to those inherent in the chosen behaviour, and the assumption that the student's present 'inappropriate' behaviour is not working for him or her.

The first assumption is questionable because it is underpinned by other, maybe invalid, assumptions. These include the assumption that the long-term rewards offered by compliance with the school's demands are perceived by the students as attainable. In the case of a successful school experience leading to employment, and, specifically,
to employment in a preferred occupation, this assumption is invalid for many Year 11
students in the economic climate of the 1990s.

For students who have an expectation of finding suitable employment after
leaving school, delayed gratification of their present perceived needs can be seen as a
viable, and logical option. They may be willing to trade off present frustration for
future reward. For students who have no such expectation, this process of behavioural
economics can be seen as irrelevant. The unlikelihood of gaining the long-term
rewards renders gratification of short-term rewards not only preferable, but also more
rational.

A further issue needs to be considered in the context of this discussion of
motivation and rewards. This is the role of sanctions which may be imposed by the
institution on students whose choice of personal rewards and whose methods of gaining
these rewards appear to be in conflict with the values, or the rules, of the school.
Discipline in the senior school is a recurring theme in the student interviews, and will
be discussed in the context of student comments in Section 6.2.2.

This section has raised issues to do with phenomenon of rewards within the
senior school environment. The next two sections of this literature review will explore
in greater detail some of the implications of this phenomenon. The first of these will
focus on the parallels between the constructs of ‘externality’ and ‘alienation’. The
second will consider issues of school-based reinforcement in the context of a discussion
of alienation in the climate of an authoritarian style of organisation.

2.5.5 Locus of control: externality and alienation

It was argued in Section 2.3.4 that a theoretical link exists between the
constructs of ‘externality’ and ‘alienation’. The following discussion based on
locus of control’ literature will provide evidence of parallels between externality and the concepts of meaninglessness and estrangement.

Findley and Cooper’s (1983) research has indicated that internality is related to higher academic achievement. This would seem to be due, at least in part, to the fact that ‘internals’, believing that their academic outcomes are within their control, and are contingent upon their personal effort, will be more likely to apply themselves to study. ‘Externals’, on the other hand, believing their academic grades to be a matter of luck, may see little point in working hard to influence those grades. The lack of academic engagement that is likely to emerge in such a situation parallels the concept of meaninglessness in alienation theory.

It could be that ‘externals’ may believe the outcomes of other aspects of schooling to be, likewise, beyond their control. They may anticipate, and may experience, negative reinforcement for their behaviour at school, and for the attitudes that some staff members may infer from that behaviour. For such students, there may seem to be little point in trying to meet the behavioural requirements of enrolment. These feelings and their impact on school-based behaviour are akin to the concept of estrangement. This linking of external locus of control with estrangement from the school culture is supported by Ekstrom et al. (1986), who list external locus of control as one of the common characteristics of students who drop out of school.

Further support of these parallels between alienated school-behaviour and the behaviour of ‘externals’ is found in the research of Basgall and Snyder (1988). Their findings go beyond those of Findley and Cooper (1983) as they point out that an external locus of control predisposes people to make excuses for poor
performance in various areas of life. Findley and Cooper claim that ‘externals’ tend to blame low grades or other difficulties in their schooling experiences on bad luck or on unfair conditions, thus attempting to protect their self-esteem in the event of failure.

The ‘locus of control’ literature is rich in studies of the impact of ‘internality’ and ‘externality’ on individuals’ experiences of schooling. It is beyond the scope of the present investigation to go into any further detail of the links between externality and alienation. It does, however, seem appropriate for the theoretical parallels between the two constructs to be acknowledged, and for future investigations into the connections between them to be encouraged. It is claimed here that investigations into the significance of ‘locus of control’ research findings might provide useful information for schools in which staff are seeking to provide appropriate services to students who are experiencing alienation in the senior-school environment.

2.5.6 Authoritarianism and alienation

Many schools are authoritarian in nature. In an institution managed along authoritarian lines, belonging means conforming to values and practices adopted by the group (Watt, 1982). In such a school, the student who places low value on principles, beliefs or behaviours that the school values highly, is likely to be regarded as a deviant in the school population, especially where these disparities are acted out in ‘inappropriate’ behaviour. For this student to be able to continue as a member of the school population, change is necessary. The student’s behaviour must change, whether or not that behaviour-change is supported by changes in attitude.
Indications of protest are not readily tolerated in an authoritarian-type organisation. Any serious form of protest against the status quo is viewed as subversive, and protestors as deviants. It must be noted here, however, that not all protest is overt, and not all students who experience low needs-satisfaction in the school are willing or, indeed, able to express this perception, for a variety of reasons. In fact, there is a vital question emerging here. If students are experiencing high levels of alienation - powerlessness, meaninglessness, estrangement or various combinations of these states - and they are still, for the most part, going through the motions of meeting the demands of the school, what is the repository of that suppressed alienation?

If, as Israel (1979) maintains, the psychological state of alienation is the consequence of the existence of "a discrepancy between learned expectations, values or goals and a difficulty or an impossibility in a given social system to realise these values or goals" (p. 15), how does the compliant student experiencing such a discrepancy manage the consequent experiences of alienation?

The concern underlying these questions is that students who combine high levels of alienation with high levels of compliant school behaviour may be involved in a serious exercise in self-alienation. Pearson (1975) comments that

the requirements of normality, conformity and reasonableness - in a word 'mental health' - are a suffocation which stifles, blocks and distorts the expression of a fully human consciousness. Learning to live at ease with urban-industrial society requires that men forget and repress much of their experience of a disturbing and destructive social system. And it requires that they bury much of their experience of their selves in the catechisms of conforming normality. (p. 17)

Pearson's equating of such conformity with repression of elements of the 'self' can be readily translated into a discussion of the school experiences of senior students who are reluctantly staying on at school, and trying to fit in with an organisational environment that appears to them to be inappropriate to their needs. It seems likely
that, in the long run, such self-alienating conformity could prove to be more damaging, to both individuals and society, than an overt behavioural expression of the original experience of alienation. Therefore, it is important that reports of high levels of alienation in its various manifestations should not be rejected by policy-makers at school or systemic level on the grounds that they are not being demonstrated in what schools might describe as ‘inappropriate school behaviour’.

Pearson (1975) discusses the concept of ‘disorderly conduct’ in the context of a delicate relationship between freedom and social order. He claims that

the study of how and why men do things other than what they are supposed to do, and how other men think of this disorderly conduct is also a study of how things might be other than they are. It touches a delicate nerve of the relationship between freedom and social order. (p. xi)

The question of who is to be the prime beneficiary of the senior-schooling experience surfaces here. According to the “Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia”, two of these goals are:

To provide an excellent education for all young people, being one which develops their talents and capacities to full potential, and is relevant to the social, cultural and economic needs of the nation; and
To enable all students to achieve high standards of learning and to develop self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, respect for others, and achievement of personal excellence. (Finn, 1991, p. 9)

These goals appear to be based on an assumption that the student is to be the prime beneficiary of the school experience. This assumption and these goals, however, do not seem to be compatible with a senior-school environment in which organisation, rules and sanctions are apparently not flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the older adolescent. Most senior students are at a stage of life where they are negotiating the developmental tasks of discovering a personal identity and of becoming more independent. They are also beginning to think in ways that make them sensitive to issues of justice, and acutely aware of perceived injustices. Considered in this context,
Pearson's words need to be considered by schools that demand from all students conformity to rules regarded by senior students as irrelevant or inappropriate to their age-group. Consideration needs to be given to his description of 'disorderly conduct' as an indication of how things might be other than they are. The suggestion is that schools may have something to learn by giving voice to senior students, and by listening to their descriptions of their experiences of senior schooling.

A further possibility needs to be considered in the context of this discussion. This is the possibility that, for many individual students, and maybe for groups of students, the moment of 'enough' may come. This is the moment described by Camus (1953) as the time when the slave turns and looks at the master and says, "No!" Camus sees rebellion as being born in that moment in which the slave no longer accepts the master as master, in which the slave asserts a humanness that can no longer be subservient to another. Interestingly, Camus notes that the final order - the order that cannot, and will not, be obeyed - is not necessarily the most humiliating or offensive order that has been given. It is simply the first order to be given after a certain line has been crossed. This line is often, if not always, impossible to see until it has been passed. For the slave, the 'no' is a statement of a new attitude of 'all or nothing'. Even death, according to Camus, would be preferable to denying the certain internal belief that the line has been crossed.

While words such as 'master and slave' and 'preferable death' are rather melodramatic in the context of a senior school, the experience described so graphically by Camus is not foreign to that context. School policy-makers who choose to ignore the early indications that 'the line' is being approached need to consider the possible implications of an 'all or nothing' change in previously alienated yet compliant senior students. Such discussion could provide useful insights into the problems of violence in school settings.
The question underlying this discussion of authoritarianism, compliance and rebellion in the school setting is the extent to which school curriculum and organisation indicate an understanding of, and a response to, the needs of students. Recognition of the need for schools to match curriculum offerings and organisational strategies to the changing needs of students is by no means a new phenomenon. This claim can be supported by referring to the focal issues and the recommendations in the Commonwealth and NSW Governments' Education Reports, particularly those of the 1970s and 1980s.

2.6 The context of Australian schools

2.6.1 Two decades of school reviews and reports

In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of State-commissioned school reviews were commissioned in NSW, and each of the resulting reports featured the issues of a changing society, changing expectations of schools, and changing clientele. During this period, increased financial involvement of the Commonwealth Government in Australian education led to the establishment of committees to investigate and report on various aspects of education in Australia. It is not surprising that the issues identified in earlier sections of this chapter are discussed in both State and Commonwealth reports of the 1970s and 1980s.

In the context of the present investigation, it is necessary to explore the recommendations of these reports and reviews which were commissioned to inform government educational policy at State or Federal level. That educational policy in Australia appears to be informed by commissioned reports rather than by educational research is a separate, but important, problem which demands further investigation.

The educational literature includes some evidence of such investigation. Porter
(1993a), for example, has responded to the plethora of education commissions and reports in the preceding decade in the following way:

This bureaucratic tradition in Australian public policy on education is actually best exemplified historically by the use of the Government Report and the Royal Commission, rather than research, to investigate various social and educational issues. Instead of a wide variety of educational research reports emanating from various independent bodies, educational investigation in Australia has tended (and still tends) to be heavily “controlled”. The practice has been to establish a commission to investigate, or a group of experts to report. Indeed the history of Australian education could be charted by its many significant policy reports on all levels . . . The history of Australian education certainly could not be charted by its significant research reports. (p. 56)

Similar discussion has arisen in the context of educational commissions and reports, and educational reform in USA. (Pink, 1989; Howe, 1983). In this literature, the focus is on the failure of the commissioners to take up equity issues in a way that is likely to initiate changes, and on the gap between report recommendations and school-based reality. In a study of twenty commissioned reports on the health care system of New York City, Alford (1975) describes the commissioning of an investigation as a conventional response to a situation perceived as a crisis. He sees the commission as a way of studying a situation or organisational phenomenon, rather than as a process whose outcome is to advocate efficient and effective systemic change. He uses the term ‘symbolic response to problems’ to describe the commissioning of an investigation.

While the author shares the concerns discussed above, and would hope that future educational policy in Australia will increasingly be informed by indigenous and independent research (c.f. Porter, 1989; Holdaway, 1982), detailed attention to these issues falls outside the scope of the present inquiry. The following discussion, therefore, will focus on the content of the reports commissioned by the Australian and NSW governments in the past two decades. The most recent report discussed in this
section is the Carrick Report (1989), as the intention of this section is to present the policy situation as it was at the beginning of this investigation. It is acknowledged that more recent reports have been prepared and published at both State and Federal level, but the contents of these fall outside the purposes of this section of the thesis.

There are certain common themes that run through the reports, both Commonwealth and State. One of these, of particular relevance to the present study of student alienation, is an insistence, expressed in a variety of ways, upon the concept of children as the prime beneficiaries of the education system.

The theme can be identified in the six Commonwealth reports of this period. The Karmel Reports (1973 and 1985), for example, explore the general theme of equality of opportunity for all students. The Williams Report (1979), addressing issues of post-compulsory education and post-secondary education, places a strong emphasis on the needs of students in the transition from school to work, and includes recommendations aimed at smoothing that transition for individual students.

In the 1980s, the Australian Schools Commission produced three reports on post-compulsory education in Australian secondary schools. These were Schooling for 15 and 16 Year Olds (1980), Participation and Equity in Australian Schools (1983) and In the National Interest (1987). Although these reports included recommendations about curriculum issues such as new courses and assessment procedures, their emphasis was on the desirability of moving schools closer to a match with the specific needs of post-compulsory students.

In New South Wales, the McGowan Report (1981), exploring arguments for reform in the junior secondary school, includes a set of recommendations based on matching more flexible junior schooling with the needs of students. The theme is continued by Swan and McKinnon (1984). Their report, Future Directions of Secondary Education, calls for a well-rounded general education for every student.
The recommended broadening of curriculum was intended to respond to the needs of the students who would stay on at school for Years 11 and 12, but who were not likely to proceed to tertiary education.

The Carrick Report (1989) published the findings and recommendations of the Committee of Review of NSW Schools. One focus of this report is a discussion of how welfare issues and instructional issues can be balanced in the context of schooling.

The following discussion will outline the areas explored in the above reports. This discussion is valuable in the context of the present study in that it highlights, not only the school-based welfare and curriculum issues noted by the committees, but also specific recommendations that have been made, over a period of more than twenty years, in response to these issues. Two reports will be given more detailed attention: the first, the Karmel Report (1973), and the last, the Carrick Report (1989).

In Chapter Six, the findings of the present inquiry will be considered in the light of these reports. In this discussion, an attempt will be made to clarify how those findings can be interpreted as one indicator of the success with which schools have implemented the Committees' recommendations.

In 1972, the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission was appointed. The Committee's terms of reference (presented in full in Appendix B) include the expectations that the Committee will:

- examine the position of both government and non-government primary and secondary schools in all States and in the A.C.T. and the N.T;
- make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Science as to the immediate financial needs of schools, priorities within those needs, and appropriate measures to assist in meeting those needs, and
- work towards establishing acceptable standards for those schools, government and non-government alike, which fall short of those standards. (Karmel, 1973, p. 3)
Deficiencies in schools which were seen to be “falling short of those standards” are identified in this report. They include inadequate human and material resources, inequalities among schools in resources and opportunities and inadequate quality in the areas of teaching, curriculum and administration. The Report claims to be focused on outcomes of education, with the intention that schools should attempt to provide all children with more equal opportunities to participate more fully in society as valued and respected members of it. The practical recommendations of the Report, however, focus on inputs, such as school resources, and call for substantially increased expenditure on resources, in an attempt to make consistent, as far as possible, the material and physical circumstances of children’s education in Australia.

Twelve years later, Karmel chaired the Quality of Education Review Committee. This committee reported (1985) that many of the deficiencies in Australian schooling that had been noted in the 1973 Karmel Report had, by 1985, been overcome. The second report focuses on ways of working towards more equality of outcome for students in Australian schools.

One area of the 1985 report is of particular relevance to the present study. This is the identification, as a precise national objective, of the “improving of the attainment of competencies among disadvantaged groups as a basis for raising their participation in Years 11 and 12” (Karmel, 1985, p. 201). This objective raises not only the issue of increasing retention rates, but also the challenge of matching schooling to senior students’ needs in such a way that they will be actively participating in senior schooling rather than just staying on.

The Report of the Committee of Review of NSW Schools (Carrick, 1989) outlines a variety of societal changes affecting education in the years since the
Wyndham Report of 1957. The impact of these changes is summarised in the following descriptive statement from the Report:

Today, a relatively stable and aging population, containing 14 per cent born in non-English-speaking countries and having significantly changed family structures and social values, confronts an uncertain economy characterised by entrenched high levels of juvenile unemployment and a rapidly changing mix of vocational opportunities. In this environment, schools and teachers need to respond to a range of new challenges in a community which demands more of its schools. (p. 53)

The committee's response to these changes focuses on the concept of the school "as a significant and growing social welfare agency" (p. 55). They propose an objective assessment of this role, and question "how far educational resources, already limited, can be stretched without damage to education's central purpose" (p. 55).

This statement of concern rests on two assumptions: that education has "a central purpose" (as distinct from a specified range of aims, objectives and anticipated outcomes), and that welfare functions are external to, or at best peripheral to, this purpose. Both assumptions are debatable. The debate highlights the difficulties, if not the impossibility, of separating the concepts of learning, learning environments, client characteristics, pedagogy and the nature of the teacher-student interface.

Whatever the process of such debate (and the extensive literature in the area of educational philosophy testifies to the existence of a wide interest in the struggle between academic and welfare concerns in educational institutions), the following problem remains. Schools are faced with a diverse population of students, and with the challenge of matching, not only the content and processes of instruction, but also the school environment, to the needs of this population. These challenges are amplified in the senior years.

Such challenges are directly considered in the Carrick Report (1989). In Chapter 11, entitled "Retention", the committee recognises the impact of increased
youth unemployment on the Government’s focus on higher participation rates in post-compulsory years of schooling. “Since the mid-1970s, when measured unemployment among all Australian age groups began to rise, additional years of education have been seen as an alternative full-time activity to unemployment for young people” (p. 179).

While recognising the inevitable criticism that such an alternative can be interpreted as little more than an attempt to hide large numbers of unemployed young people amongst the senior-school population, the committee calls for consideration of another way of perceiving the concept of increased ‘staying-on’:

While some may view this as simply an attempt to reduce artificially formal measures of unemployment, defusing the social conflicts that may be caused by unemployment, others see a genuine concern for the welfare and future of youth, and a deeply held conviction that education is a more positive and constructive preparation for adult life than unemployment. (Carrick, 1989 p. 179)

This view is supported by an argument for the intrinsic value of higher participation rates in post-compulsory schooling and for its economic impact:

Higher participation rates are regarded as desirable in themselves for educational reasons, and as increasingly relevant economically and socially. Rapidly changing technologies and related effects on the domestic economy make early school leaving and the consequent entry to the labour market of large numbers of young, unskilled school leavers increasingly inappropriate in economic terms. Extended, more relevant education or training is regarded as an important way of increasing the productivity of the workforce . . . A fundamental assumption underlying all policies aimed at increasing retention is that more education is intrinsically valuable . . . Arguments for extended schooling include increased opportunities for personal growth, for acquisition of critical and analytical skills, and for exposure to broader perspectives regarding interpersonal, social, and cultural knowledge. (Carrick, 1989, p. 179)

The Report then makes claims about individual benefits likely to accrue to the student who stays on to complete Years 11 and 12: “There are clear links between level of education and the probability of being employed and a correlation between level of education and life-time earnings” (p. 179).
From *The Challenge of Retention* (1989), Carrick (1989) identifies three broad categories of factors impacting on retention: environmental, curricular and organisational. He summarises the findings of that national study, commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education and Training, as follows:

Environmental factors were judged to be the most important influences on students' returning to school. Of these, reasons related to their future career plans were the most important, followed closely by their parents' advice, the climate of the school and the commitment of the staff to retention. Financial reasons did not appear to be so important.

The single most important factor influencing students to remain at school once they have chosen to return for Years 11 and 12 is the curriculum. Within this category the two most important influences were the diversity of the curriculum and its responsiveness to the needs of the students. The curriculum as a whole needs a more practical orientation to satisfy the needs of the overall group of students returning for Years 11 and 12.

Organisational factors are also seen as influencing students to remain at school. The interviews in the sample schools identified senior colleges, flexible structures of schooling, credentialling systems, student welfare and school timetables as the most important influences in this category. (p. 181)

It is interesting, in the light of the above reasons for staying on for Years 11 and 12, to note one of the findings in *School and Beyond: School Leavers' Perceptions of the Relevance of Secondary Education* (1985), a report commissioned by the NSW Department of Education. This finding is that increased retention in senior years depends on students' believing that completion of Year 12 would improve their employment prospects.

Carrick proceeds to outline ways in which the senior school needs to cater for a broader range of ability, motivation and aspiration in a senior-school environment no longer catering mainly for students aiming at entrance to tertiary studies. Both the Carrick Report and the research projects providing information to the NSW Committee, emphasize the need for more resources, human, financial and physical, in order to cater
for the wider range of motivation and academic ability represented in the new clientele of the senior school.

Recommendations include student-responsive curriculum initiatives, including new subjects and cooperation between schools and TAFE colleges to widen subject choices for senior students. Organisational initiatives are also recommended. These include whole-school welfare policies aimed at making the school environment more responsive to the needs of students, and at making the organisational climate of the school be experienced as more fair by students.

Specifically, the Committee addresses the challenge presented to schools by the "broader mix of ability, motivation and aspiration in senior classes" (p. 182). The Report states that responding to this challenge "means introducing changes that make schools more attractive learning environments and making curriculum and credentialling arrangements more relevant to students’ and the wider community’s needs" (p. 182).

The final statements of this part of the Report are of particular relevance to the present study:

It is essential for the increasing number of students who stay on that their secondary education is worthwhile in terms of further education and employment opportunities. Increased retention must be supported by the provision of sufficient teachers and resources to meet the needs of Year 11 and Year 12 students. (p. 183)

From the above discussion, the present study emerges as an exploration of how the students in four southern-Illawarra schools perceive these 'challenges of retention' to have been met in their experiences of senior schooling. Discussion of the results of the survey and of the data provided in the interviews will include consideration of this question. It will also relate some of these research findings to other insights and recommendations discussed in this section of the literature review.
Chapter One included an introductory description of Australian senior schooling in the 1990s and referred, in Section 1.3, to Collins’ (1992) critical discussion of the impact of economic rationalism on education. This issue will be examined in greater detail here in the context of a discussion of post-compulsory schooling in Australia.

2.6.2 Post-compulsory schooling in Australia

The impact of economic rationalism on government policy, particularly in the educational arena, has been explored in a variety of contexts. Rizvi (1993), for example, describes the diminishing funding for multicultural programs during the 1980s. He claims that "there would appear to be a fundamental mismatch between Labor’s commitment to the idea of a multiculturalism powered by the principles of social justice and its preparedness to support these principles, with appropriate levels of funding and forms of service delivery" (p. 120). He describes mainstreaming policies as being guided by economic rationalism, rather than "either the assumptions of assimilation or some deeper concern for social justice" (p. 136).

Rizvi draws attention to, and rejects, a policy change which appears to have done little more than change the name of the program and withdraw support funding from it. Multiculturalism is, of course, not the only area of educational policy to have undergone such a process.

The area of retention of students in post-compulsory schooling is a case in point. Here, too, the rhetoric and the resources do not match. The Finn Report (1991) projects that 95% of 19-year-olds will be completing or participating in education or training by 2001 (p. 48). There is an absence of financial resources to make the senior school more amenable to the needs of the ‘new seniors’. In view of this deficit, it is difficult to take seriously the Finn Committee’s (1991) claims that the main purpose of
greatly increased retention rates by the year 2001 is to benefit the young people themselves.

It would seem appropriate here to outline the terms of reference for the Finn Review, and to summarise the recommendations made by the Review Committee, before exploring some of the discussion that has been stimulated by the Report. A complete list of the terms of reference appears in Appendix C, while the "ten common and agreed national goals for schooling in Australia . . . listed in Table 1.1" (Finn, 1991, p. 9) of the Finn Report are included here as Appendix D.

Particularly pertinent to the present investigation are the following paragraphs from the terms of reference for the Review:

(. . . to consider) appropriate national curriculum principles designed to enable all young people, including those with special needs, to develop key competencies, with the associated implications for curriculum development, initial teacher preparation and continuing professional development;

(. . . to consider) current barriers to the effective participation of disadvantaged young people, including those with disabilities, in post-compulsory education and training, and strategies for increasing their participation and improving their educational and labour market outcomes;

(. . . to consider) the likely resource and funding implications of existing trends in, and further strategies for, post-compulsory education and training. (Finn, 1991, p. 2)

The first two areas are of particular importance when the needs of 'reluctant stayers-on' are being considered. The move, however, from rhetoric to action depends on the third. Making a serious attempt to meet the needs of a changing clientele in the senior school requires resources - costly resources in areas of curriculum, administration and personnel. In the absence of a clear indication of availability of such resources, the other terms of reference for this Review, and the recommendations flowing from them, seem to lack foundation.
Collins (1992), in her discussion of the Finn Report (1991), argues that extra funding in several areas is essential for the outcomes forecast in the Report to become possible. Her list includes funding for teacher education in new post-compulsory curriculum areas, extra funding for professional development of existing teachers in the same areas, special funding for world-class universities with a technical emphasis, funding for a nation-wide early-childhood reading recovery program, funding to expand TAFE training in the service sector, and funding for counselling and extra learning support for the new post-compulsory stayers. She refers to "a certain callousness which comes with distant and somewhat manipulative corporatist thinking" and claims that "a fixation upon economic recovery as an end in itself, and upon creating a lower overall unemployment picture for the monitors, has replaced concern about real young people, their difficulties, aspirations and despair" (p. 47).

Finn's targets of competency-based achievement are described by Collins (1992), who acknowledging in her discussion of these targets that the Finn Committee are calling for more than retention. She proceeds, however, to criticise the superficiality the Resources chapter of the Finn Review:

There is no evidence of thought given to what this would really require in terms of ground-level resources. The more the education systems retain those who used to be early leavers, the larger the per-head costs if there are to be real educational gains, real achievement targets met. The Resources chapter of Finn calculates costs through to the year 2001 on a purely retention basis, not an achievement one. Where is the costing of the extra teacher education and professional development? ... or of post-compulsory personal counselling and remediation programs? These are required if achievement, rather than simply corralling, is the genuine goal. (p. 47)

Sweet (1992), too, questions the ways in which increased retention rates in post-compulsory education can be translated into benefits to young people. His concern is how well the Finn report reflects the needs of young people. He then outlines his concern that "the letter if not the spirit of the broad target (of specified
increases in retention rates) could in large part be achieved through an expanded participation in schools as we know them combined with the present rates of transfer from schools to higher education” (p. 39). He argues that schools need to change what they do, if ‘retained young people’ are to gain benefits relevant to their perceived needs. In particular, he argues in favour of schools’ offering to students the opportunity to obtain, by their participation in post-compulsory education, skills and qualifications which will prepare them for entry to the workforce.

Porter (1993b) sums up her concerns about the impact of economic rationalism on educational policy in her description of “the crucial feature of a public education system” as “its contribution to the construction of citizenship and the common good in broad terms rather than the economy in narrow terms” (p. 47). She follows up this description with a call for “a government that is willing to grapple with greater human challenges, that has greater citizen involvement, and more distributive justice” (p. 47).

The above discussion has presented an outline of recent government reports on educational issues, and has questioned the dearth of independent research findings to support the policies flowing from the reports. It has explored the place of economic rationalism in educational policy, and has questioned the availability of resources to make report recommendations practicable.

A major focus of the reports and reviews featured in this section has been the need for higher student retention rates in the senior school, and the forging of stronger links between senior schools and the work place. The present investigation focuses on the senior students themselves. At its foundation is the question of how ‘retained young people’ perceive their needs in the context of the senior school.
2.7 Theoretical basis of this research

This thesis began with a description of changes in the nature of the senior years of schooling in New South Wales schools in the economic climate of the late 1980s and 1990s. An important feature of these changes was the increase in the numbers of young people staying on at school beyond the compulsory years of schooling. Another was the observation that many of the ‘stayers-on’ were not intending to pursue further studies following the Higher School Certificate year. These two changes in the senior-school clientele have serious implications for the administration, curriculum and pedagogy of senior schooling.

Observations of students in Year 11 at several southern Illawarra schools, complemented by informal discussions with students and with their teachers, led to a concern about mismatches between many students’ perceived needs and the services offered to them as clients of the service organisation of the school.

The research sets out to explore these possible mismatches, and does so in the context of several strands of sociological and psychological theory. Commencing with an overview of issues of contemporary Australian society, this chapter has noted that two major areas of theory are likely to inform the discussion of problems of senior schooling. These are youth culture theory and alienation theory. Observations of students’ attitudes and behaviours led to the identifying of elements of powerlessness, meaninglessness, estrangement, motivation deficits and helplessness in senior students. These concepts were found to be reminiscent of many of the themes in the youth culture theory of the 1990s and also of the manifestations of ‘alienation’ identified in the literature by Seeman (1959).
To these strands of theory have been added discussions of motivation theory, both traditional hierarchical theory and the more recent picoeconomic understanding of the construct of motivation. Traditional developmental theory has also been discussed as one way of interpreting the general needs of students of particular ages. The relevance of all of these theoretical insights to the present study has been gathered together in a discussion of school-based alienation, and then placed in the context of the reviews and reports shaping post-compulsory schooling in Australia.

All of this discussion provides the foundation for the research project which will be described in detail in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

2.8 Research questions

The queries driving the investigation are listed in Section 1.5. Consideration of these issues led to three research questions, repeated here as the focus of the research project about to be presented.

1. Do students’ perceptions of the senior-schooling experience include feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement?

2. If so, how do the levels of these phenomena correlate with antecedent variables? The variables to be investigated in the study are: (a) gender, (b) participation in non-Matriculation courses, (c) participation in TAFE courses, (d) receipt of Austudy, (e) main source of family income, (f) an older sibling who is unemployed, (g) an older sibling who has completed Year 12 of school, (h) a parent who has completed Year 12 of school, (i) the expectation that the student will eventually find employment in a preferred occupation, (j) student’s first preference - return to school or leave, and (k) whether the return-to-school decision was made by the student or by a parent.
3. How do senior students perceive the impact of school policy, organisation and subject offerings on student experiences of estrangement, meaninglessness and powerlessness in the school environment?

In the present research, these questions are approached by means of two research methods. A questionnaire is used to generate scores for the phenomena of estrangement, meaninglessness and powerlessness. The resultant data are submitted to statistical analysis in relationship to the independent variables listed in Question Two. The third research question is the focus of the case studies and the analysis of the interviews.
3. Chapter Three: Method A: Quantitative Study

3.1 Introduction

The present research utilises both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Chapter Three describes the methodology for the quantitative study, and Chapter Four the methodology for the qualitative study.

The quantitative methodology section commences with a discussion of early measures of alienation. This discussion leads to the reasons for developing a new Senior-School Alienation Scale specific to the present study, and reflecting the philosophical and theoretical basis of the study. The process of developing the new scale is outlined. The section ends with a description of the administration and analysis methodology for the quantitative study.

3.2 The Instrument

3.2.1 Early measures of alienation

Various measures of alienation have been designed in the last four decades. The discussion in this chapter will commence with a description of the scales developed by Srole (1956), Nettler (1957), Dean (1961) and Middleton (1963). Each of these descriptions will include a statement of reasons why each of these scales is considered by the author to be an inappropriate instrument for this study of alienation in the context of the senior school. The discussion of Dean's (1961) scale will broaden to a consideration of Dean's scale-construction methodology, as the new Senior-School Alienation Scale developed for the present study has been constructed in a similar way.

Researchers in the area of alienation have tended to rely on the four measures named above. Roberts and Rokeach (1956) for example, follow Srole.
They refer to anomie as a sociological concept described by Srole as meaning "the phenomena variously referred to as social dysfunction or disorganisation, group alienation and demoralisation" (p. 355). In their replication of Srole’s alienation research, they use Srole’s five-item scale designed to tap the five theoretical components of anomie which he had identified and presented in a paper read before the American Sociological Society in Chicago (1951). This paper formed the basis of an article published some years later by Srole (1956). The ‘anomie’ items are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Srole’s five anomie items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>There’s little use writing to public officials because often they aren’t really interested in the problems of the average man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>It’s hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>These days, a person doesn’t really know whom he can count on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(from Roberts & Rokeach, 1956, p. 357)

For the study described in this thesis, such items were considered by the author to hold insufficient relevance for the 16-18 year-olds who would be the Ss in the research. Although these items were not included in the ‘culling by experts’ exercise described in section 4.2.1.2 below, it was noted that they were included in Dean’s (1961) similar culling exercise, and failed to meet his judging and item-analysis criteria.

Dean (1961) identifies three major components of alienation: powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation. He constructed scales to measure each of these
components in order to determine empirical relationships that might exist among them. The first step in the construction of these scales was analysis of, not only the literature, but also the data from over 70 interviews.

From this analysis, Dean constructed a total of 139 items assumed to measure alienation. The following process led to the selection of items to be retained in Dean’s Alienation Scale:

These (139 items) were typed on individual cards, and seven experts (instructors and assistants in the Department of Sociology at the Ohio State University) were requested to judge each statement as to its applicability or nonapplicability, first, to the component of powerlessness (using a one-page description as the criterion). When this part of the task was finished, each expert received a second set of cards to judge, again, each of the 139 items as to whether each item specifically and only referred to Normlessness; then, finally, a third set of cards was presented for judging of items as they might relate to Social Isolation . . . For retention of an item, agreement on the part of at least five of the seven judges was required, with no judge placing the item in more than one category. (p. 756)

Dean acknowledges the influence of Hemphill and Westie (1955) in the development of this method of questionnaire construction. Dean also notes that “Srole’s scale could not be retained in our alienation scales because his items failed to meet our judging and item analysis criteria” (p. 758).

Dean’s final scale included nine items for powerlessness. Typical of these items were “There is little or nothing I can do towards preventing a major shooting war;” and “We are just so many cogs in the machinery of life.” This sub-scale, when tested by the split-half technique (and corrected by the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula) yielded a reliability level of .78 (N=384). Examples of the items measuring normlessness were “The end often justifies the means,” and “I often wonder what the meaning of life really is.” The corrected reliability of the
normlessness sub-scale was .73. Social isolation was measured by such items as “Sometimes I feel all alone in the world” and “One can always find friends if he shows himself friendly”. The reliability of this sub-scale was .78 when corrected. The reliability of the total alienation scale was .78 when corrected.

Dean’s inter-correlations among the alienation scale components (N=384) led him to the conclusion that “(the intercorrelations suggest) that it is quite feasible to consider the sub-scales as belonging to the same general concept. However, there appears to be enough independence among the sub-scales to warrant treating them as independent variables” (p. 756).

Dean’s Alienation Scale has been widely used in research in the past three decades. While Dean’s method of questionnaire-construction has been adopted in the present study, there are some important differences between the Dean scale and the Senior-School Alienation Scale developed for the present research. One is the specificity of the latter scale to the senior-school environment. Another concerns the belief that the sub-scales (powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation for Dean; powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement for the new scale) can be totalled to form an ‘alienation’ score. While paying tribute to Seeman for “bringing order out of the chaos” surrounding the concept of alienation in the literature, Dean regards powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation as ‘components’ of alienation, whereas Seeman’s is a description of five different ‘meanings’ of alienation. The present study follows Seeman rather than Dean in this respect. Individual scores for powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement are thus discussed separately.
Middleton (1963) developed an alienation scale as part of a larger survey of attitudes on a variety of topics. Six items of the survey scale relate to alienation. These are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Middleton's six alienation items

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There is not much that I can do about most of the important problems that we face today. (Powerlessness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Things have become so complicated in the world today that I really don’t understand just what is going on. (Meaninglessness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In order to get ahead in the world today, you are almost forced to do some things which are not right (Normlessness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am not much interested in the TV programs, movies or magazines that most people seem to like. (Cultural Estrangement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I often feel lonely. (Social Estrangement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I don’t really enjoy most of the work that I do, but I feel that I must do it in order to have other things that I need and want. (Estrangement from Work)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The words in parenthesis at the end of each of these six items do not constitute part of the items appearing on the Middleton scale. They provide Middleton’s descriptions of the kinds of alienation purported to be measured by the responses to the individual items.

While some of these items might be seen to be relevant to the age group of Ss in the present study, it was considered more appropriate for a new scale to be developed. In the new scale, similar items might appear, but they would be supported by other items measuring similar kinds of alienation. It will be noted that Middleton’s six items concern six different ‘meanings’ of alienation. The task undertaken in the development of the new scale began with identifying, from formal and informal interviews with Year 11 students, the ‘meanings’ of alienation that these students claimed to be experiencing. Three ‘meanings’ emerged: powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement, as these terms are defined in
Section 1.1.2 above. In the Senior-School Alienation Scale, each of these three meanings was the focus of a sub-scale consisting of several items.

Nettler (1957) approaches the construction of an alienation scale from a different perspective to that of Middleton. He differentiates among three related, but non-identical, ideas: alienation, anomie and personal disorganisation. He identifies in the literature a degree of "confusion of conception and assumption" (p. 671), and argues for "alienation and anomie not to be confused, although anomie usually leads to alienation. Alienation and anomie do not equate with personal disorganisation . . . (which is) defined as intrapersonal conflict, personal goallessness or lack of internal coherence" (p. 672).

Noting, in the literature, a tendency to assume anomie from some behavioural symptoms, Nettler claims that

how alienated such people feel, as compared with those whose behaviours seem less indicative of anomie, is a matter for investigation rather than assumption. Similarly, one may conceivably be alienated with or without personal disorganisation and with or without participating in behaviours that are ordinarily used as indexes of anomie. (p. 672)

Nettler constructed a 17-item alienation scale in order to make the concept of alienation more amenable to empirical study. Having sought models of estranged persons in the psychological literature and belles-lettres, he produced cards each containing paradigmatic expressions of alienation. These were presented to colleagues and acquaintances with the question, "Do you know any people, including yourself, who feel like this?" Confidential interviews were then sought with persons thus identified as approximating such an 'alien' orientation. In the interviews, an attempt was made to determine whether a common set of attitudes toward society existed among those individuals who had been identified as
alienated. The measure of alienation developed by Nettler represents most of the areas of agreement among the validators. The 17 items are represented in Table 4.

Nettler makes the claim that "there seems little doubt that this scale measures a dimension of estrangement from our society" (p. 675). Reflection on the wording of the items, and on the assumptions that appear to underlie many of them, leads the present writer to question this assertion.

Table 4: Items in Nettler's Alienation Scale

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you vote in national elections (or would you, if of voting age?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you enjoy TV?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What do you think of the new model American automobiles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you read Readers Digest?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Were you interested in the recent national elections?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Do you think children are generally a nuisance to their parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Are you interested in having children (or would you be, at the right age?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you like to participate in church activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Do national spectator-sports (football, baseball) interest you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Do you think most married people lead trapped (frustrated) lives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Do you think you could just as easily live in another society - past or present?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Do you think most politicians are sincerely interested in the public's welfare, or are they more interested in themselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Do you think religion is mostly myth or mostly truth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>&quot;Life, as most men live it, is meaningless.&quot; Do you agree or disagree?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>For yourself, assuming you could carry out your decision or do things over again, do you think a single life or married life would be the more satisfactory?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Do you believe human life is an expression of a divine purpose, or is it only the result of chance and evolution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>&quot;Most people live lives of quiet desperation.&quot; Do you agree or disagree?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(from Nettler, 1957, p. 675).

From the above discussion, it can be seen that none of these four scales was appropriate for the present study. Because of this, a new scale was developed. Discussion with Year 11 students was considered in the light of theory developed from the literature in the process of generating potential items for the scale. These items were subjected to stringent judging and item-analysis before being accepted for inclusion in the instrument.
3.2.2 A New Senior-School Alienation Scale

The construction of the Senior-School Alienation Scale developed for the present research followed Dean's (1961) model. In particular, it utilised a system of rigorous validity checks similar to those used by Dean to avoid overlap of items between sub-scale criteria.

From the literature, and from informal discussions with students from Years 11 and 12, and with their teachers, during 1991, the author developed a set of 74 items which seemed to describe ways in which senior students perceived their school experience.

Seven experts (lecturers and tutors from the Education Faculty of the University of Wollongong) were requested to judge each statement, and to indicate whether it applied to the concept of powerlessness. A half-page description of powerlessness set criteria for decision-making.

When this part of the task was completed, each expert was asked to judge each statement again - a new copy of the same 74 items, this time indicating the item's applicability to the concept of meaninglessness. The third part of the validation process presented the experts with a third copy of the 74 items. The concept of estrangement was the focus for this response (See Appendix E: VALIDATION PROCEDURE).

For retention of an item, agreement on the part of at least four of the seven judges was required. A further requirement was that no judge place the item in more than one category (after Dean, 1961).

The validation process yielded 36 items. Three further items were deleted from the final survey form when the pilot (N = 40) study indicated some ambiguity of response for students who were not receiving Austudy payments.

The final version of the Senior-School Alienation Scale consisted of 33 items (see Appendix A: SSAS SURVEY), to which Ss responded on a bi-polar five-grade intensity level (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Reliability of the
scale was enhanced by the rewording of some items to avoid set-response effect. This meant that, for some items "strongly agree" scored five, and for others "strongly agree" scored one. In the powerlessness sub-scale, there were eleven items, in the meaninglessness sub-scale, six, and in the estrangement sub-scale, sixteen. As the sub-scales were developed by the process outlined above, there was no way of making the numbers of items in the various sub-scales more equal without weakening, or invalidating, the item-selection process.

Following the scoring of the pilot returns \((N = 40)\), split-half correlations for reliability were conducted. As the 33 items represented three sub-scales of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement, each of these sub-scales was randomly split to arrive at split-half versions of the total scale with appropriate proportions of sub-scale content. Reliability coefficients for each of the three sub-scales are presented in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-scale</th>
<th>Reliability coefficient</th>
<th>Corrected (Spearman-Brown)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estrangement</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reliability coefficients for the pilot study were corrected for errors due to the reduced size of the two halves. These corrections followed the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula. Corrected coefficients were as follows: 0.82 for powerlessness, 0.68 for meaninglessness and 0.77 for estrangement.

Table 6 presents reliability coefficients for the full-scale survey \((N = 156)\).
Table 6: SSAS: Reliability coefficients for the full-scale survey (N=156)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-scale</th>
<th>Reliability coefficient</th>
<th>Corrected (Spearman-Brown)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estrangement</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All sub-scales are seen to be reliable. The meaninglessness sub-scale has the lowest reliability coefficient, probably due to the small number of items in this sub-scale.

Demographic information comprising independent variables was collected by means of a series of questions on the back of the survey sheet. These were worded in such a way that they were easily coded for computer processing of data (see Appendix F: STUDENT RESPONSE SHEET).

Independent variables included (a) age, (b) gender, (c) participation in non-Matriculation courses, (d) participation in TAFE courses, (e) receipt of Austudy, (f) main source of family income, (g) an older sibling who is unemployed, (h) an older sibling who has completed Year 12 of school, (i) a parent who has completed Year 12 of school, and (j) the expectation that the student will eventually find employment in a preferred occupation. Students were further asked to indicate whether their first choice was to stay at school, or to leave school to start work. Those whose preference was to work were asked whether their first choice, given that there was no job available, was to be at school, or at home, unemployed. Students were asked, finally, whether they, or their parents, had made the decision for them to return to school for Year 11.
All of these variables were retained throughout the analysis of data, except the variable of age. Data generated in relation to age were not useful because of the smallness of some of the ranges represented.

3.3 Subjects

Ss were Year 11 students from four southern-Illawarra public secondary schools. Of 570 Year 11 students in the four schools, 174 students participated in the survey. Having first introduced the idea of the study to each school principal, and each Year 11 form patron, the author addressed Year 11 groups at each of the target schools. At these meetings, the reasons for the study and the method of data collection were explained, and students' questions were answered. Each of these meetings included the distribution of information sheets for parents, together with a permission note to be returned to the school (see Appendices G H, I: LETTER TO PRINCIPALS, LETTER TO PARENTS, SCHOOL ORGANISATION FORM).

The 174 Ss were volunteers from the target population of 570 Year 11 students enrolled at the four schools. All students who volunteered to participate were included in the study. This was because of the voluntary nature of participation, and because Year 11 assembly groups were told that this was an opportunity for each Year 11 student to have an input into the Region's understanding of what it was like to be a senior student.

The possibility that such an approach might influence the representativeness of the resultant sample of Year 11 students was recognised. For the reasons outlined above, however, it was considered appropriate to retain in the study all students who had volunteered. Chapter Six of this thesis includes a discussion of the possible impact of volunteer-Ss on research data, and outlines Rosenthal and Rosnow's (1975) remedies for volunteerism which were implemented in the design of this research project.
When survey responses were prepared for statistical analysis, it was found that eighteen of them were unable to be used, due to errors or omissions. For the analysis, \( N = 156 \).

Of the 156 Ss, 80 were female, and 76 were male. There was a spread of students whose first option was to return to school for Years 11 and 12, and those who would have preferred to have left school, had employment been available.

### 3.4 Administration

At each school, the survey was administered in one sitting. Students were first asked to complete the information page (independent variables), then the author read each survey item twice. For each item, students were asked to tick the answer sheet for their chosen response from a range of 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' (see Appendix F: STUDENT RESPONSE SHEET).

In earlier information meetings, this method of administration had been explained to the Year 11 students. This was to avoid the non-participation of students with poor reading skills.

Administration of the survey was held consistent across the schools (See Appendix J: ADMINISTRATION OF SURVEY). The author administered the survey at each of the schools.

### 3.5 Analysis

Survey sheets were scored using a computer program allowing for the halved distribution of answer scores (S.A. = 5, S.A. = 1). Results yielded individual scores for powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement.
A database was established, with Ss' four scores entered, as well as their coded responses to questions relating to the independent variables. These variables are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Demographic variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of family income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.'s first preference: Year 11 or out of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in non-Matriculation courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in TAFE courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipt of Austudy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling who completed Year 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s) who completed Year 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.'s expectation of eventually finding employment in a personally preferred occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of return to school for Year 11 made by S. or by parent(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data were transferred to spreadsheet format, then submitted to analysis of variance in a computer program that produced correlations between each of the scores (powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement) and the independent
variables. The data was also analysed to indicate any gender differences in these correlations.
4. Chapter Four: Method B: Qualitative Study

4.1 Introduction
The methodology for the qualitative part of the research is described in this chapter, commencing with a discussion of three important aspects of qualitative research that relate to the present study. These are: (a) the constructs underlying qualitative inquiry, (b) the phenomenon of volunteerism and (c) the question of generalisability of findings. Finally, the chapter describes the method used to analyse the 31 interviews.

4.2 Basis of the qualitative research study
An important research question which emerged from the early observational stages of this study concerned how senior-school students manage, or cope with, their experience of the senior school.

One hundred and fifty-six Year 11 students in southern Illawarra schools responded to the student-alienation questionnaire. The resultant data were submitted to statistical analysis with the purpose of identifying whether any significant correlations might emerge between the sub-scale (powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement) scores and the range of demographic variables presented in Table 7 (p. 130). The results of this quantitative research, reported in full in Chapter Five, provided information about manifestations of alienation in senior students by identifying significant correlations between various forms of alienation and a number of independent variables relevant to senior students.

It seemed likely to the author, however, that the statistically significant correlations which emerged from the questionnaire told an incomplete story. They indicated significant levels of alienation (presenting as one or more of the
phenomena of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement) amongst senior students. Despite these alienation levels, however, all of the Ss were still enrolled at school in Term Four of Year 11. The fact of their persistence as senior students in spite of significant levels of alienation had been demonstrated. What remained to be studied, however, was the students' insights into the coping skills which were enabling them to persist as senior students.

4.2.1 The interview Ss

As part of the interpretive process of the study, then, it was decided to interview volunteer Year 11 students to obtain a broader information base about their experiences of the senior school. In the beginning stages of the project, students who had expressed their willingness to participate in the survey were asked to indicate whether they would be willing also to participate in an individual interview at a later stage of the research.

In the Year assemblies where the project was introduced to all Year 11 students at each of the participating schools, the survey and the interviews were presented to the students as their opportunity to express their views, and to describe the way they were experiencing senior schooling. Students were asked to consider volunteering for an interview whether they had willingly chosen to return to school or not, whether they were enjoying school or not, and whether they were achieving high academic levels or not.

Thirty-one students volunteered for interviews and each of these was interviewed by the author.
4.2.2 The phenomenon of volunteerism

It is acknowledged here that the phenomenon of volunteerism may affect research data collected from voluntary Ss. Basic to this problem is the possibility that the Ss' reasons for volunteering may impact on the kinds of responses they give. One possible example of this phenomenon would be Ss who might volunteer because of a strong personal need to be accepted (in this instance, by the researcher), and who might, therefore, respond in an interview or questionnaire with the answers they think the researcher is looking for.

Bordens and Abbott (1991) discuss S.-related and situational characteristics which might affect a potential S.'s decision about volunteering for a particular research study. S.-related characteristics include such considerations as the S.'s attitude towards self-disclosure. An example of a situational characteristic is the S.'s perception of the importance of the research topic. They conclude, from their consideration of such characteristics, that "volunteering is not a simple random process. Certain types of people are disposed to volunteer generally, and for certain specific types of research" (Bordens & Abbott, 1991, p. 125).

Volunteerism can affect both the internal and the external validity of a research project. It is possible for variables related to voluntary participation to cause subtle variations in the dependent variable. Such volunteer bias is described by Rosenthal and Rosnow (1975) as affecting "inferred causality". External validity may be affected in that volunteerism may affect the generalisability of results beyond the research sample.

It is clearly important that the impact of volunteer bias be taken into account in the design of a project in which subjects are to be volunteers. The positive
aspects of volunteerism also need to be recognised. Crano and Brewer (1973), for example, argue that voluntary Ss have made a conscious decision that their possible gains from participation outweigh possible losses. The act of volunteering has demonstrated this attitude. They claim that, as long as this positive attitude is maintained throughout their participation in the project, through the retention of what they describe as the “positive gain-to-loss ratio”, such Ss are likely to respond in an honest manner.

Rosenthal and Rosnow (1975) list ten remedies for the problems of volunteerism. It is claimed here that, of these ten suggestions for reducing the bias inherent in gathering research data from voluntary Ss, at least six have been implemented in the design of the present research project, at the point of recruiting Ss for both the survey and the interviews:

1. Make the appeal for Ss as interesting as possible, keeping in mind the nature of the target population.
2. Make the appeal for volunteers as nonthreatening as possible so that potential volunteers will not be put off by unwarranted fears of unfavourable evaluation.
3. Explicitly state the theoretical and practical importance of the research for which volunteering is requested.
4. Explicitly state in what way the target population is particularly relevant to the research being conducted and the responsibility of the potential volunteers to participate in research that has potential for benefiting others.
5. When possible, avoid research tasks that may be psychologically or biologically stressful.
6. After a target population has been defined, an effort should be made to have someone known to that population make an appeal for volunteers. The request for volunteers itself may be more successful if a personalised appeal is made. (pp. 198, 199)

Implementation of these suggestions can be seen in the recruiting of volunteers through the author’s addressing of Year 11 assemblies in each of the target schools. In each of these assemblies, the author was accompanied by, and
supported by, the Year 11 student adviser. The relevance of the research to the students, and the opportunity it provided for them to express their feelings about their experience of senior schooling, were important issues presented in the assemblies. It was also made clear to students that participation in the project would not be embarrassing to any individuals, even those who might not describe themselves as strong readers. Before volunteering, they were told that, for the survey, each item would be read aloud by the author and that they would be asked only to tick the box indicating their response to that item.

In recruiting Ss, the researcher considered the nature of the target population. In the school-assembly presentations, care was taken to avoid, as far as possible, the skewing of the sample by some sub-groups’ deciding not to participate. The assurance (described above) that there would be no embarrassment to poor readers in completing the questionnaire, is one example of such a precaution. Another was the way in which students who were not enjoying their senior schooling experience were encouraged to participate in the survey so that their views of senior schooling would be heard and considered.

4.2.3 The case-study Ss

Seven of the interviewed Ss were selected to be presented as case studies. They were three males and four females, and included representatives of each of the four schools. These Ss were chosen from the 31 interviewees because they represent a cross-section of the senior students participating in the study. Further, each of these Ss had made comments in their interviews that were relevant to the research questions being considered in this section of the study, and the researcher’s
opinion was that a more detailed presentation of their perceptions of senior schooling would enrich the discussion of those research questions.

Two of the case study Ss presented with life- and school-situations very different from those of the other Ss in at least one important aspect. The S identified here as Peter was repeating Term Four of Year 11. He had dropped out of Year 12 at another school after his frequent truancy had led to an expectation of a poor HSC result. At the time of the interview, he indicated that he was hoping, the next year, to achieve HSC grades which would earn him entrance to university. “Eric” was an exchange student who was soon to return to school in Sweden to prepare for university.

Of the other five case-study Ss, “Sharon” was hoping to study at university when she left school, while “Dave” gave no indication of his future plans, but made some very positive comments about his experience of senior-schooling. “Kelly” hoped to become a primary-school teacher, “Stephanie” claimed to have returned to school for Year 11 only because she could not find work, and “Helen” planned to study Psychology at university.

The case studies make an important contribution to the research project. While the interview analyses present patterns of response occurring across the 31 Ss, the case studies identify some of the background information about individual Ss, and illustrate ways in which those individuals, with those specific backgrounds, are experiencing their senior schooling.

4.3 Constructs underlying qualitative inquiry

Lincoln and Guba (1985) address the characteristics of different methods of approaching data-collection for differing purposes. They discuss basic differences
between constructs underlying research in the conventional positivist paradigm (internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity) and those which they consider to be more appropriate to naturalistic or qualitative inquiry (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability). They define ‘credibility’ as the researcher’s ability to “demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described” (p. 296).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the interview can yield data that describe complexities of variables and interactions within a social environment. They claim, further, that such in-depth descriptions are so embedded with data that is derived from the setting that their validity is assured. Such a claim is problematic, since it appears to be arguing the construct of validity by manipulating the definition of setting-derived data. However, further light is thrown on Lincoln and Guba’s meaning by Marshall and Rossman’s (1989) comment on the above claim: “Within the parameters of that setting, population, and theoretical framework, the research will be valid. A qualitative researcher must therefore adequately state those parameters” (p. 145).

In the present study of senior students’ perception of schooling, the setting is four high schools in the southern Illawarra area of NSW. Ss participating in the survey were students who volunteered to do so after attending a Year 11 form meeting in which the purposes and nature of the research project were presented by the author. Thirty-one of these volunteers returned for individual interviews with the author three to four weeks after completing the survey.
It is acknowledged here that the concepts of replicability and generalisability can be problematic in the open-ended interview-style of data collection used in the present study. The replicability of the positivist paradigm is clearly not possible in open-ended interview methodology because of the interactive nature of the data collection and the flexibility of approach, as well as the dynamic nature of the environments likely to be studied in such research. By nature, qualitative studies cannot be replicated because the real world is constantly changing. Marshall and Rossman (1989) state that "the researcher . . . concentrates on recording the complexity of situational contexts and interrelations as they occur. Moreover, the researcher's goal of discovering this complexity by . . . a flexible research design cannot be replicated by future researchers, nor should it be attempted" (p. 148).

4.4 The generalisability of qualitative-research findings

The concept of transferability or generalisability depends on assumptions which are foreign to the parameters of the qualitative section of the present study. The purpose of these case studies and the analyses of data which emerged from the 31 interviews was to gain further insights into the meanings ascribed to alienation symptoms by individual Year 11 students. Some levels of alienation and its sub-concepts had been shown, by analysis of the questionnaire-based data, to be statistically significant. Further questions needed to be asked. How were senior students experiencing the senior school environment? How were they perceiving interactions between them and their teachers? How did they go about coping with problems that they were facing in the senior school?

The interviews opened up to the author some responses to such questions. The transcripts are acknowledged to be no more, and no less, than accounts of
individual students’ perceptions of the senior school. They provide the reader with insights into what these students meant by their responses to the Likert-scale survey. No claim of generalisability is made.

The seven case studies reported here present the perceptions of seven Year 11 volunteers as they were given the opportunity to describe aspects of their experience of senior-schooling. It may be that some of these perceptions (and, perhaps, the beliefs underlying them) are unique to a particular student. It may be that some of these perceptions are based on a misconception of some of the objective realities being described by the student. What is claimed here is that seven individuals stated that they were experiencing the senior school in the ways they have described. This being so, it is further claimed that issues raised by these students, and insights into the senior-school experience offered by these students form a reasonable basis for discussion questions which might be productively considered by teachers and administrators whose agenda includes an attempt to understand the perceived needs of senior-school students.

4.5 Students’ perceptions: Verbatims

One of the most powerful indicators of students’ experience of the senior years of schooling is the way they describe that experience, in their own words. While questionnaires yield quantitative data that can be analysed for statistical significance, an important richness is imparted to those results when the students are given the opportunity to describe more fully, in their own words, the feelings and thoughts lying behind the choices they indicated on the survey.

The present study has been built on a phenomenological theoretical base. The purpose of the study is to hear what senior students have to say by encouraging
them to express, in response to surveys and in individual interviews, their perceptions of senior schooling.

One important reason for this approach is the traditional expectation in schools that students, particularly senior students, whose age means that their education is ‘post-compulsory’, either comply with the culture of the school, or leave. In such a climate, students are often not encouraged to express their perceptions of schooling. It is the behaviour of the students that is observed by staff, and students’ experiences of schooling are strongly influenced by teachers’ response, or reaction, to that behaviour.

In discussing student dropout rates in USA, Fine (1985) refers to the silencing of dissenting students in schools. Her research revealed that not only the context of the urban social setting, but also the structure of the school, actually contributed to the dropout rate. Part of this situation, she claimed, could be attributed to the way in which, in their day-to-day school experience, student voices of protest and inquiry were directly and indirectly silenced by people and institutions of the dominant culture:

For the most part, schooling is structured so that student opinions, voices and critical thoughts remain silenced - by teachers and ultimately by their own inhibitions. This is especially true in classes from which students are most likely to drop out. Classrooms are organised more around control than conversation, more around the authority of teacher than autonomy of students, and more around competition than collaboration. (p. 99)

Erickson (1986) writes of “conditions of meaning that students and teachers create together” and asks the following questions: “How is it that it can make sense to students to learn in one situation, and not in another? How are these meaning systems created and sustained in daily interaction” (p. 127)?
Such are the questions underlying an attempt to describe, and to interpret, how Year 11 students in four southern-Illawarra schools perceive their experience of senior schooling. The intention is to focus on students’ perceptions of schooling by listening to their descriptions of senior schooling, and by analysing the data generated in this process. The qualitative research aims at recording what Erickson (1986) describes as “the immediate and local meanings of actions . . . from the actor’s point of view” (p. 119).

4.6 The form of the interviews

This section of the research report will present data offered by the 31 Year 11 students who volunteered to follow up their participation in the survey with a personal interview conducted by the author.

There is much discussion in the social-research literature about the form of interviews. Sarantakos (1993), for example, refers to the dichotomies of structured versus unstructured interviews and standardised versus unstandardised interviews. He describes a structured interview as, “in reality, a questionnaire read by the interviewer as prescribed by the researcher . . . allowing no freedom to make adjustments to any of its elements, such as content, wording, or order of the questions” (p. 178).

The aim of the structured interview is to minimise interviewer bias and to gain the highest possible degree of procedural uniformity. In the unstructured interview, by contrast, there is no such strict control of the procedure. The unstructured interview is described by Sarantakos as having the following characteristics:
The interviewer acts in this context freely, on the basis of certain research points, formulating questions as required and when required, and employing neutral probing. The structure of these interviews is flexible, and the restrictions minimal, being presented in most cases in the form of guides rather than rules. (p. 178)

Differences between standardised and unstandardised interviews appear in the degree of standardisation of the questions, as well as the degree of standardisation of expected answers. In a standardised interview, respondents are offered a set of response options. The unstandardised interview is characterised by open questions. Respondents are free to formulate their own response in a way that they find most fitting to describe their perceptions.

It is acknowledged here that the purposes of the quantitative section of this research project differed, in some important respects, from the purposes of the qualitative section. Whereas the former aimed at establishing statistical significance in levels of alienation, the latter was intended to provide anecdotal evidence which would supplement those results. This would be achieved by listening to individual students - by allowing them the opportunity to express their perceptions of senior schooling, without being bound by standardised question- or answer-formats.

Students were thus encouraged to express their opinions about any issues raised in the survey, but also about any other senior school issues important to them. Some students came to the interviews with clear ideas of what they wanted to say. Others responded to a probe such as, "Would you describe the discipline system for senior students as fair?" by expressing an opinion and proceeding to give several anecdotes in illustration of their points. When interviews followed such a
course, the author followed the line of those comments, rather than steering the students on to other issues for the sake of uniformity of data categories for analysis.

Although the interviews were thus lacking in uniformity of focus topics, several themes emerged, and a discussion of these will follow the case studies.

4.7 Interview-data analysis

The reporting of the case studies is followed by an analysis of interview data that identifies themes emerging from the 31 interviews. Each of the 31 interviews was, with Ss’ permission, taped, then transcribed and analysed for content themes.

Here again, no further claim is made than that these themes were present in the perceptions of these 31 students. Here again, the issues raised and the insights gained are offered to teachers and administrators for discussion and, in particular, for consideration in the light of local circumstances.

In the interview section of the present study, the aim was to give to Year 11 students an opportunity for expressing their perceptions of senior schooling. As each of the Ss had previously, and within a time-span of four weeks, participated in the questionnaire, there were some issues raised in the survey items that emerged frequently in the interviews. In the early stages of each interview, the interviewer introduced one or more of these themes to set the interview in motion. Other than this opener, the interviewer’s purpose was to follow the line of students’ own observations and comments, and to gather data descriptive of individual students’ experience of senior-schooling.

Chapters Three and Four have presented the methodologies employed for the quantitative study and the qualitative study. Chapter Five presents the results of the research.
5. Chapter Five: Results

5.1 Results A: Quantitative Study

5.1.1 The Variables

The results in this section refer to the relationships between Ss’ scores (powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement) and the following variables: (a) school, (b) gender, (c) participation in non-Matriculation courses, (d) participation in TAFE courses, (e) receipt of Austudy, (f) main source of family income, (g) an older sibling who is unemployed, (h) an older sibling who has completed Year 12 of school, (i) a parent who has completed Year 12 of school, (j) the expectation that the student will eventually find employment in a preferred occupation, (k) student’s first preference - return to school or leave, and (l) who made the return-to-school decision, the student or parent.

5.1.2 The Analysis

The F statistic (see, for example, Bordens & Abbott, 1991) was used, and analyses of variance were required to meet a significance level of .05 to be reported as showing significant relationship. This follows a convention in the behavioural sciences “that an alpha level of 0.05 is the maximum acceptable rate for type 1 errors. This level provides reasonable protection against type I errors while also maintaining a reasonable level of power. (Bordens & Abbott, 1991, p. 380)

Huck, Cormier and Bounds (1974) describe the alpha level as “a probability that defines how rare or unlikely the sample data must be before the researcher can reject the null hypothesis” (p. 41). Bordens and Abbott (1991) further comment that most journal editors are reluctant to accept for publication papers in which results do not achieve the alpha level of .05: “The reason, of course, is that such
results stand a relatively high chance of being attributable to random factors rather than to the effect of the independent variable” (p. 528).

It is acknowledged here that a more conservative test of the significance of correlations among variables would be provided by requiring an alpha level of .01 or lower. When, however, the attitudinal nature of the data is taken into account, it seems reasonable to have chosen the alpha level of .05 which represents the higher end of the acceptable range for research in the behavioural sciences, as argued above.

The Minitab computer program was used to analyse the data. The results of this analysis will be presented in three figures and two tables. The three figures consist of histograms that will demonstrate:

1. the relationship between powerlessness and each independent variable,
2. the relationship between meaninglessness and each independent variable, and
3. the relationship between estrangement and each independent variable.

The tables will present:

1. a summary of all significant relationships yielded in the analysis of the data, and
2. the interaction of gender with each other independent variable, in relation to each of the three scores (powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement).

5.1.2.1 Analyses of Variance: Powerlessness

Figure 3 shows the results of several analyses of variance to determine the association between powerlessness and each independent variable.
Figure 3: The p-values arising from analyses of variance to determine the effects of various factors on powerlessness

Relationships with powerlessness were significant at $p \leq .05$ for: (a) students whose first choice was to gain employment, but whose second preference was to be at school, rather than being unemployed, at home, even had unemployment benefits been available ($p < .001$); (b) students who had an older sibling who was currently unemployed ($p = .005$); (c) students who had no expectation of eventually entering their preferred occupation ($p = .001$); and (d) students whose choice to return to school had been made, not by themselves, but by their parents ($p = .014$).
5.1.2.2 Analyses of Variance: Meaninglessness

Figure 4 shows the results of several analyses of variance to determine the association of meaninglessness with each independent variable.

Figure 4: The p-values arising from analyses of variance to determine the effects of various factors on meaninglessness

Figure four shows that relationships with meaninglessness were significant at p < .05 for: (a) students whose first choice was to gain employment, but whose second preference was to be at school, rather than unemployed, at home, even had unemployment benefits been available (p < .001); (b) students participating in non-Matriculation courses (p < .001); (b) students participating in non-Matriculation courses (p < .001); (c) students who had an older sibling currently
unemployed (p = .002); and (d) students who had no expectation of eventual entry to their preferred occupation (p = .004).

5.1.2.3 Analyses of Variance: Estrangement

Figure 5 shows the results of several analyses of variance to determine the association between estrangement and each independent variable.

Figure 5: The p-values arising from analyses of variance to determine the effects of various factors on estrangement

Relationships with estrangement were significant at p ≤ .05 for: (a) students whose family income was mainly derived from unemployment benefits, or other social security benefits (p = .03); and (b) students who had no expectation of eventual entry to their preferred occupation (p = .006).
5.1.2.4 Summary of the results reported to this point

Table 8 summarises the results reported above. It presents all relationships identified in the statistical analysis of data as significant at $p \leq .01$, and $p \leq .05$.

Table 8: Summary of significant relationships between independent variables and scores for powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Powerlessness</th>
<th>Meaninglessness</th>
<th>Estrangement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income source</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.010 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return choice</td>
<td>&lt; .001 **</td>
<td>&lt; .001 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Matric</td>
<td>.023 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austudy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed sibling</td>
<td>.005 **</td>
<td>.002 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Yr 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling Yr 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational expectation</td>
<td>.001 **</td>
<td>.004 **</td>
<td>.006 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-maker</td>
<td>.014 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at $p \leq .05$    ** significant at $p \leq .01$

The variable of which of the four schools was attended by a S. made no significant difference to any of the three scores. There were no significant differences on any score between: (a) Ss participating in TAFE courses and Ss who were not, (b) between Ss who were receiving Austudy and those who were not receiving Austudy, (c) between Ss whose parents had, or had not, completed Year 12, or (d) between Ss with or without older siblings who had completed Year 12.

Estrangement scores were not significantly different according to Ss’ first
choice of staying at school or leaving school at the end of Year 10. Neither were estrangement scores significantly different between students with or without unemployed older siblings. Differences in sources of family income did not make a significant difference in scores for powerlessness or meaninglessness.

There was no significant difference in scores for powerlessness or estrangement between Ss who were participating in non-Matriculation courses and those who were not. Students who made their own decision to return to Year 11, on the one hand, and those whose parents made the decision, on the other hand, demonstrated no significant difference in meaninglessness or estrangement.

5.1.2.5 Gender differences

Table 9 shows the interaction of gender with each other independent variable, in relation to each of the three alienation scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Pow p</th>
<th>Mea p</th>
<th>Estr p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen/school</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/income source</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/return choice</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/Non-matric</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/TAFE</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/Austudy</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/Unemployed sibling</td>
<td>0.01 **</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/parent Yr 12</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/sibling Yr 12</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.01 **</td>
<td>0.05 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/occ. exp.</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen/decision</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05 *</td>
<td>0.02 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at p ≤ .05
** significant at p ≤ .01
A gender difference emerged for Ss with older siblings who had completed Year 12. For Year 11 students with older siblings who had completed the HSC, girls scored significantly higher on meaninglessness scores than boys (p = .014). Boys who had not been preceded in Year 12 by a sibling had significantly higher estrangement scores (p = .05) than girls.

Amongst Ss whose parents made the decision concerning their return to school, boys had significantly higher scores than girls in meaninglessness (p = .048) and estrangement (p = .022).
5.2 Results B: Qualitative Study

5.2.1 Case Studies

5.2.1.1 Confidentiality

Ss were assured that at least two years would elapse before any of the contents of the interviews would be made available to anyone other than the author, and that, at no time, would the identity of the Ss be disclosed. In keeping with these assurances, the following case studies are presented under pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are intended to do no more than provide a convenient way of referring to each student as a person in the reporting of the case studies. The names chosen are meant to convey only the sex of the Ss, and no indication of ethnicity or any other demographic variable is intended to be inferred. Where such information would be likely to illuminate the data from a particular case study, it is included in the report of that case study.

5.2.1.2 Summary of Case Studies

The details of the seven case studies are presented below. In this section, the findings of the case studies are presented in summary. The pseudonyms given to the seven case study Ss are: Peter, Sharon, Dave, Kelly, Eric, Stephanie and Helen.

a) Peter was a relative newcomer to his school. He had been enrolled in Year 12 at another local school, and had decided, seven weeks before the HSC exams, to transfer to his present school and enrol in Year 11. He described his two experiences of senior-school, telling the interviewer about his lack of motivation in his earlier school, and about his truancy during that time. At
the time of the interview, Peter expressed his intention to take a 3Unit subject in Year 12, and indicated his enjoyment of school in the new setting.

b) Sharon was hoping to study at University when she left school. In her words, she was “putting up with school” because, in that way, she could gain entry to the future educational experience she had chosen. Her criticism of the senior school focused mainly on the teachers and the co-existence of staff who showed that they respected the students and cared about their needs, and staff who appeared to the students to think of them as interruptions to something else that they would rather be doing. She spoke at length about the inappropriateness of teachers’ publicly ridiculing individual students.

c) Dave spoke very positively about his experience of senior-schooling. He said that he was enjoying getting to know the teachers better as the classroom became less formal. He also enjoyed being a person that junior students looked up to. His major criticism concerned the discipline system operating in the school.

d) Kelly indicated that her vocational goal was to become a primary-school teacher. She was finding, in her senior year, that some teachers demonstrated a lack of understanding of adolescents’ emotional vulnerability. She, too, referred to public ridicule and humiliation of students. As was the case with Sharon, she was not a student who had personally experienced such treatment, but she believed that it was wrong for any teacher to ridicule a student.
e) Eric was an exchange student from Sweden, and had been enrolled in Year 11 in an Illawarra high school for three months. He had found the school rules for senior students to be excessively restrictive. He further commented that the rules that seemed to him to be inappropriate for seniors were actually setting up a conflict situation in the school.

f) Stephanie said that she had returned to Year 11 only because she could not find a job. She spoke about how difficult some subjects were for her. She claimed that she could not understand much of the work, and that the teachers did not seem to know how to help students like her. Although she would prefer to leave school and find employment, she had made a personal commitment to do her best at school, and she was critical of ‘stayers-on’ who refused to work in class and disrupted the lessons for those who wanted to learn. Stephanie also complained about the inconsistency that she had found in teachers’ enforcement of rules concerning the wearing of school uniform. She explained this inconsistency in terms of teachers’ diminished energy in the face of having to deal daily with chronic rule-breakers.

g) Helen indicated her ambition to study Psychology at university. Her main problem with school was the feeling of being controlled - of being caught in a routine that has been controlled by someone else. In her comments about teachers’ apparent lack of respect for some students, she spoke about teachers’ stress levels and the related fatigue. Her opinion was that these variables had a great influence on teachers’ behaviour at various times. She was also critical of students who chose to ‘bait’ teachers until they reacted.
angrily. She expressed her sadness that she could see that some teachers were ‘hurting’ because of the classroom behaviour.

5.2.1.3 Case Study A: Peter

Peter was a student who had been advised by his teachers at another school that he would not receive an HSC grading in Biology because he had not completed enough practical hours. His decision, seven weeks before the HSC, was to transfer to a neighbouring school and enrol in Year 11. In the interview, at the new school, he told the story of his first attempt at senior schooling.

In both Year 11 and Year 12, Peter had truanted frequently, eventually being suspended on two occasions for truancy. He spoke about his lack of motivation. Even though he knew he was capable of earning a TER that would gain him university entrance, he did not put in the work:

*I knew I was good enough, but I just wasn’t motivated. I’d just get on the wrong side of the teacher, and that was it. Once I got on the wrong side of the teacher, I’d just keep going down that side, you know.*

When asked why he had not left school instead of maintaining enrolment and truanting, Peter replied, “It’s not what I want.” He identified “teachers” as his reason for wanting to miss classes. He illustrated this in the following story:

Well, in my English class, back at my old school, I had this teacher that I got on really well with in Year 11, and I got 82%. That was in General English, for my Year 11 yearly. I got into Year 12, and they put me in a top class for English. I knew the teacher didn’t like me, and I said, “I don’t want to be in here. I want to go back to the other class.” They said, “No,” so I just got up and went into the other class, and I was in there for about a week, and then they caught up with me...... they put me back into the other class, and my marks dropped to 48 in the Year 12 half-yearly - from 82 to 48 over half a year. That was because of this teacher. He’d always make a fool of me - he makes examples and jokes, and it always seemed to be on me.
Peter went on to describe feeling put down in English classes. He said that
the people in the new class had what he described as "a totally different
vocabulary". He claimed that he would say things in words that meant the same
thing, but that the teacher

was used to all these really smart people, just because they were
really good with language - using big words. He liked that, and
he'd say to me, sometimes, when I'd walk into class, "What are
you doing here? You might as well go." He'd say, "Go," and I
went! Half the time he told me to go.

As the interview progressed, it became clear that Peter was an academically
capable student. Indicators of this were his 82% for 2U General English in the Year
11 yearly examination, the fact that he had been studying 3U Maths before he had
started missing classes and had chosen to change to a lower level, the fact that he
was a 3U Geography student, and that he had been doing well at Chemistry before
he had started cutting classes.

Another problem identified by Peter concerned subject choice for Year 12.
Circumstances had prevented him from studying Geography at 3U level at his first
school:

I wanted to do 3U Geography, and last year in the exam, you had
to get 60, and I only got 57 because I had Glandular Fever - and
they made me do my exams all in two days, and I didn't know - I
just walked up to school, and the day I walked up to school, they
gave me three tests - the teacher did - one of the teachers that
really didn't like me was my Year adviser - I came to this school,
and I said, I want to do 3U Geography next year - and they said,
yes, alright - pick an easy 2U subject - one that you think you can
take even if you miss half a year, and we'll let you do 3U
Geography next year.
In this statement, Peter was painting a clear contrast between the attitudes and programming policies he had experienced in the two schools. While he paid tribute to some of the staff at his first school:

They tried - I have to admit - they tried a lot because they knew I could do it - a lot of the staff, they’d try to talk to me - some of the ones that liked me - they’d take me to one side and they’d say, come on, we know you can do it,

he also gave a clear indication of the depression and powerlessness he had felt - feelings that had led to the vicious cycle of his not working on HSC subjects, teachers reacting negatively to him, and his truanting, thus attracting further negative attention. He used the following words to express those feelings:

Once I started to get put down, it was hard for me to bring myself up for the same person that put me down - you know what I mean (so then) I’d stay, and I’d give heaps of cheek and that didn’t work, so I just left them - another thing that was a problem was that I did chemistry, and a teacher advised me on doing it and I was going really well, and then when I started wagging a bit - I started - it’s really hard, because you have to go to chemistry all the time - and I asked so many times can I go into another subject - and it was no, no - and that was one big reason I wagged school, because then I could get out of it.

The difference between Peter’s two experiences of senior school, in the same year, and about 5 kilometres distant from each other, is best expressed in his own words:

next year I’ll do 3U Geography - exactly what I wanted to do at my school from the beginning - and because I didn’t get my way there, they wouldn’t let me - I got depressed over that, and that made me hate school a bit - but now, I love coming to school - every day I think - it’s good.

5.2.1.4 Case Study B: Sharon

Sharon was a Year 11 girl who was hoping to study at university after the HSC. Her summary of the senior-school experience was:
It's alright . . . you kind of think you're rather be at other places sometimes but you've got to be here. I really want to go to Uni, so I know I've got to do my HSC so I'm putting up with it . . . it's not that I love it or anything.

In speaking about teachers' respect for senior students, Sharon made some insightful comments:

They say that they do . . . they think that they do but they don't really. They've still got the same underlying discipline and the same acts and . . .

I don't know . . . they say they treat you like adults except they don't. They still treat you like "shut up and sit down, speak when you're spoken to, do what you're told when you're told." Some teachers are really good and really do treat you like adults but there's a lot that don't.

Sharon contrasted two groups of teachers - those who seem to indicate, from their attitudes and behaviour towards senior students, that they respect those students and are there to help them, and those whose attitudes and behaviour give the students different messages. She expressed the opinion that some teachers appear to regard students as an interruption to something else that they would rather be doing, while others create a climate in the classroom that makes students want to learn:

You feel you . . . like you want to learn more in a class where the teachers respect you like people - not like students that they've got to be there to teach. It's like you know, putting out their time because you're there... some of them.

She described a class in which the teacher respects the senior students as adults:

more like equals than on different levels . . . and they treat you like you're a real person. and it makes people want to learn and want to listen because they've got that respect.
According to Sharon, students in such a climate are more likely to enter into discussions. Students are not likely to sit back and not do anything. They also feel comfortable to express their ideas, because they know that the teacher will not put them down if their ideas are unusual or if they sound silly.

By contrast, she described student reactions to the other group of teachers:

You just want to rebel against them because you’re just sick of it. It’s not fair that they treat you so badly . . . sometimes when they say that they’re treating you so good and that you just don’t want to learn. So to get back at them you want to say “Get lost! I’m not doing it.”

Her illustration of “bad treatment” concerned some teachers’ reactions to students’ comments in classroom discussions:

You get made fun of for saying something . . . if you say something . . . er . . . and they say, “That’s stupid!” . . . It’s just not right.

Later in the interview, Sharon was asked if there was anything she would do differently if she was running the school, and she returned to this point:

I’d get the teachers to have more respect and less of a tendency to make examples of people. Maybe take them aside after class and give them a helping hand or something . . . not to ridicule them in front of the class.

According to Sharon, ridicule of a student by a teacher was not always verbal:

“How could you be that stupid?” They won’t exactly say that but will kind of go . . . “Oh,” . . . and with their facials . . . and you just decide - OK, I won’t say anything next time.

Sharon said that she was describing what she had seen happening to other students. She indicated that she would be very angry if it happened to her, and that she would probably act in a way that would get her into trouble. She believed that
she would be disciplined by receiving a “detention for being so rude or disobedient when I’m trying to express my feelings”.

It is important to keep in mind the fact that these comments were being made by an academically capable student, voluntarily at school in post-compulsory years in order to prepare for university. Earlier in the interview, she had expressed the opinion that senior students needed to be bound by the same rules as juniors in order to be a good example to them. She also had no problem with the strictness of the rules that made seniors stay in the school library if they had free periods:

It’s fair enough really. We’re at school . . . and it’s school hours and we’re supposed to be studying. Whether you read a book or you sit there quietly doing anything I think . . . it’s fair enough.

Her comment about discipline in the school was equally positive:

If there’s no discipline, everyone’s just going to run wild and nothing’s going to get done.

Sharon, after stating her belief that students’ expressions of feelings were likely to lead them into trouble with teachers, offered the following insights into the anomaly of teachers’ talking about treating senior students as adults, but apparently finding it difficult to allow them to act as adults:

They say, you know, that if you act like an adult you will be treated like an adult, but they don’t (treat you like an adult. I think it’s) because they’re scared of you being as smart as them, or knowing something that they don’t know or, you know, speaking like they do. They think, “I’ve got to get rid of this because . . .” They want nothing to challenge their authority.

(I think it’s because) they must be insecure or something . . . I think there’s so many of us and so few of them, they think we might be revolutionary or something. They just don’t like being challenged in any way.
To the interviewer’s comment, “So you can be treated as adults as long as you toe the line, and don’t challenge?” Sharon produced a thought-provoking reply:

Yes, we can be treated like adults as long as we act like children.

5.2.1.5 Case Study C: Dave

Dave described his experience of senior schooling in positive terms. He spoke of becoming more responsible for his actions, and for his work, and of how the teachers responded to this emerging maturity:

We do get a lot of respect compared to the younger years - like we come to know our teachers - and we can talk to them as friends, not just as our teacher. We get to know our teachers, and they’re pretty lenient with our work and that. They try to help us more, because we’re in our senior years, and they’re more worried about our future.

He also commented on how good it felt for the seniors to have juniors looking up to them. His attitude towards school rules was that they did not impinge much on seniors’ lives, even though they were rather strict. On one issue, however, his comments delivered mixed messages. He spoke about the discipline system, and claimed that the feeling was more one of being helped than of being controlled. The level system used in the junior years did not appear to be operating in the senior years, as disciplinary action was more along the lines of negotiation. Seniors who had broken rules could work it out with the Year Adviser, and sometimes the Principal, but also had the option to argue their case before a discipline committee of Head Teachers.
As he continued, however, the ideal of a student’s being empowered to defend himself in this way was contrasted with a description of a reality which was quite different:

They say that you can go to this meeting and have your own say, but, from what I’ve heard, most of the students go in, and they get told what they’ve done. Then they get put on a level, and they have to do this and this, but, from what I’ve heard, they don’t get a say, which is what it’s all about. You’re supposed to go in there and tell them what you’ve done, and have your say about the incident.

Asked about whether senior students actually had the choice of an interview with the Principal and the Year Adviser, or whether someone else decided that the issue was a discipline committee issue, Dave responded:

You get told, and you go to it. At the beginning of the year, we got told about the discipline meetings - how they worked, and, as I said before, they said that you get to have a say - you get to talk to the Head Teachers, and tell them your situation, and what you’ve done - and you might be able to . . . work it out from there.

Dave appeared to be describing an attempt by his school to adjust the discipline system to accommodate the needs of the older population of the senior school. His perception of the situation, however, was that maybe the teachers involved were finding it difficult to change their attitudes and behaviours in such a way that the new system could work as planned.

5.2.1.6 Case Study D: Kelly

Kelly was a Year 11 student who was hoping to study at university after the HSC. Her career ambition was to become a primary-school teacher. She was undertaking an academic course aimed at the highest possible TER score, and was studying Maths at 3U level, and English at 2UG level.
Kelly’s comments are presented here as representative of Ss who recounted incidents in which they portrayed some teachers as lacking in understanding of the emotional vulnerability of young people in later adolescent years.

Early in the interview, she spoke about the indignity of having to ask teachers for permission to go to the toilet, and also expressed her belief that there was room for more negotiation with senior students concerning such issues as changes to uniforms. She commented positively about the interaction between senior students and some teachers who were willing to approach them as adult to adult, and thus to offer a relationship quite different from that with junior students.

Her major concerns, however, appeared to emerge in response to an invitation to “say anything else that you have on your mind about the senior school”. She spoke of the power a teacher has to hurt students by insensitively and publicly announcing their mistakes and failures in pieces of school work. Her point was illustrated by an incident in which English assessments were being discussed in a Form meeting:

One time when the teachers haven’t treated us that well is - we had a meeting to discuss our English assessments sort of thing, and they really put us down - like, when we write our English exam, most of the sections were OK, but in one section he read sections out of people’s work. I thought that was going back to like we were in primary school. He was reading sections sort of, and saying to the whole year what they did wrong. I just didn’t think that was fair. We’re seniors now, and we try our best, and people do get hurt if they didn’t do as well as other people. When he did that, I felt that he was treating us really badly.

Kelly proceeded to speak about the privacy issues involved in such an incident:

Everyone is trying hard. Our marks should be sort of our marks - not told around to other people sort of thing - and if we wrote
something wrong, I think that’s between us and the teacher, not for the whole year . . . I know that one person was quite upset that their part was read out. (Even though the people were not identified to the other students), it was pretty plain. The stuff that he was saying was fairly slack, like - I can’t think of an example exactly . . . If he’d said it one on one, it wouldn’t have been so bad, but since he said it to the whole year, everyone was laughing about it, so it hurt them.

Kelly’s point was that, even if the students who had written the faulty answers were not named, it was rather obvious that the students whose work was being read out would be feeling humiliated. After all, what was actually happening was that their peers were being led by the teacher to respond to the question of how anyone could be stupid enough to write such a thing.

She compared this incident with something that she had seen recently when she was doing Work Experience at a K-6 school. She described how, in Kindergarten, the teacher had tended to stand individual pupils up and tell them exactly what they had done wrongly:

I didn’t think it was fair in Kindergarten, and I thought, “Now we’re in Year 11, and it’s even worse!”

5.2.1.7 Case Study E: Eric

Eric is an exchange student from Sweden. He has been enrolled in Year 11 of an Illawarra high school for almost three months. When he returns home, he has 18 months of schooling before going to university, where he hopes to study Economics.

Eric’s main point of contrast between the two education systems he has experienced is the discipline system. He has found the NSW school system to be very strict. He reported that, in the Swedish system, students are allowed to leave the school ground whenever they have a break or a recess.
Eric described his experience, in Sweden, of a different kind of school in which seniors did not share the same campus as the juniors, and in which organisational and disciplinary systems were thus able to be made more appropriate for the students in each of the two sub-schools. High school takes in Years 11, 12 and 13, and is completely separate from the junior years. About the senior school experience in NSW, he comments:

The school takes much more control of the students - like - you do that, you have to do that... it's not up to you. You have to do it, and if you don’t, you’re in trouble.

His opinion is that the separation of the two groups of secondary students, with two distinct campuses, motivates senior students to mature and to take more responsibility for their behaviour and for their study. He comments that, if this separation existed, there would be no need to have a lot of the rules which seem to him to be inappropriate to senior students.

One major difference between the two systems in terms of organisation is that Swedish schools have ten-minute breaks between lessons:

You get ten minutes’ recess after each 40 minute lesson - and here you have four periods in a row - so there’s sort of pressure - you need a break.

Eric expressed concern about the conflict situations in the school that seemed to him to be avoidable. He was referring to rules that appeared to be inappropriate to the ages of senior students. His perception was that students, seeing the rules to be unnecessarily restrictive or intrusive, responded by breaking them. Staff then had to decide whether to react to the breaking of the rules - and according to Eric, the only real outcome from such a situation was that energy was wasted on something that did not really matter.
5.2.1.8 Case Study F: Stephanie

Stephanie stated clearly in her first sentence in the interview that her main reason for coming back to school was that there were no jobs. She had done voluntary work during the Christmas holidays following Year 10, hoping that this would lead to an offer of employment, but this had not happened.

Stephanie's comments about Government allowances for unemployed young people were thought-provoking:

It's no use being on Job Search, because you may as well come back and get more education. I think that people (on Job Search) use the money on wrong things. They're supposed to use their money for travelling to look for jobs. I don't think they do. (If I'd gone onto Job-Search allowance) I probably wouldn't have used it the right way. They would probably give me too much, and I wouldn't spend it on searching for jobs. I'd probably spend it on my own things, things that I wanted to spend it on. They are making kids too comfortable. Half of the people out there who are on Job Search are not even bothered to look for a job because they know they're getting the income, but they have to write down jobs that they're looking for, so they make them up . . . I don't know . . .

Her comments about Austudy were similar:

It's the same with Austudy. Some people get too much money. I mean, I don't get Austudy myself; but some people get too much money. Half of it is not even spent on school stuff.

Stephanie's opinion was that senior students who refuse to wear school uniform are making a conscious statement about having to be at school when they would have preferred to leave at the end of Year 10:

Walking to school, you see people - (think about the) dress code. They wear the wrong dress purposely so they have to go home and get changed. Some people do that!

Her experience of the classroom in senior school was that, not being an academically-oriented student, she found it difficult to understand much of the
work. Some teachers did not appear to her to explain the work clearly enough for students such as her:

I don’t mind coming to school, because I try. But some of the subjects you do, some teachers are too hard. They explain it too difficult. You don’t understand it, then you get low grades again. They don’t explain the work thoroughly, properly. I’m dropping one subject next year and going into a different subject, because I can’t understand it.

Stephanie indicated that not all reluctant ‘stayers-on’ had her attitude towards the school work. She described students sitting in class, doing no work, talking and annoying the people sitting around them, and also how she (and others) attempted to ignore them and get on with their work. Her opinion was that they would have been better to leave school, except for the fact that they were either getting Austudy, or that their parents had insisted on their returning to school because they could not get work.

As Stephanie spoke, it became clear that she had been a compliant student throughout high school. She had been in little trouble at school. Recently, however, she had bought a brand-name jumper because a lot of people seemed to be wearing them to school, and not getting into trouble, and, when she had worn it, it had been confiscated for the day, and she had been told that, if she wore it again, she would be sent home. Her complaint was not about strict uniform rules. It was about inconsistency in the enforcing of those rules:

They let a few people wear these (brand name) jumpers, and no-one got into trouble for it. But then I went and bought one. I got into trouble. I had to get it taken off me for the day, and had to pick it up, and then they were going to send me home to get changed just because I had this (brand name) jumper on. But people still wear it.

There are boys in my year, they wear ... if I wore a shirt today with just a little bit of writing in the circle, I’d get in trouble.
Even if I covered it up and had it under other clothes and you could see it through my jumper, I’d still get in trouble. Boys can wear clothes like that, with writing on them. I know guys in my year that do that - they wear jumpers with all different colours on them. The girls are not allowed to wear that, but the boys are.

One of the guys in our year is a surfy sort of guy. He doesn’t do his work that much, and he always wears jumpers with different colours on them. They don’t send him home to get changed because they’re sick of him. They’re sick of sending him home, maybe.

If you do something wrong, not very often, you get into big trouble. But if you continually do the wrong thing, you get away with it. It’s because the teachers are sick of always nagging the same kids.

Stephanie’s opinion was that the teachers did not have the energy to be consistent in disciplining the chronic rule-breakers in the senior school. The emerging anomaly was that the infrequent offenders appeared to be bearing the brunt of the disciplinary measures, while the frequent offenders’ recalcitrant behaviour appeared to have rendered the teachers powerless.

5.2.1.9 Case Study G: Helen

Helen is a Year 11 student who wants to go to university after the HSC to study Psychology. Early in the interview, Helen commented about how school ‘gets to’ her, because of the feeling of being controlled:

Some days you don’t mind, and other days you really don’t want to be here. It’s not the school, it’s mainly just the idea of school. Being controlled - like you’ve always got to be somewhere, . . . it’s like sort of a routine, and controlled by someone else. I don’t think school could be different. The school wouldn’t be able to achieve anything. It has to be like that.

Some other students had denied the suggestion that teachers show respect to senior students, describing classroom attitudes and behaviours that they interpreted as lacking such respect. Helen interpreted the situation quite differently:
Most teachers have a lot of respect for students, but there are some teachers who - well, it's not that they don't respect you - just that they get tired. Some teachers just don't handle the stress as well as others, and they seem to take it out on the older students.

All teachers get stressed out. I can see why they would, but some teachers can handle that, and not take it out on the next class. (For instance,) if you've got a low Year 7 class the period before, you're obviously going to be on the end of your nerves by the time you come to Year 11. Then all it takes is one smart comment from Year 11 for them to explode. They tend not to explode at the Year 7s, because they can't handle it, but the Year 11s can handle it. Then they take it personally, and it just keeps going - it doesn't stop - it gets like a cycle or something.

Helen followed up these statements by describing how some students, particularly those who have always been in trouble even in the junior school, tend to see the teachers as the enemy. She described these students “doing what they can to work the teacher up and then sitting back and watching the teacher explode”. The interviewer asked her how it felt to be a student who just wanted to get on with her work, and to have to cope with this kind of behaviour from her peers. Her answer focussed, not on the interruption to her opportunity to learn, but on the pain being inflicted on the teachers by these students:

You feel sorry for the teacher, because a lot of the time they're - you can see that they're hurting. It's not just a matter of, “My class isn't listening to me, after I've prepared it”. They take it personally and get upset. You feel sorry for them.

5.2.2 Interview Analysis

The analysis of the 31 interviews yielded eight common themes: (a) school discipline; (b) school uniform; (c) Ss’ perceptions of the nature of the relationship between teachers and senior students; (d) responsibility for completing school work and homework; (e) seniors as role models for junior students; (f) the impact of
disruptive classroom behaviour in the senior school; (g) toilet-leave permission and (h) teacher absence from senior classes.

The qualitative results that follow identify trends in the interviews. As indicated in the discussion of qualitative research in Chapter Four, caution must be taken in interpreting the data emerging from an 'unstructured interview' methodology. The results are not claimed to be generalisable. Nor do they need to be. Their value to this investigation resides in their power to give voice to 31 individual adolescents who, at the time of the interviews, were enrolled in Year 11 of one of the four participating schools. The identification of eight major themes in the transcripts of the interviews indicates that, for this group of 31 senior students, certain issues have arisen consistently despite the unstructured nature of the interviews.

In Chapter Six, it will be argued that these eight themes would make a profitable focus of discussion for teachers and school administrators who are attempting to achieve a better 'fit' of schooling to senior students. For now, the results of the interview analyses will be reported in the context of the eight themes which have emerged from the transcripts.

Direct quotes in this section are taken from interview transcripts. The Ss are identified by school (A, B, C or D), by an identifying number, and by sex. The designation C4m, for example, would indicate that the S. is a male from school C, and that he was the fourth S. from that school to be interviewed.

5.2.2.1 School discipline

Of the 31 interviewed Ss, five indicated satisfaction with their experience of the discipline systems of the senior school. One described the 'white-slip' system
as a reasonable way for teachers to indicate to students that specific infringements were serious. The 'white slip' was a paper given to a student who seemed to a teacher to have responded inappropriately to attempts at on-the-spot disciplinary measures. Once a white slip was issued, the relevant Year Adviser, and maybe a Head Teacher would become involved in the school's response to the incident. According to the Ss who spoke favourably of this disciplinary process, the issue of a white slip gave students the message that they had gone far enough.

Another referred to an incident in which she had broken a window while she was taking part in some foolish 'mucking around'. She was not placed on a level, as she believed a junior would have been for a similar incident. (In this comment, she was referring to the practice of students' commencing the school year with automatic placement on Level 1 in the school's discipline system, and of their staying on Level 1 while their behaviour was satisfactory. Those who were involved in serious infringements of school rules would be 'placed on a level'. This meant that, according to the nature of the incident, they would be placed on Level 2, 3, 4 or 5. Placement on any level other than Level 1 carried with it certain losses of privileges, and Level 5 placement meant automatic suspension from school. It was possible for students 'on levels' to return gradually to Level 1 placement by demonstrating consistently appropriate school behaviour.) The Year Adviser spoke to her about her inappropriate and dangerous behaviour, but the breaking of the window was accepted as a silly accident, and she was expected to pay for the repairs. She had experienced this as a reasonable response to a misdemeanour in a student of her age.
The other three Ss voiced the opinion that senior students are old enough to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They claimed that those who do so have no need for concern about discipline systems. One expressed the opinion that those who act in immature ways deserve the trouble they attract to themselves:

You don’t have to be here, so if you muck up, it’s just stupid. You can leave if you want. It’s your own stupid fault if you do get into trouble. (D6m)

The second of these three Ss described senior students as “less devious” now than when they were younger, and claimed that they had learned to become more responsible. The third indicated that he was aware of nothing in the senior school that he would like to change, and claimed that:

basically, the kids who are at school want to be at school . . . a lot of the people who were in strife are not at school any more. The ones who are at school are those who really want to be here. They’re not the trouble-makers. (A5m)

Amongst the 13 Ss who expressed discontent with the senior school discipline system, the comments centred around the associated themes of control and age-appropriateness of discipline, and the theme of perceived inconsistencies of various kinds.

The exchange student from Sweden had questioned why the senior school environment had to be so controlled. He described the discipline system as “too strict”. Another student implied similar concerns as she described disciplinary measures that seemed to her to be out of proportion to the misdemeanours. She gave the following illustration:

If you have a free period and you’re caught outside if you’re supposed to be in the library or something, you still get fractional truancy for that, even though you’re still in school. Because it’s
such a nice day, we go out and sit and read a book outside and we keep getting into trouble. (A2f)

Within the theme of improved age-appropriateness of disciplinary measures, came an argument from one S. for greater flexibility. He claimed that the discipline system needed to be relaxed to allow seniors to develop more responsibility for their own behaviour. Another S. spoke about teachers’ sending home notes to parents when Year 11 students had not completed homework, and claimed this action to be more appropriate to Year 7 students than to 17-year-olds. She, too, was expressing the opinion that greater responsibility should be placed on senior students themselves.

Several Ss expressed the opinion that disciplinary measures inappropriate to their age were introduced because of the immature behaviour of some seniors. They were calling for age-appropriate discipline with age-appropriate consequences for those who chose to reject reasonable guidelines.

One of these Ss (B5f), in response to a question about an alternative system, suggested that the level system for seniors be replaced by a negotiation system. Students who consistently acted outside the guidelines would, in her system, be interviewed by a senior students’ welfare teacher. The ultimate choice to be discussed with students in such interviews would be whether they wished to stay at school and act as mature students, or whether they would prefer to leave school. She saw that, in the present system, there was a third choice, that she claimed to have seen in operation. This was for the student to choose to stay on at school and also to choose to continue to break the rules. She saw this third choice as unacceptable, because it not only disrupted other students’ experience of senior
schooling, but often led also to a tightening of discipline for all senior students in an attempt to control the behaviour of the few.

Another S.'s comment supported her last point:

Some senior students do the wrong thing, and it's made strict for everyone. (B7f)

A S. (D3f) from another school agreed, adding that it was likely that inappropriately strict rules for senior students could actually lead to some of the discipline problems. She claimed, for example, that some seniors went to the local shop during school hours only because it had been declared out-of-bounds. She also referred to the inappropriateness of senior students' being expected to accept what they perceived as unfair comment or unjust treatment from teachers without being given the right of responding:

It's alright for them (teachers) to blow you up, and you haven't got the right to put your say in . . . When you say something back, you get into trouble for it, and yet they can go off their rocker at you . . . They don't treat you like an adult. They just treat you as a little kid. (D3f)

Dissatisfaction with the power wielded by disruptive students was the main concern of another S., who called for stricter control of these students through firmer discipline:

They should not be allowed to stay in class if they're not working . . . should let those who are working get on with it. (C2m)

In the area of control, then, these Ss were calling for age-appropriate guidelines monitored in such a way that disruptive students would experience personal consequences for their behaviour. Other seniors would then be free to pursue their schooling goals in a more peaceful and mature climate.
Dissatisfaction with perceived inconsistencies in the discipline system was a recurring theme in the interviews. One of these inconsistencies was a perception of differing expectations of boys and girls, particularly in regard to uniform-wearing. At one school, both male and female Ss commented that dress-codes were applied more strictly to the girls than to the boys.

Several Ss referred to perceived inconsistency of consequences for similar offences, depending apparently on the past reputation of the offender. Their perception was that it was difficult to earn the right to a fresh start in the senior school if a student had been in trouble as a junior. Two of these comments were:

You do the same as someone else, but you get harder discipline. It doesn’t seem fair, but you’ve just got to put up with it. (A1m)

(The group I was with) used to make heaps of trouble back then. They’ve all left now, but still we get into trouble like before. We don’t make much trouble now, but still it’s the same thing. (B6m)

5.2.2.2 School uniform

Students’ comments about uniform-wearing in the senior school ranged from unqualified support:

I don’t see anything wrong with it. It just makes it easier getting dressed every morning. You don’t have to think about what to wear . . . It’s easy. (B3m)

through disinterest:

It doesn’t really bother me. (B4f)

to opposition:

Uniforms are not exactly necessary. They don’t interrupt the thought processes, I’m sure, or bother the teachers. I’ve spoken to a fair few teachers about it, and they don’t care whether you’re wearing uniform or not. It’s not going to disturb the class. (C5m)
This student supported a dress code, but preferred to have no strictly prescribed uniform for either junior or senior high school students.

Most comments were about the strictness of uniform policies. Two Ss, from different schools, spoke about the trouble caused by wearing an un-collared shirt to school. One of these claimed that, at his school, if you wore un-collared shirts, even plain ones in the correct colour, it would be noted on your school report that you failed to wear uniform. His complaint was that, for seniors, school reports become part of the employment profile. Uniform comments could make good students who wore the wrong shirt appear to be undisciplined or non-co-operative. His perception was that such comments on school reports were unfair.

Several comments were made about the policing of uniform rules. Some teachers were perceived by students as unnecessarily strict and as having concerns about uniforms which were "over the top".

Other comments about teachers described subjects' perceptions of inconsistencies in the enforcing of uniform policies. At one school, both male and female Ss indicated that more leeway was given to the boys. Girls were expected to wear complete uniform, and appeared more likely than the boys to be sent home to change if they were not in uniform. One female S. who made such a comment added an anecdote about one of the boys in her year:

He's a surfy kind of guy. He always wears it (brand-name gear). He doesn't do his work that much, and he always wears jumpers with different colours on them. (The teachers ignore it) because they are sick of him . . . because they're sick of sending him home maybe. (C1f)

An issue discussed by several Ss was the role of senior uniform in visually differentiating senior students from juniors. One school had the same uniform for
all students, and a student from that school commented that seniors should have a
different uniform. A second student from the same school suggested that even a
different-coloured shirt would help to indicate that a student was a senior. At
another school, the uniform was described as a way of “showing who is a senior
and who is not, from a distance.”

From a third school came a comment about a perceived change in this
case:

Senior uniform used to be a symbol of the transition. That has
now been lost. It used to be that going from Year 10 to Year 11
was a big jump - like, you got a lot of privileges and different
clothes, but now . . . (the Year 10s) are getting close to what the
seniors wear, and there's not that big jump any more. (A10f)

One male S. who had described a teacher who was “always on someone’s
back about uniform” proceeded to describe another school’s senior uniform. At this
school, senior boys wore jackets and slacks, with a shirt and tie:

I reckon that's a good idea . . . you can wear pants and a nice
jacket to school . . . the sort of stuff you'd see out on the streets,
not just at school. (D1m)

His suggestion was checked with other Ss, who expressed their agreement. One
boy who had expressed the opinion that the uniform rules seemed to be “a bit over
the top” and too strictly policed at his school, added:

I like it rather on the extremes, like no uniform at all or a very
strict, dressy uniform. (D7m)

Representative of the other male Ss who supported this kind of uniform policy for
seniors was the one who commented:

I'd love to come to a school where you had to wear a jacket and
tie and good pants . . . You'd feel quite good . . . You'd feel
more proud . . . If they're going to make you wear it (uniform),
they should make it a higher standard. (D7m)
Another comment, made by a female S., concerned the lack of consultation with students about uniform changes. She expressed satisfaction with the uniform, but dissatisfaction with the process of choosing that uniform:

I think we should have more say - like the uniform - I’m happy about the uniform, but we should have more say to tell them that we’re happy with it. (A7f)

5.2.2.3 Perceived relationship between teachers and senior students

A recurring theme in the interviews concerned students’ perceptions of the nature of the relationship existing between staff and senior students. The underlying question, for a variety of Ss, was whether teachers appeared to be treating senior students as adults.

Ss who perceived an adult relationship to characterise the senior classroom claimed that seniors were given more responsibility (A3m) and that they were treated “more as adults” (A10f). The interviews yielded several examples of how this adult-to-adult relationship was experienced by students in the senior classroom. Some Ss, for example, referred to a more open relationship with teachers:

We come to know our teachers. We can talk to them as friends, not just as our teachers. (A4m)

Some teachers are more relaxed with you . . . They are easier to talk to, and they relate to you more. They treat you differently. It’s hard to explain . . . They’ll tell you jokes in class and that sort of stuff, and they’ll tell you personal things - like not real personal things, but they’ll touch on them. (A7f)

Several Ss described teachers as being more available and willing to help students in the senior years than they had seemed to be during their junior years of schooling:

They try to help us more because we’re in our senior years . . . it’s more a feeling of being helped than being controlled. (A4m)
The teachers are just different when you’re in Year 11. They want to help you more, I reckon. They’ll stay back and help you. (A8f)

I get on really well with the teachers. If you ever need help, most of them will say, “Come back later, and I’ll show you how to do it again.” It’s good. (A10f)

They seem more willing to give you their time, and help you out. As long as you’re willing to put in the time, they are, too. (C5m)

You have a better relationship with them. They sort of help you out more . . . You seem to get on better with them. (B9f)

The reciprocal nature of respect between seniors and staff was expressed by many Ss. One described teachers’ dealing with immature behaviour in some junior classes by imposing strict discipline. Her perception was that changes in senior students’ attitudes and behaviour had been matched by changes in teachers’ responses (A10f). Her perception was supported by a male S. from another school:

It’s sort of a two-way thing. I think (respect) is something the students have earned. They’ve got to show that they’re willing to work. If they are, I’m sure they’ll get respect. (A10f)

One student illustrated this reciprocity by describing her changed relationship with her Year Adviser:

I think the majority of teachers will respect you if you respect them . . . a lot of the teachers go half-way . . . I started to take school work more seriously about half-way through Year 10, and my Year Adviser began to show me some respect . . . I started earning my respect with him, but I had to earn it. I had to work for it, and once I did that, we both came half-way. He has as much respect for me as I have for him. (D2f)

Other comments related to students’ earning teachers’ respect by acting in a more mature way. Such comments included the following:

If you’ve changed, the teachers change. (D4m)
You have to act in a mature way to be really accepted by the teachers. If you don’t, they just treat you as a kid. (B5f)

If you give them the respect, they respect you as well. (B5f)

I think there’s more respect because they kind of see you as adults and expect you to set a high standard as a senior. (A5m)

Others spoke of students’ responding to teachers’ expectations of more mature behaviour from seniors:

They expect you to act like adults and you sort of do. (C1f)

They’ve got a lot more respect for us. I think they expect us to be a bit more mature, and seniors respond to that by acting more grown-up. (C2m)

Some Ss reported perceived ambiguities and anomalies in the student-teacher relationship. One S., who described herself as “lucky because I’m in some of the higher classes and a lot of the teachers are better”, spoke about:

some teachers (who) do not get along with some kids . . . They more or less pick on them and say things to put them down. (A2f)

Her observation was echoed by several Ss. One, for example, described her perception of some classroom experiences:

You get made fun of for saying something. If you say something, they say, “That’s stupid!” It’s just not right! (Bf)

From another school came the following comment:

If they’re good teachers, you respect them, but you don’t respect someone who doesn’t deserve respect . . . one who can’t get through to you, who doesn’t give a damn, who just puts the work on the board, and doesn’t care . . . They’re the classes you don’t get your work done in. (C2m)

5.2.2.4 Responsibility for school work

Many Ss suggested that senior students be given greater responsibility for their work. This view was expressed by students in a variety of ways:
Senior students have to do a bit more on their own. They’ve got to decide that they want to do the work. (A2f)

(The greatest) need is for seniors to be given more responsibility here. It doesn’t seem that they’re looking at us as responsible. (Cm)

I think it would be a better idea for teachers to step back and allow us to make our mistakes. (D5f)

No-one else can make you work . . . Teachers try and help you through, but teachers don’t have to get us through. (B7f)

They need to give us more space . . . Everything you do, there’s someone looking at you. (We need to be) given a bit of freedom. (B7f)

Included in comments about increased personal responsibility was an understanding of inherent consequences of misusing the freedom students were seeking. About seniors’ taking days off school, one S. said:

People that are fair dinkum about school aren’t really going to wag . . . The people that obviously don’t want to be here, well, they just have heaps of days off. You should just not worry about them. (A2f)

Another S. made a similar comment about students’ missing lessons:

I reckon that, in Year 12, if you don’t want to turn up to a class, you shouldn’t have to . . . (If you missed enough classes) you would just fail. (Alf)

This understanding of personal responsibility was supported by the comments of two other Ss:

If you don’t catch up, it’s your HSC. It’s your problem, sort of thing. (B7f)

It’s my responsibility to be here, you know. If I miss a lesson, it’s my problem. I mean, we don’t have to be here now. (D3f)

A Year 11 exchange student from Sweden described his perception of Australian schooling as much more closely controlled than Swedish schooling:
5.2.2.5 Seniors as role models for junior students

In the interviews, several of the Ss commented about the role of senior students as examples for students in junior high-school years. They described feeling good when “the little kids sort of look up to us”.

Others, discussing the implications of the 7-12 integrated campus for senior students, expressed their feeling that the benefits of integration, to both seniors and juniors, outweighed the possible drawbacks. Even being expected to adhere to strict uniform rules and to abide by the same school rules as juniors were outweighed for these seniors by the positive effect of being respected by the juniors and having a role in helping them to settle in and feel comfortable in high school.

The following two comments are representative of these expressions:

Well, (concerning uniform-wearing) the juniors have to look up to the seniors. We just have to be an example to the junior students. (C4m)

I think you really do (feel that you belong to the school in a special way). When I went to the Year 7 camp, you can sort of see that you really make a difference, that they look up to you sort of thing . . . It would be wrong for juniors to have stricter uniform rules (than seniors) . . . I couldn’t see how you could do that - like, it would be alright in theory but it wouldn’t work. The juniors would see seniors doing something and they would do it too, and they’d say, “Well, they can do it, so why can’t we?” There would be a big uproar, so I couldn’t see it working. (If you had stricter rules for the juniors,) they’d get upset and they wouldn’t respect the seniors. It wouldn’t work. (D5f)

The peer-support role was taken very seriously by many seniors, represented here by a Year 11 girl who described the role in the following way:
You need to be together to let the younger ones sort of . . . to help them if they need you, or to let them know that we are there, sort of thing . . . I've got friends in younger years, and they think that they can come and talk to you because they can't talk to teachers. There's some things that they don't think they can go to teachers about - and they just come to you . . . Someone has to be there. There has to be someone that . . . otherwise they get all caught up - like all - knotted - and things like that. Like, there's something worrying them: can we do this, can we do that? They just need some help sometimes without having to go and ask permission. They can just come and ask you is it alright, sort of thing. You don't say - yes, you can, or no you can't - you just say - Yes, you can BUT, or No, BUT sort of thing. (B7f)

5.2.2.6 Impact of disruptive classroom behaviour

Students who referred, in the interview, to disruptions to senior classes caused by students 'mucking around' presented a variety of reasons for the phenomenon, and a variety of reactions to it. Each of the four schools yielded these comments.

One girl, who was finding the senior academic work very difficult, described the attitude of seniors who had decided not to do any work:

In class, they'll talk, or they just sit there and don't do any work. They talk and annoy whoever's sitting with them. (L1f)

She went on to describe her own attempts to ignore these interruptions and to keep on working in class. Classwork was really important to her because she did not usually do well in exams. Her opinion was that "it's no use them coming back if they're not going to try."

A boy from the same school expressed the opinion that some teachers do not deserve the students' respect because of the way they teach. He described such a teacher as:

one that can't get through to you . . . doesn't really give a damn, just puts the work on the board, and doesn't care . . . the kids
don’t react. They just sit there and muck around. They’re the classes you don’t get your work done in, and you end up getting lots of homework. (C2m)

A third student from the same school commented differently. He was in the highest level of streamed classes, and stated that he was not in any groups where students who would not work and who wanted to waste time were likely to disrupt his studies:

Well, the ones that wouldn’t usually stay on . . . they’re not really in the classes I take, so they don’t faze me. (C5m)

From another school, a student described being moved through the levels system because of his inappropriate behaviour in class in Year 11. This consisted mainly of what he described as “always just sticking up for myself - pretty stupid really, but I always do”. He had appeared before the discipline committee five or six times before being threatened with the possibility of having to repeat Year 11. He had been given three options: to leave school, to repeat Year 11 or to start behaving and working in ways appropriate to a senior student. He had settled down into more appropriate school behaviour, but not before having spent three terms of senior schooling disrupting classes for teachers and other students.

His comments were paralleled by those of a student from another school, who spoke of the need for students to stand up for themselves:

Oh well, if you get accused of something, and you didn’t do it, you’ve got a right to answer back, and stand up for yourself. You can’t just be put down for no reason! (D3f)

Concerning her own classroom behaviour, she said that:

when I like the teachers, and they like me, like, they’re nice to me, then I try. But if the teacher’s being slack to me, I just won’t work. If a teacher won’t like me, I won’t do nothing. I just muck up for them . . . The ones that like me, I always try to go good for them. (D3f)
Another student described how, as a junior, he had enjoyed being sent out of class for something. He felt ‘big’ when this happened, and thought it was good. He had decided to change his school behaviour in order to fit in to school as a senior student. His comment about seniors who continued to act in ways that led to their being asked to leave the classroom was that

when you’re in Year 11 and 12, and you see people getting kicked out, you think - oh - they’re just wasting their time here. They might as well not be here. (D4m)

He, too, had managed to disrupt many senior school classes by his non-cooperative behaviour through the first semester of senior schooling.

From a third school, a similar scenario was described, this time in terms of seniors’ knowing

how far you can push the teachers, and so you do. You just keep pushing them, and you don’t do the work sometimes. It depends what mood you’re in. (B2f)

This student, also, referred to the problem of backchatting. She had been in trouble for backchatting since the junior years, but described how, as a senior, she tended to push the teachers further, without concern for consequences. She knew that the behaviour was not working for her, but did not appear inclined to change, seeing the status quo as her reality:

I can see it from the teachers’ view as well, because I got into a full-on argument about this. I’ve always backchatted them since I was little. I just sort of stand up for myself, and it doesn’t go down too well. (B2f)

About such students, one girl expressed the following view:

Being in some of the classes . . . um, I mean, like my geography class. I’m up the top of the class, but, because we have some people that muck around . . . I’m friends with them, but because they never do any work, I know in their HSC they’re going to do
very badly. I feel a bit disappointed, because I know that's going to drag my marks down a lot, too. I don't like the idea of that much. I wish there was something I could do. I don't think they deserve to do their HSC if they're going to make it harder for the rest of us. (A2f)

Her preference was to separate the two groups of senior students - those who wanted to do the HSC, and those who did not want to. She commented that there were not enough non-Matriculation subjects to meet the needs of non-academic students, and that they were therefore forced to take academic courses. She had read about the education system in Germany, where there are three levels, and suggested a similar approach for NSW to accommodate the variety of students in the senior school:

The top level is for the really good kids. You've got your next level for the people who are half and half, and the next level that just don't really care. I think that something like that would be a really good school system. It seems to work over there. I think maybe something like that has to come in . . . (A2f)

One student expressed concern for teachers who are baited by senior students. She recognised their hurt as they received the inappropriate behaviour as a personal attack, but she went on to deny that personal attack was intended. She described the behaviour:

If you, ever since Year 7, have always been in trouble - always being sent out - like, once you're into Year 11, you're not always in as much trouble, but you still tend to see the teachers as the enemy. You do what you can to work the teacher up and then you sit back and watch her or him explode. (D5f)

Her comment gives an important insight into inappropriate senior behaviour. It interprets the behaviour as an indicator of intense frustration and helplessness emanating from the student, rather than as an indicator of disrespect for, or animosity towards, particular teachers.
A further call for understanding of what is motivating senior students who behave inappropriately in class came from another student who laid some blame on the grading of classes. She believed that the possibility of change in discouraged senior students lay in being freed from the 'bottom-class' syndrome:

The bottom class always feels - yes, we're the bottom, there's no point. I think that's how they feel - like we're the bottom - everyone knows we're the losers . . . teachers discipline them - like - you know, they don't try to treat them as adults. They try and control them because they know they're the bottom class. (B7f)

Outlining her preference for mixed-ability classes in senior levels of the school, she indicated that the way classes were organised was probably responsible for some of the problems:

(Having mixed-ability classes) would make a big difference. They wouldn't feel as if they have to muck up to impress their friends. They could just be themselves, and they'd learn a lot more . . . I think if they tried to treat people - to treat everyone the same, (and to realise that) the bad (kids) can change . . . if they'd mix everyone together - and they didn't sort of grade you so much . . ., they'd be better off . . . because they wouldn't get the feeling of being put down. - like you're not as good as somebody else. (B7f)

Her final statements on this issue injected a welcome note of compassion for less able students who had to continue on at school because of the lack of employment opportunities for Year 10 leavers:

When you think of it, those people who are in the lower classes have been in the lower classes all the time - like ever since Year 7, 'cause if they haven't got the ability, they haven't got it. So they're sort of with the same people all the time. If they mixed them around a bit, they might change . . . They might be allowed to change. (B7f)
5.2.2.7 Permission for toilet leave

Of all the topics discussed in the interviews, the issue creating the most comment was whether senior students should be expected to ask a teacher’s permission for toilet leave. Discontented students identified enforcement of the rule an important indication that they were not being treated as adults. Students who were more contented in the senior school environment identified flexibility in this area as an important indicator that they were respected as adults. What emerged from the comments was that individual teachers approached this issue in different ways:

Some teachers respect us, but others - you’ve got to ask to go to the toilet, ask to do this, and ask to do that . . . some of them are really good, and teach you really nicely, and others don’t. (A2f)

Some teachers do (relate to you as an adult) . . . like, Mr ------, he just says, “Oh, you just walk out if you want to go to the toilet.” Others, if you walk out, will say, “Where are you going? Where are you going?” and you say, “I’m just going to the toilet.” You should just be allowed to go out. (A6m)

Some comments went further, to express students’ questions about why such rules would be imposed on seniors. One student spoke of one teacher who allows seniors to leave the room quietly to go to the toilet - just as other adults do in other social settings, but she recognised that some teachers “still like to keep control of the kids”. She spoke of some teachers telling seniors that they did not need the tight rules now, because of their emerging maturity. To her, this was a natural movement in adjusting the senior-school environment to fit the age of the students:

Well, I think we should be allowed to just walk out - like to the toilet. At this stage, we’re not about to just go - just to get out of school or something. We’re here because we want to be . . . (A7f)

Other students echoed her sentiments:

I think if you want to go to the toilet, you should just go . . . it’s not like we’re going to run away or anything. (D2f)
They question you about things like when you need to go to the toilet. Seniors don’t want to miss out on work. They don’t have to be here. They should just go to the toilet if they want. The teachers should know by now who to trust and that... (Having to ask permission) is really stupid. (D6m)

One student said that seniors should tell teachers that they were going to the toilet instead of asking them. In his classes, students had been denied permission to leave the room for toilet leave, especially if there were only five or six minutes left in the period.

5.2.2.8 Teacher absence from senior classes

A theme which emerged in some interviews concerned teachers who, for various reasons, did not remain in the senior classroom throughout the lesson. The phenomenon was described briefly by one student as an indicator that seniors were being regarded as adults. He referred to teachers having more respect for senior students, and being able to leave the classroom for longer, without expecting trouble to erupt because of the class’ being unsupervised.

It was not seen in this light by some other students:

Some teachers I have come in and give you sheets and just walk out again. They say it’s up to you if you want to do the work, and that puts all the strain on us. (A10f)

When asked about the frequency of this kind of teaching approach, this student replied that it was one particular subject. Six periods a week were allocated to the subject, and she described them in this way:

He’ll just hand out sheets - like, say we’ve got six periods a week, he’ll come in, like, hand out a few notes, whatever, and then go out again... most of the times, when he gives us the sheets, no-one will do the work anyway. Everyone just sits and talks, and you (have to) do it as homework. We have to hand the sheets in and then he gives us a mark. Whatever your mark is - say you got six - you’ve got to find out what you did wrong... I don’t think
that’s good, because you need to be taught other than yourself teaching. That’s what you come for! (A10f)

This student described other subjects as good, claiming that all of her other teachers were “really good”. These were not the only schools in which the phenomenon of the absentee senior teacher was described. From another school came the comment:

The teachers don’t really hesitate now - they’ll just walk out of the classroom. Before, when we were younger and that, they didn’t want to leave the class there by themselves. Well - you know - a lot of classes you have, they’re in there for two minutes. They set your work for you and then go if they’ve got to do other things and that. (D2f)

She described the good feeling of being trusted by these teachers to get on with the work without needing close supervision, but also recognised the fact that this trust was, for many seniors, misplaced:

It’s good in some ways, but it’s only half the class that will work when the teacher is gone - so the other half that don’t work distract the half that want to work. (D2f)

These anecdotes illustrate the theme that came from many students who were interviewed - that the large numbers of students now returning to Year 11 had changed the way teachers approached the teaching of senior classes. Some teachers are perceived by students as seeing seniors as just another class. One student commented that the teachers do not seem to regard senior classes as special any more. Students explained this change of teacher attitude in terms of the increased numbers in Year 11. They expressed the opinion that some teachers no longer approach senior classes in the interested and friendly way that their older friends and siblings had led them to expect. They believed that this was because there are
so many students, and because of the changes in the senior school climate caused by this senior population explosion.

In Chapter Six, the results reported in this chapter will be discussed in the context of the theoretical underpinning of this investigation. It will consist of two sections, one pertaining to the quantitative part of the study, and the other to the qualitative part of the study.
6. Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

6.1 Discussion A: Quantitative study

6.1.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three, the focus of this investigation was presented in the form of three research questions. These were:

1. Do students' perceptions of the senior-schooling experience include feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement?

2. If so, how do the levels of these phenomena correlate with antecedent variables? The variables to be investigated in the study are: (a) gender, (b) participation in non-Matriculation courses, (c) participation in TAFE courses, (d) receipt of Austudy, (e) main source of family income, (f) an older sibling who is unemployed, (g) an older sibling who has completed Year 12 of school, (h) a parent who has completed Year 12 of school, (i) the expectation that the student will eventually find employment in a preferred occupation, (j) student's first preference - return to school or leave, and (k) whether the return-to-school decision was made by the student or by a parent.

3. How do senior students perceive the impact of school policy, organisation and subject offerings on student experiences of estrangement, meaninglessness and powerlessness in the school environment?

Data relevant to these research questions were collected by both quantitative and qualitative methods, as described in Chapters Four and Five. In the quantitative-data analysis, each of the three alienation scores (powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement) was analysed for statistically significant relationships with the independent variables (presented in Table 7).
The significant relationships revealed in these analyses have been presented in Table 8. To facilitate consideration of these results, each independent variable that related significantly to an alienation score will now be discussed in the context of the theoretical base of the study. Further insights into the meaning of some of these significant relationships will emerge in the discussion of the qualitative part of the study in Section 6.2.

6.1.2 S.'s preferred choice: leave or return to school for Year 11

The S.'s preferred choice: to return to school for Year 11, or to leave school, was found to be significantly related to powerlessness and meaninglessness. (p ≤ .01). Significant scores in powerlessness are not surprising for these Ss. The definition of powerlessness emerging from the survey of 'alienation' literature in Chapter Two included the following features: (a) experiencing a diminished sense of personal control, (b) perceiving that personal behaviour does not determine personally desirable outcomes or reinforcements, (c) feeling unable to control outcomes, and (d) experiencing diminished personal control because of economic constraints.

All of these features are observable amongst 'reluctant' senior students — those whose first preference would have been to leave school at the end of Year 10 and to enter the workforce. The frustration caused to these students by an economic situation that thwarts their efforts to leave school and enter paid employment is an example of an "axis of oppression" as described by Stewart (1998, p. 39), and discussed in Section 2.1.4.

A similar comment can be made about the meaninglessness scores of this group of Ss. Features of meaninglessness emerging from the literature review
include: (a) feeling that external behavioural constraints (especially those experienced by the individual as irrelevant, unfair or unnecessarily restrictive) are undermining the development of personal insights as the basis for independent decision-making; (b) having a low expectation of being able to satisfactorily predict future outcomes of behaviour; and (c) feeling that there is little or no point in participating in the work expected of a senior student.

The result under discussion here is a statistically significant difference in meaninglessness scores between Ss whose first preference would have been to leave school at the end of Year 10 to enter the workforce and those who had chosen to return to school.

The issue is not merely an 'adolescent attitude' problem. It is not that senior students, in general, experience high levels of powerlessness and meaninglessness. Whether students want to be at school, or whether they feel that they have been 'reluctantly convinced' that school is the only viable option for their lives at this time, makes a difference to their levels of powerlessness and meaninglessness.

Chapter Two began with a discussion of the human need to 'belong'. Among senior students whose first preference was to leave school and enter the workforce, the perception of 'belonging' in the school environment is elusive, because of the phenomenon of meaninglessness. Kahler (1957) describes alienation as an experience of 'not-belonging', or of uncomfortable separation from aspects of society. This is the experience described by many senior students, as the discussion of the interviews later in this chapter will demonstrate.

The experience of these students and Kahler's alienated people can be described in similar terms, but forty years later, there is an important difference.
Many alienated senior students do not appear to exhibit the struggle that Kahler describes – the struggle to change aspects of society which they perceive to be conducive to alienation. Although the school situation is perceived by these students as lacking in meaning, their sense of personal powerlessness appears to preclude serious efforts to attempt to initiate change.

6.1.3 Ss with an unemployed older sibling

A similar result emerged in the analyses of the alienation scores with the variable of S. having an unemployed sibling. Here, too, the relationship of the variable with both the powerlessness score and the meaninglessness score was significant at p < .01.

The ‘staying-on’ philosophy has been presented to students in a way that suggested that the completion of Year 12 would enhance employment opportunities. For young people who have personal contact, in their own families, with the impact of youth unemployment on both the unemployed individual and the family, it is not surprising that such suggestions have a hollow ring to them.

Further to this, and relevant to both of the results discussed above, some senior students whose preference had been to leave school at the end of Year 10, developed that preference in the context of an extensive experience of school-failure. Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey and White (1988) offer insights into why such students might experience powerlessness and meaninglessness in the setting of senior schooling: “To expect students who have been judged inadequate for 10... years to submit eagerly to yet another judgmental situation without a visible payoff is folly” (p. 500).
They describe students who participate minimally in school-life as responding to their experience of helplessness in the school situation: "With little hope, anyone with common sense might avoid failure by refusing to participate in the system. If school promises no payoff, and if the material to be learned has little bearing on students' lives, they become bored (Farrell et al., 1988, p. 497).

This observation parallels those of the author (Section 1.3) concerning the reluctance of some 'stayers-on' to participate fully in the assignments and other academic work required of senior students. By making the decision not to submit such work, these students avoid the indignity and humiliation of further failure.

6.1.4 Participation in non-Matriculation subjects

In an attempt to meet the specific program-needs of 'non-academic' senior students, many schools have introduced non-Matriculation subjects into the senior school curriculum. The Board of Studies has produced guidelines for the development and implementation of such courses, and changes in the senior-school clientele, not only in comprehensive public high schools, but also in systemic and private schools, have made this process an essential part of senior-school policy.

It might be expected that students enrolled in these subjects, presumably tailor-made for them, would experience lower alienation levels than other students. The results from the survey do not support this expectation. Ss participating in non-Matriculation subjects scored significantly higher meaninglessness levels than other students.

Clearly, for these students, the non-Matriculation subjects had not fulfilled the hope for a greater engagement of non-academic seniors. One reason for this
may be the tendency for these subjects to be presented in traditional ways, and to be examined, also, in traditional style. Adams, Ball, Braithwaite, Kensell and Low (1989) report teachers’ perceptions that “many teachers find difficulty developing teaching materials for the new courses and changing their teaching methods to suit the different content and the different clientele” (p. 61).

The issue here is whether schools are capable of bringing ‘real-life’ non-academic activities into the classroom, without transforming the associated tasks in such a way that young people taking the courses continue to be treated as ‘students’ in the traditional use of the term. A problem arises when ‘real-life’, experiential courses are presented in such a way that the students are required to use cognitive skills that can be tested by traditional examination methods.

These insights from Adams et al. (1989) support the findings of Farrell et al. (1988) who describe lessons that seemed to the researcher-observer to be interesting, but were later described by non-academic senior students as boring. They explain this phenomenon in the following way:

Class discussions might deal with what seemed to me to be interesting material but what stood out to the students was that rewards (grades) were based on their performance on tests and assignments, and their past experience could lead them to predict further failure. (p. 498)

Informal discussion with teachers of non-Matriculation subjects in Illawarra school in the early 1990s indicates not only concern, but also a level of disappointment that these courses have not been more favourably received by ‘staying-on’ students. Brand (1991), for example, developed some non-Matriculation courses for one of the schools in the present study, and anticipated that the students would embrace the different style of courses, and enjoy their
contents. This was not how many of the students responded (Personal interview with author).

It seems to the author that provision of new courses, less academically demanding, and presumably more relevant or interesting to the ‘staying-on’ clientele has been based on an invalid assumption. This is the assumption that these young people will be content to be at school if the subject offerings include some that are ‘tailor-made’ for them in level of difficulty and in level of interest.

The results of the survey indicate, rather, that the problem goes much deeper than the question of subject offerings. These students do not want to be at school. They recognise the fact that the provision of special courses is no more than a "bandaid" approach to the basic problem of their enforced retention at school. When teachers expend significant amounts of energy and time developing non-Matriculation courses that they believe will make a difference, it is not surprising that the apathy of students who do not want to participate fully in the courses is having an impact on those teachers. It is not only the students who experience powerlessness and meaninglessness in the context of ‘staying-on’ in the senior school.

6.1.5 Future occupational expectations

The analyses of the relationships between each of the three scores and the factor of occupational expectation yielded the most consistent relationship between the alienation scores and an independent variable. For Ss who indicated their belief that they were not likely, at any time in the future, to find employment in their preferred occupation, the relationships between this factor and each of the alienation scores were significant at $p \leq .01$. 
It would appear that unemployment statistics have improved through the Staying-On program, rather than the real employment prospects of the students (See Figure 1, page 18). Young people who have completed their compulsory years of education, and who have stayed on at school when they found that employment was not available to them, do not appear in the official unemployment statistics. They become the 'hidden unemployed'. The time comes, however, when these young people have completed their two years of 'optional' senior-schooling, and many of them find that there is still no job.

Some of these senior-school students have experienced this process of 'delayed unemployment' in their older siblings. Most have seen the process depicted on television or in newspapers. Their staying-on at school for two post-compulsory years is not illuminated by hopes of employment payoffs from the experience. They stay on, then, experiencing significant levels of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement.

6.1.6 Return-to-school decision made by parent(s)

Ss whose parents had made the decision that they would return to school in Year 11 were found to have scores for powerlessness which made the relationship significant at the \( p \leq .05 \) level.

This result can be understood in terms of the developmental stages likely to be relevant to the ages of these students. The psychosocial developmental tasks pertaining to adolescence will serve as an illustration. Erikson's (1950) psychosocial crisis of adolescence is "identity versus confusion" (p. 234). This crisis has been described by Weiten (1992) in terms of the individual's need to work out a unique self-concept, and to find a values-system that gives life some direction.
Adolescents whose personal choice is to leave school at the end of compulsory schooling are expressing, in the making of that choice, elements of their emerging self-concept. When others (even parents who may genuinely want the best for their offspring) override this choice, and make other decisions for individual students, feelings of powerlessness in these students are almost inevitable.

6.1.7 Main source of family income

There was a significant relationship (at p ≤ .05) between the factor of parental income source and the estrangement score. Ss whose family’s main source of income was a social-security allowance or pension registered significantly higher scores for estrangement. A *Sydney Morning Herald* article in July, 1993 reported that almost 20% of Australian children live in homes where neither parent is working, and that 12% of the unemployed between the ages of 15 and 24 live at home with an unemployed parent (21/7/93, p. 13).

The meaning of ‘estrangement’ in the context of the present investigation, includes:

(a) assigning low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in a given society;

(b) feelings of, and sometimes acting-out of, rebellion in that societal context; and

(c) the belief that personal goals cannot be achieved through socially approved behaviour.

In the early 19th century, Hegel’s (1977) description of alienation emphasised the individual’s separation from some important element of society. In
the late 20th century, in Australia, the economic climate is one of high unemployment, a situation in which thousands of Australians are unable to fulfil their basic expectation of working and financially supporting themselves and their families. Given this economic situation, in which individuals are involuntarily separated from this important element of life and given these Ss’ personal experience of their parents’ unemployment and reliance on social security payments to survive, it does not seem surprising that they would exhibit the feelings and beliefs described above.

Merton (1946) describes normlessness (one aspect of ‘estrangement’ as the term is used in this investigation) in terms of the individual’s distrust of social control. He explains that this distrust is the result of the individual’s perception that such control undermines personal rights and freedoms.

Interpreted into the context of the present investigation, such estrangement could reasonably be assumed to be the experience of the long-term unemployed and their families. The basis for this argument is the likelihood that involuntary reliance on social-security benefits for financial survival is perceived by many ‘beneficiaries’ as an unavoidable submission to a very basic form of social control.

6.1.8 Gender differences

As reported in Chapter Five, several gender differences emerged in the statistical analyses. One of these concerned alienation scores for Ss with older siblings who had completed Year 12.

Girls in the group of Year 11 students who had older siblings who had completed the HSC, scored significantly higher on meaninglessness scores than
boys in that group \((p = .014)\). Boys who had not been preceded in Year 12 by a sibling had significantly higher estrangement scores \((p = .05)\) than girls.

Amongst Ss whose parents made the decision concerning their return to school, boys had significantly higher scores than girls in meaninglessness \((p = .048)\) and estrangement \((p = .022)\).

The present investigation has revealed these gender differences, but has not explored the reasons for them. Several possible explanations are worthy of future investigation, and will be presented in Chapter 7 in the form of questions amenable to further research.

6.1.9 Summary

The discussion above focused on the results of the analyses of quantitative data collected from Ss. These results have been discussed in the context of the first two research questions.

A discussion of data yielded by the interviews follows. This discussion will provide rich insights into issues raised by the third research question: How do senior students perceive the impact of school policy, organisation and subject offerings on student experiences of estrangement, meaninglessness and powerlessness in the school environment?
6.2 Discussion B: Qualitative study

6.2.1 Introduction

As stated above (Section 6.1.1), the present study investigates three research questions. The first two of these questions provided the focus for the quantitative section of the research, and have been discussed in Section 6.1.

The interviews with 31 of the Ss yielded data relevant to the third research question: How do students perceive the impact of school policy, organisation and subject offerings on student experiences of estrangement, meaninglessness and powerlessness in the school environment?

The analyses of these interviews, reported in Chapter Five, will now be discussed in the context of that question. In Chapter Five, it was demonstrated that eight themes emerged in these interviews, these themes revealing Ss' perceptions of: (a) school discipline, (b) school uniform, (c) the teacher/senior student relationship, (d) responsibility for schoolwork and homework, (e) seniors as role models for junior students, (f) disruptive classroom behaviour, (g) permission for toilet leave and (h) teacher absence from scheduled senior lessons.

As argued in Chapter Four, the author considers that the results of the qualitative section of this investigation provide a useful baseline for staff discussions. Such discussions could be useful in informing future policy decisions concerning senior schooling at the local school level and, maybe, beyond.

The perceptions of these Ss provide insights into how some senior students experience the senior school. As claimed above, the quantitative results support the notion that student alienation is present in the senior school. Some Ss, when interviewed, described elements of their senior-school experience that would suggest
that at least some of this alienation might be heightened by certain features of the senior school. In the interviews, Ss raised issues of administration, pedagogy and teachers' attitudes, as well as senior students' attitudes and the role of senior students in the school community.

Data emerging from the interviews are important because they are provided, first-hand, by senior students. These are data produced by listening to the students themselves, rather than relying on observer-reports.

A discussion of the interview themes follows. It will focus on whether the Ss' comments appear to be giving support to the assumption that the school environment may be implicated in students' experiences of estrangement, meaninglessness and powerlessness in the school environment.

6.2.2 School discipline

The first theme to be considered here relates to Ss' perceptions of discipline in the senior school.

As indicated in the results section, Ss gave a wide range of responses to this issue. Of five Ss who indicated satisfaction with the discipline system, one described the 'white slip' and 'levels' system (see Section 5.2.2.1) as giving students a clear message about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. To this S., such a system was clear and predictable, and, therefore, satisfactory. Another had committed a dangerous misdemeanour, and reported that the Year Adviser had negotiated the consequences with her in a way she saw as appropriate to her age. Three Ss indicated that they experienced the school's discipline system as almost irrelevant to seniors because seniors are old enough to take responsibility for their actions.
The majority of students interviewed, however, expressed discontent with aspects of the senior-school discipline system. Three themes emerged: (a) age-appropriateness of discipline, (b) perceived inconsistencies in school discipline and (c) discipline as control. These themes will now be discussed in the context of the theoretical foundations of this research.

The psychosocial task of adolescence is described by Erikson (1950) as "identity versus confusion" (p. 234). Adolescents are in the process of coming to terms with physical and social changes in their personal lives, and seeking to find some way to understand who they are, and who they are becoming (Coleman, Herzberg & Morris, 1977). This developmental task is tackled in various ways by individual adolescents who are seeking to "work out a stable self-concept as a unique individual" (Weiten, 1992, p. 403). Some interviewed Ss claimed that there are forms of disciplinary action adopted in some schools that are experienced by senior students as humiliating and inappropriate. These negative reinforcements, perceived by these students as attacking or denying their identity and as undermining their self-esteem, are likely to collide with adolescent students' search for identity and self-esteem.

This is an important consideration, especially at a time when, to use Wyn and White's (1997) term, 'youth' is a phenomenon that is undergoing a process of 'redefinition' in the context of Australia's economic position in the 1990s. The senior-school experience needs to provide support to the young people caught up in the implications of Australia's economic and social changes.

Another important issue here is the fact that, when the comments about senior-school discipline were divided into two groups – those from Ss whose first
choice had been to return to school, and those from Ss who would have preferred to leave and enter employment – each of these two groups had twice as many discontented as contented Ss for the discipline variable. This means that the expressions of discontent with the senior-school discipline system were not merely flowing over from Ss’ discontent with being at school against their will. It was a general expression of resistance against discipline measures that Ss experienced as inappropriate to students of their age.

One S. claimed that childish punishments undermined senior students’ attempts to develop more responsibility for their own behaviour. Another said that it seemed to him that teachers utilised disciplinary measures inappropriate to adolescent students because those students were displaying immature behaviour in their misdemeanours. He saw this cycle of mismatch as counterproductive.

The issue of ‘discipline as control’ emerged in many of the interviews. The idea being expressed was that many of the rules imposed and policed in schools have little intrinsic meaning. The behaviours they preclude are not perceived by these Ss as dangerous or damaging to the school as a social unit. The question that came to the author’s mind when listening to these comments in the interviews was, “What is the worst thing that could happen in the school if this rule was deleted?” When no serious problems can be predicted in response to such a question, it must be considered possible that the enforcing of the rule is a display of power on the part of staff. The ensuing power-play raises levels of powerlessness in students.

Many Ss spoke of perceived inconsistencies in the administration of their schools’ discipline systems. Seeman’s (1959) description of meaninglessness included individuals’ response to external constraints which appeared to them to be
unreasonable, unfair or unnecessarily restrictive. This is how many of the interviewed Ss experienced inconsistent discipline.

The kinds of inconsistencies described to the interviewer included consequences perceived by Ss to be out of proportion to the misdemeanours. One example of this was a situation where senior students reported that they had been regarded as engaging in 'fractional truancy' when they were still within the school grounds but had chosen to spend a free period reading a book outside rather than spending the free period in the library. The consequence of such a misdemeanour was similar to that for a student who had missed a class and left the school without permission.

Other Ss reported their perception of differing expectations of boys and girls in some areas of school rules. At one school, for instance, both male and female Ss had commented that the school's dress-codes were applied more strictly to the girls than to the boys. Ss experienced such inconsistencies as an unjust application of the rules.

Ss' comments about these discipline issues can be interpreted readily in terms of students' feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement, as these terms have been defined in this research. It is therefore claimed that these results are relevant to the third research question, indicating, as they do, that the educational environment is a factor in the psychological alienation of senior students from schooling.

6.2.3 School uniform

Some of the comments Ss made about school uniform are similar to those about the other discipline issues discussed above. Issues of control and
inconsistency featured in the interviews. There was such a range of comments about school uniform, however, that no clear patterns emerged.

6.2.4 Perceived relationship between teachers and senior students

The relationship between teachers and senior students was described by most of the interviewed Ss as positive. Most reported experiences of reciprocal respect. One S., for example, said, "They've got a lot more respect for us. I think they expect us to be a bit more mature, and seniors respond to that by acting more grown-up" (C2m).

Some of the interviewed Ss, however, reported experiences in which they felt that senior students had been humiliated by teachers in front of other students. One S., for example, was in what she described as "higher classes", and had not experienced such treatment herself, but had observed that "some teachers do not get along with some kids... They more or less pick on them and say things to put them down" (A2f).

It can be seen, then, that there is some evidence in Ss' perceptions of this aspect of senior schooling, that the educational environment is contributing to student alienation. The majority of the comments by Ss, however, did not agree with these Ss' description of the relationship between senior students and teachers.

It is important to note here that students' statements critical of some teachers' attitudes and behaviours did not come exclusively from 'stayers-on'. They cannot be dismissed or explained away in terms of indicators of the critical student's 'poor attitude'. Some of the expressions of concern in this area were voiced by students who had chosen to return to school in order to prepare for future university study, and who were disturbed by incidents that they perceived to indicated discrimination against peers who were not academically gifted.
6.2.5 Responsibility for school work

Concerning this issue, a clear message emerged across the range of Ss interviewed. This was that senior students need to be held accountable for the way they approach lessons and assignments. The teachers who “chased up” students who failed to produce assignments were regarded by most Ss in a negative way. The general opinion was that such response from teachers diminished the sense of personal responsibility among senior students.

Teachers’ follow-up of late or missed assignments was seen by most Ss as undermining the power that senior students should have to take responsibility for their approach to schooling. This was expressed by two Ss in the following ways:

I think it would be a better idea for teachers to step back and allow us to make our mistakes. (D5f)

Senior students have to do a bit more on their own. They’ve got to decide that they want to do the work. (A2f)

Most Ss who spoke about this issue described teachers’ efforts to make senior students fulfil course requirements in terms of inappropriateness for the students’ age. They regarded that their age-group needed space to develop personal responsibility. Such an opinion is in keeping with the developmental stages of adolescence described in Chapter Two.

The undermining of senior students’ developing sense of personal responsibility is perceived by Ss as an undermining of their personal power. It is therefore claimed that the results associated with this issue indicate Ss’ perceptions that senior-student powerlessness is raised by this aspect of the senior-school environment.

6.2.6 Seniors as role models for junior students

Most Ss’ comments about this issue indicated their satisfaction with this aspect of school organisation and community life in the school. The Ss identified
restrictions that appeared to be inevitable in a situation where the 7-12 school was a united campus, but the clear message emerging from the interviews was that the benefits of being regarded as role models for juniors outweighed these restrictions.

It seems to the author, however, that an invalid assumption underlies such an acceptance of unpalatable aspects of senior-school organisation by students who enjoy the role-model aspect of being seniors. This is the assumption that senior students can be viable role models for junior students only by meeting similar organisational expectations as those held for the junior students.

The assumption is invalid in two important aspects. First, it does not present to the juniors a valid model of the impact of elements of personal development and increasing responsibility that should come with the maturing process associated with progressing from age 12 to age 18. Secondly, it takes away from the juniors the advantage of a new status to aim for – the status of true seniority within the school community.

It can be seen, therefore, that this is an issue of importance, not only to senior students, but also to junior members of the school community.

6.2.7 Impact of disruptive classroom behaviour

The majority of Ss described their dissatisfaction with the kinds of classroom behaviour they often experienced. Each of the four schools was represented in these expressions of dissatisfaction. Ss described how difficult it could be to work in class when some students appeared to them to be deliberately setting out to disrupt the lesson. One S. claimed that “the ones that wouldn’t usually stay on” (C5m) were often those who would waste time in class and interrupt other students’ attempts to benefit from the lessons.
Possible explanations for such classroom behaviour were offered by some Ss. These included the possibility that some senior students are reacting to the way they believe teachers to be feeling towards them:

Oh well, if you get accused of something and you didn't do it, you've got a right to answer back, and stand up for yourself. You can't just be put down for no reason! ... When I like the teachers, and they like me, like, they're nice to me, then I try. But if the teacher's being slack to me, I just won't work. If a teacher won't like me, I won't do nothing. I just muck up for them ... The ones that like me, I always try to go good for them. (D3f)

Another possible explanation relates to senior students who have developed an expectation of being in trouble at school, and whose behaviour is interpreted by Ss as a form of self-defence. This is indicated, for example, in the following comment:

If you, ever since Year 7, have always been in trouble – always being sent out – like, once you're into Year 11, you're not always in as much trouble, but you still tend to see the teachers as the enemy. You do what you can to work the teacher up and then you sit down and watch him or her explode. (D5f)

This comment expresses the intense frustration and helplessness felt by the student due to the impact of earlier schooling experiences on her present perceptions of schooling. Her negative expectations of the senior-schooling experience are expressions of powerlessness and estrangement as these phenomena have been defined in this study.

6.2.8 Permission for toilet leave

This was the issue generating the most comment from Ss in the interviews. The general feeling expressed was that, if teachers were treating them as adults, rather than as young children, they would not be expected to ask permission for toilet leave.
One student said that seniors should tell teachers that they were going to the 
toilet instead of asking them. In his classes, students had been denied permission to 
leave the room for toilet leave, especially if there were only five or six minutes left in 
the period.

When comments such as these are considered in the light of the age-group 
represented in the senior-student population, it is not difficult to understand why it has 
become an important focus of dissatisfaction for many students. The Oxford English 
Dictionary defines adolescence as “the process or condition of growing up; the 
growing age of human beings; the period which extends from childhood to manhood or 
womanhood” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 170). An adolescent can thus be 
described as a person between childhood and maturity, or as one who is in the process 
of becoming an adult.

In Australian society, adults are usually afforded the courtesy of being able to 
meet their toileting needs without undue embarrassment. The interviewed students 
appear to be identifying some teachers who are aware of such issues and sensitive to the 
needs of the students, and others who seem to want to exert unnecessary control over 
senior students. One way of responding to the resultant problems might be to formalise 
appropriate changes in organisational rules for students in senior years, rather than 
leaving it to individual teachers to interpret the rules ad hoc.

One possible solution to this problem was posed by Eric in his interview. He 
described his experience, in Sweden, of an organisational pattern in the secondary 
school in which a ten-minute break was inserted between the school periods. Students 
were expected to use these breaks to attend to such personal needs as toilet visits, 
drinks or dropping off assignments to staffrooms. They were also expected to be at 
their next lesson on time. Eric expressed his opinion that, in his host school in
Australia, many problems seemed to be engendered by the lack of flexibility in the organisation.

It can be clearly seen from the data emerging from the interviews, and from the above discussion of Ss’ perceptions of this aspect of senior schooling, that this is an area of school organisation and practice that, for these Ss, is a factor in their experiencing powerlessness and estrangement in the senior school.

### 6.2.9 Teacher absence from senior classes

Whereas some Ss interpreted the absence of some teachers from scheduled senior classes as an indication that seniors were regarded by those teachers as adults who could get on with their work without constant supervision, other Ss described this phenomenon in terms of teachers’ lack of respect for, and interest in, some senior classes. For these Ss, the ‘absentee teacher’ appeared to be demonstrating a lack of commitment to teaching these classes.

Several Ss commented that the attitudes these teachers appeared to have towards senior classes had probably been influenced by the population explosion in the senior school. Older friends and siblings had led current Year 11 students to anticipate a special relationship between students and teaching staff in the senior years, and these expectations were not being met, especially in classes with a high proportion of ‘stayers-on’. This understanding was given succinct expression by one S. who said that teachers do not seem to regard senior classes as special any more.

Such expressions of Ss’ experience of senior schooling equate with the definitions of ‘meaninglessness’ and ‘estrangement’ adopted for this research. It is therefore claimed that Ss’ responses in this issue of school organisation and practice support the notion that the educational environment is a factor in the psychological alienation of senior students from schooling.
6.2.10 Conclusion

It is important to consider the results and discussion of the data collected in this investigation in the context of the economic situation in Australia in the 1990s. While other arguments are advanced in support of encouraging young people to remain at school until they complete Year 12, there is much support in the literature for the claim that the push for increased retention rates in the senior years is based on economic, rather than educational rationale.

It is claimed here that educational and psychological insights need to be an integral part of the process of educational policy-making. It is acknowledged that it would be counter-productive and inappropriate to develop policies that appear to ignore the impact of such economic issues as youth unemployment. It is also claimed, however, that decision-making based primarily on economic issues is likely to lead to increased alienation in the senior school. This is because economic rationalism inclines towards dehumanisation. The developmental stage of late adolescence is likely to come into conflict with policies developed in such a climate.

In Section 2.5.6, Pearson’s (1975) concept of ‘disorderly conduct’ was discussed. His claim is that a delicate relationship exists between personal freedom and social order. In this section of the literature review, this insight of Pearson’s was aligned with Finn’s (1991) claim that the national goals for schooling in Australia include the enabling of all students “to develop self-confidence, optimism (and) high self-esteem” (p. 9). The Finn committee recognised the need to encourage individual students’ quest for personal freedom and growth, as well as the need for schools to be able to function smoothly and effectively as social organisations.
In the seven years since the Finn Report (1991) was published, many school staffs have engaged in discussions which they have hoped would lead to policies enabling students to develop in the areas identified by Finn. It is claimed here that the comments of these senior students concerning inappropriate discipline systems in senior schools need to be considered in such policy discussions in the closing years of this century.

In this chapter, the results of the quantitative and qualitative sections of the investigation have been discussed. In Chapter Seven, some of the implications of these findings will be discussed in the context of the phenomenon of change in organisations. Suggestions for further investigations into senior-school alienation and related issues will conclude the chapter.
7. Chapter Seven: Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The quantitative part of this investigation has demonstrated that alienation, in the forms of powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement, is present in the senior schools targeted for the study. The data from the interviews have corroborated those quantitative results, and have brought to them an added depth of meaning, as interviewed students have expressed the issues of senior-schooling that concern them, and that have contributed to their perceptions of senior-schooling. Consideration of these results in the context of the third research question has led to the claim that the educational environment is a factor in the alienation of senior students from schooling.

Such results are in keeping with the theoretical foundations laid for this investigation in Chapter Two. The frustration underlying many of the Ss' comments in the interviews, for example, can be understood in the context of the self-efficacy theory and coping-theory described in Chapter Two. The dilemma for these Ss seems to be that they can devise ways of meeting their own needs, and of coping with a life situation that is different from what they would prefer, but that their solutions do not work in the senior-school context.

If these young people could be offered an assurance that the completion of Years 11 and 12 would open up to them reasonable expectations of employment opportunities, then it could be that picoeconomic theory would offer them some help in coping more successfully with the senior-school experience. Delaying gratification is a reasonable option where the hope of future rewards is a reasonable hope. For many of these Ss, such was not the perception of the future. They were
experiencing the senior school in a negative way, because they perceived its organisation, administration and pedagogy to be unrelated to their needs, and they were anticipating a post-school experience of unemployment.

Given the information and insights produced in this investigation, it seems reasonable to suggest that school policy-makers could benefit from listening to the problems identified by the Ss, and from discussing how these problems might be alleviated. Such discussion would be likely to lead to changes in senior schooling.

Many of the issues raised by Ss in the interviews are not the kind of topics that are likely to be discussed openly within the school setting. If concerned students trust at least one member of staff and express their concerns to that person, it is often very difficult for this teacher to use the information in a way that is likely to bring about anything more than minor changes. This can be attributed to three possible causes: the fear of creating precedents whose final destination cannot be controlled, the fear of discipline in the school being undermined, and the fear of changes to the power structure of staff-student relationships. If members of school staffs do have such fears, these will need to be given attention before any real changes can be implemented in the senior-school setting.

The need for changes in the senior-school setting is supported by the findings of Green and Bigum (1993). Their research into post-compulsory schooling in Australia and the politics of school retention policy had as its focus the possible differences between senior students of the present and senior students of the past. They express their concern about the emergence of “the post modern student-subject”, and describe “the emergence of a new type of student with new needs and new capacities” (p. 119). They call for new theories of youth and
adolescence, theories that acknowledge "the contemporary framing of youth as one of striking complexity and contradiction" (p. 119).

Such new theories have been developed in the intervening years, and some of these have been discussed in Section 2.1 (e.g. Edwards, 1999; Sweet, 1998; Wooden, 1998; Eckersley, 1997; Goldman & La Castra, 1998, Wyn & White, 1997). The emergence of new understandings of 'youth', and of the problems they face as they move towards adult membership of contemporary Australian society has led to a need for changes in the senior-school environment. These changes are essential if the 'new senior-school clientele' described by Green and Bigum (1993) are to be the prime beneficiaries of the senior-school experience, and if they are to derive the maximum benefits of their post-compulsory schooling.

Alienation is a phenomenon that needs to be recognised and understood in the setting of the senior school. It is probable, however, that the problems inherent in the negative aspects of student alienation cannot begin to attract solutions until an underlying problem is dealt with. This problem has to do with the phenomenon of change in a well-established organisational system.

It is claimed here that an increased understanding of the process of change is an essential precursor to schools' creative and effective response to the alienation demonstrated in their senior students. This is an area that will be indicated, later in this chapter, as requiring further investigation.

7.2 Suggestions for further research

7.2.1 Investigations of gender differences reported in this study

In Chapter Seven, quantitative data analysis was reported to have revealed several gender differences in alienation scores. It was outside the scope of this
investigation to explore the implications of these differences. Several possible explanations, however, are now suggested for future investigation. These suggestions may provide a starting point for further research into gender differences in the attitudes, perceptions and alienation levels of senior students.

The first of these concerns the possibility that, in general, girls may arrive earlier than boys at a cognitive level that deals with interpreting abstractions. It was suggested that, if this were so, they might therefore be more likely to interpret older siblings’ disappointing experiences of senior schooling, or of post-schooling unemployment, into the context of their own lives. Such a phenomenon could explain the higher meaninglessness scores for girls whose older siblings had completed the HSC. Further research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Another area in which further investigations would enrich the findings of the present study concerns the possible differences between adolescent boys and girls in locus-of-control orientation. The discussion of the results of the quantitative section of this investigation posed the following questions for future study:

In the age group under discussion, are boys more likely than girls to have internal LOC, and therefore have a more optimistic view of their capacity to generate, by their own efforts, positive post-HSC prospects? If so, is this internality a generalised personality feature of boys, or is it specific to this life-domain?

Other questions identified for further investigations were:

♦ Why were the boys’ alienation scores higher than the those of the girls in the situation where the return-to-school decision had been made by the parents?

♦ Boys in this group scored significantly higher in meaninglessness and estrangement than the girls. Is this difference indicative of a difference between boys and girls of this age in compliant behaviour?

♦ Is it, rather, that there is a difference between the ways in which boys and girls undertake the psychosocial tasks of late adolescence? If so, might such a difference mean that, amongst Ss who would rather be at work than at school, boys,
rather than girls, perceive an element of invasion of their sense of personal identity when parents make the decision that they should participate in post-compulsory schooling?

All of the above questions are suggested for further investigation.

7.2.2 Replication studies

The findings of the present investigation would be enhanced by replication studies that produced similar findings. These studies might include:

(a) a similar investigation with current Year 11 students at the four target schools as Ss;
(b) an investigation similar to the present research, with more Year 11 students and more schools involved;
(c) investigations comparing perceptions of senior students in state and catholic senior secondary schools;
(d) investigations comparing the perceptions of Year 11 students from city and country schools,
(d) investigations comparing the impact of high or low socio-economic status on Year 11 students’ perceptions of senior schooling, and
(e) investigations comparing the perceptions of schooling between Year 11 students from senior colleges in the ACT and Year 11 students from various high school settings in NSW.

7.2.3 Teacher response to results of the present study

Another valuable flow-on from this study might be an investigation in which the results of the present study were presented to senior-school teachers in the form of a questionnaire to which they would respond. The data that would emerge from
such an investigation would identify matches and mismatches between students' and teachers' perceptions of the senior school.

7.2.4 Generalising the interview data

It was acknowledged in the reporting of the interview data that these data had emerged from the responses of a relatively small number of Ss in interviews. Because of this, the results of analysing these data were claimed to be inappropriate for generalising to a larger population. It is suggested here that a further questionnaire might be developed, using insights drawn from interview data as the basis for the items. This questionnaire could then be used to gather, from a larger number of Ss, quantitative data suitable for statistical analyses.

7.2.5 The phenomenon of change in schools

It was stated in Section 7.1 that creative and effective responses to the senior-student alienation demonstrated in this study needs to be preceded by an increased understanding of the process of change in a school setting. It is therefore suggested that future research include investigations into: (a) processes of school-based institutional change, (b) the phenomenon resistance to change in school settings, and (c) the development of a practical model whereby school-based change can be facilitated.

7.3 Coming full-circle

*I'm always looking for a place – for somewhere to be*  
(Tournier, 1968, p. 9).

Tournier's anxious young client is not alone in the need he expresses in this statement. The 'need to belong' can be described as a universal human phenomenon (e.g. Tournier, 1968, Maslow, 1970).
Where there is a serious mismatch between individuals and their environments, frustration of this need is inevitable. The investigation reported in this thesis has demonstrated that such mismatches are a feature of the schooling experience for some students in N.S.W. senior schools.

It is argued here that this situation can change if schools can change. Senior schools can be transformed, by sensitive response to students' perceptions of schooling, into places of which students will feel comfortable to say:

\[ I \text{ have found a place – somewhere to be.} \]
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY


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*The Herald Sun*, 17/3/97.

*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21/7/93


9. APPENDICES

Appendix A: SSAS Survey

Appendix B: Karmel Review Terms of Reference

Appendix C: Finn Review Terms of Reference

Appendix D: Finn Review: Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia

Appendix E: Item Validation Procedure

Appendix F: Student Response Sheet

Appendix G: Letter to Principals

Appendix H: Letter to Parents

Appendix I: School Organisation Form

Appendix J: Administration of Survey
9.1 Appendix A: SSAS, 1992
Senior-School Alienation Scale

The Senior-School Alienation Scale was constructed by the author. It consists of items supported through the validation process as suitable for measuring ‘powerlessness’, ‘meaninglessness’ or ‘estrangement’.

The validation process yielded 36 items. Three of these were deleted from the final survey when the pilot study indicated some ambiguity of response to items referring to Austudy.

In the administration of the survey, the author read each of the items twice, then Ss were given time to indicate their responses on the response sheets. The SSAS was not distributed to Ss, because of the possibility that some of the Ss might have reading problems. This administration method was chosen to minimise the anxiety level of such Ss.

Two versions of the SSAS are included in Appendix A. The first contains only the items as they were read to Ss. The second includes information necessary for the scoring of the SSAS. For each item, the sub-scale to which it belongs is indicated. Asterisks indicate the scoring information for each item.
SENIOR-SCHOOL ALIENATION SCALE

1992

| A1 | Even if I finish school, there are no jobs. |
| A2 | Most teachers treat us with respect. |
| A3 | Discipline at this school is fair. |
| A4 | I try to keep out of trouble at school. |
| A5 | I don’t like it when people stir teachers to get them going. |

| B1 | I think that teachers try to give me a fair go. |
| B2 | I think school rules are pretty important. |
| B3 | I’m in trouble most of the time at school. |
| B4 | I have no power over my own timetable. |
| B5 | There are opportunities at this school for us to have a say - and we can change things. |

| C1 | I think it is OK for a senior to have to ask permission to go to the toilet. |
| C2 | What’s the point? I fail just about every test or assignment I do. |
| C3 | I usually do the set homework. |
| C4 | I think it’s alright to miss classes if I don’t like the teacher. |
| C5 | I work for the teachers who seem to like me. |

| D1 | I am at school because I couldn’t get a job, so my parents made me come back. |
| D2 | If a teacher picks on me, I’ve got the right to answer back. |
| D3 | I feel that I really belong to this school. |
| D4 | School pride and school spirit are very important. |
| D5 | I like school because there’s so much to learn. |

| E1 | There is just no point in being here. |
| E2 | I want more say in my own life. |
| E3 | I think most teachers would rather not teach me. |
| E4 | I can’t change anything. |
| E5 | School’s OK. At least I’m with my friends. |
| F 1 | I don’t come to school to learn things - I come to get Austudy. |
| F 2 | I come to school just often enough to keep my Austudy. |
| F 3 | If I could get a job - any job - I’d be out of here. |
| F 4 | If I can’t get what I want the way the school operates, I’ll just break the rules. |
| F 5 | I feel unhappy about having to come to school each day. |

| G 1 | I’m here because my parents don’t want me “on the streets”. |
| G 2 | It doesn’t matter if you’re late for school. |
| G 3 | I have to be here because I need Austudy. |
| G 4 | I have power over my own life. |
| G 5 | I am in control of my life. |

| H 1 | I try to do all my work for school. |
**SENIOR-SCHOOL ALIENATION SCALE**

**1992**

**INCLUDING SCORING INFORMATION:**

* STRONGLY AGREE = 5
** STRONGLY AGREE = 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-scale</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 1</td>
<td>Even if I finish school, there are no jobs.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A 2</td>
<td>Most teachers treat us with respect.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 3</td>
<td>Discipline at this school is fair.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 4</td>
<td>I try to keep out of trouble at school.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 5</td>
<td>I don’t like it when people stir teachers to get them going.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 1</td>
<td>I think that teachers try to give me a fair go.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 2</td>
<td>I think school rules are pretty important.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B 3</td>
<td>I’m in trouble most of the time at school.</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 4</td>
<td>I have no power over my own timetable.</td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>There are opportunities at this school for us to have a say - and we can change things.</td>
<td>P</td>
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<td>C 1</td>
<td>I think it is OK for a senior to have to ask permission to go to the toilet.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>What’s the point? I fail just about every test or assignment I do.</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 5</td>
<td>I work for the teachers who seem to like me.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* D 1 I am at school because I couldn’t get a job, so my parents made me come back. P

* D 2 If a teacher picks on me, I’ve got the right to answer back. E

** D 3 I feel that I really belong to this school. E

** D 4 School pride and school spirit are very important. E

** D 5 I like school because there’s so much to learn. M

* E 1 There is just no point in being here. M

* E 2 I want more say in my own life. P

* E 3 I think most teachers would rather not teach me. E

* E 4 I can’t change anything. P

** E 5 School’s OK. At least I’m with my friends. E

* F 1 I don’t come to school to learn things - I come to get Austudy. P

* F 2 I come to school just often enough to keep my Austudy. P

* F 3 If I could get a job - any job - I’d be out of here. P

* F 4 If I can’t get what I want the way the school operates, I’ll just break the rules. E

* F 5 I feel unhappy about having to come to school each day. E

* G 1 I’m here because my parents don’t want me “on the streets”. P

* G 2 It doesn’t matter if you’re late for school. E

* G 3 I have to be here because I need Austudy. P

** G 4 I have power over my own life. P

** G 5 I am in control of my life. P

** H 1 I try to do all my work for school. E
9.2 Appendix B: Karmel Review Terms of Reference

Chapter Two (Section 2.6.1) contains a discussion of school reviews and reports in the past 25 years. The Karmel Review (1973) is discussed in detail. The terms of reference for this review are the content of this appendix.
Karmel Review Terms of Reference

1. Pending the establishment under statute of the Australian Schools Commission which will make continuing arrangements, the Interim Committee will:

   (a) examine the position of both government and non-government primary and secondary schools in all States and in the A.C.T. and the N.T.;

   (b) make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Science as to the immediate financial needs of schools, priorities within those needs, and appropriate measures to assist in meeting those needs, including:

      (i) grants from the Commonwealth to the States in respect of both government and non-government schools;

      (ii) funds for government schools and grants to non-government schools in the A.C.T. and the N.T.;

      (iii) the conditions under which those grants are to be made available.

2. In carrying out its task the Interim Committee will:

   (a) work towards establishing acceptable standards for those schools, government and non-government alike, which fall short of those standards;

   (b) take into account:

      (i) where necessary, both the expansion of existing schools and the establishment of new ones;
(ii) the particular needs of schools for the handicapped, whether mental, physical or social, and of isolated children;

(iii) the diversity of curricula to meet differing aptitudes and interests of students;

(iv) plans for development of particular areas;

(c) promote the economic use of resources;

(d) consult with the States and representatives of non-government schools and with appropriate authorities in the A.C.T. and N.T.

3. The grants recommended by the Interim Committee will be:

(a) for the period 1 January 1974 to 31 December 1975;

(b) in addition to existing Commonwealth commitments;

(c) directed towards increased expenditure on schools and not in substitution for continuing efforts by the States and non-government school authorities.

4. The reports of the Interim Committee will be made public promptly by the Minister.

(Karmel, 1973, p. 3)
9.3 Appendix C: Finn Review Terms of Reference

Chapter Two (Section 2.6.2) contains a discussion of post-compulsory education in New South Wales, and, in particular, of the recommendations of the Finn Review (1991). The terms of reference for this review are the content of this appendix.
Having regard to the findings of previous relevant studies and reviews, and having regard to current reviews and working parties and initiatives being implemented in each of the States and Territories, to report to the Australian Education Council and to Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training, on the future development of post-compulsory education and training in Australia, with particular reference to those young people who have left school and are not participating in a formal education or training program. The Review would consider:

a. the appropriate form and level of a new national target for participation in post-compulsory education and training, an appropriate basis of measurement of that target, and a recommended timetable and strategies for its achievement;

b. appropriate national curriculum principles designed to enable all young people, including those with special needs, to develop key competencies, with the associated implications for curriculum development, initial teacher preparation and continuing professional development;

c. the means by which links can be drawn between different education and training pathways and sectors to expand the options available to all young people, including those with special needs, and to achieve national coherence in entry and exit points between education, training and employment;

d. the appropriate roles and responsibilities of schools, TAFE and higher education in the provision of post-compulsory education and training for young people consistent
with the principles and objectives identified in (b) and (c) above, and the roles of private and industry providers;

e. current barriers to the effective participation of disadvantaged young people, including those with disabilities, in post-compulsory education and training, and strategies for increasing their participation and improving their educational and labour market outcomes;

f. the implications of current and prospective changes in post-compulsory education and training for the provision of careers education, information and counselling to students, including the requirements for information on educational pathways and associated career paths; and

g. the likely resource and funding implications of existing trends in, and further strategies for, post-compulsory education and training.

(Finn, 1991, p.2)
The Finn Review (1991) discusses post-compulsory schooling in New South Wales. The 'national goals' presented in the Finn Review appear here as Appendix D.
1. To provide an excellent education for all young people, being one which develops their talents and capacities to full potential, and is relevant to the social, cultural and economic needs of the nation.

2. To enable all students to achieve high standards of learning and to develop self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, respect for others, and achievement of personal excellence.

3. To promote equality of educational opportunities, and to provide for groups with special learning requirements.

4. To respond to the current and emerging economic and social needs of the nation, and to provide those skills which will allow students maximum flexibility and adaptability in their future employment and other aspects of life.

5. To provide a foundation for further education and training, in terms of knowledge and skills, respect for learning and positive attitudes for lifelong education.

6. To develop in students:
   a. the skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing;
   b. skills of numeracy, and other mathematical skills;
   c. skills of analysis and problem solving;
   d. skills of information processing and computing;
   e. an understanding of the role of science and technology in society, together with scientific and technological skills;
   f. a knowledge and appreciation of Australia's historical and geographic context;
   g. a knowledge of languages other than English;
h. an appreciation and understanding of, and confidence to participate in, the creative arts;

i. an understanding of, and concern for, balanced development and the global environment; and

j. a capacity to exercise judgment in matters of morality, ethics and social justice.

7. To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context.

8. To provide students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage including the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups.

9. To provide for the physical development and personal health and fitness of students, and for the creative use of leisure time.

10. To provide appropriate career education and knowledge of the world of work, including an understanding of the nature and place of work in our society. (Finn, 1991, p. 9)
9.5 Appendix E: Item Validation Procedure

The Senior-School Alienation Scale was constructed by the author for collection of quantitative data. The process of construction of the scale is detailed in Chapter Three (Section 3.2.2).

Appendix E consists of:

a. the letter sent to each member of the academic staff from the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong who had indicated willingness to participate in the validity check for the survey items;

b. a background document, included with the above letter, giving a brief introduction to the theory of alienation underpinning this investigation, and details of the definitions adopted by the author (and based on Seeman, 1959) of the terms ‘powerlessness’, ‘meaninglessness’ and ‘estrangement’;

c. a copy of the 74 items being tested for validity, with columns where validators could check the item’s suitability for measuring ‘powerlessness’;

d. a copy of the 74 items being tested for validity, with columns where validators could check the item’s suitability for measuring ‘meaninglessness’;

e. a copy of the 74 items being tested for validity, with columns where validators could check the item’s suitability for measuring ‘estrangement’.
from: Joyce McIver  
Ph.D. candidate  
Faculty of Education  
University of Wollongong

to: ............................

Thank you for assisting me in this validity check for survey items in the Senior School Alienation Scale. I understand the time involved in this exercise, and appreciate your availability.

Would you please:

1. read the introductory paragraph on POWERLESSNESS.

2. in the light of the given definitions, read all items and tick the appropriate column for each item, in response to the question:

   DOES THIS ITEM REFER TO POWERLESSNESS?

3. Set aside the pages indicating your responses to the items in terms of their suitability for measuring POWERLESSNESS.

4. Without referring back to your ‘powerlessness’ responses, follow the same procedure for:
   MEANINGLESSNESS, and
   ESTRANGEMENT.

I shall come to your office between 4.30 and 5.00 on Friday afternoon, and again between 9.30 and 10.00 on Monday morning. Could you please leave your return envelope on your office door if you are not going to be in at one of these times?

Thank you once again for your cooperation.

Joyce McIver
Seeman (1959, p. 783) identifies five manifestations of alienation:

- powerlessness
- meaninglessness
- normlessness
- isolation
- self-estrangement.

Observation of, conversations with, and interviews with Year 11 students in 1991 and 1992 lead the author to an identification of three components of senior school alienation as expressed in behaviour and comment:

- powerlessness
- meaninglessness
- estrangement.

These constructs are explained on the following pages.
POWERLESSNESS

Here, powerlessness contains elements of separation from effective control over personal destiny, with its attendant feeling of helplessness. (cf Dean, 1961, p. 754).

Kris and Leites (1950) describe powerlessness in this way:

‘ordinary’ individuals have ever less the feeling that they can understand or influence the very events upon which their lives and happiness are known to depend.

In the context of the senior secondary school in the 1990s, powerlessness may be demonstrated by:

a) diminished (or non-existent) sense of personal control,

b) expectancy that my own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of outcomes or reinforcement I seek.

In brief, the student feels unable to control outcomes in the daily life and discipline of the school.

c) economic circumstances deciding the individual’s status as student or non-student.

In brief, the student is unable to leave school because of unemployment, parental decisions in the light of unemployment, or needing to receive Austudy.

MEANINGLESSNESS

a) Meaninglessness involves a devaluation of the individual’s own insights because of external constraints on behaviour, and is elevated where the external constraints seem to the individual to be irrelevant, unfair, or unnecessarily restrictive.

This leads to:

b) a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about future outcomes of behaviour can be made, and

c) a feeling that there is little or no point in work and/or behaviour requirements of the senior-school.
ESTRANGEMENT

Estrangement combines elements of Seeman's 'normlessness' and 'isolation'.

It includes:

a) assigning low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in a given society (in this case, a comprehensive secondary school),

b) feelings of, and sometimes acting out of, rebellion in that societal context,

c) the belief that given goals cannot be achieved through socially-approved behaviour, and

d) the individual's seeking satisfaction of private interests (or personal needs) by any means which seem to that person to be effective, irrespective of the society's goals or values.

The concept is enriched by Durkheim's (1897) descriptive words about 'anomie', which can be translated as:

- a perpetual state of discontent,
- disorientation,
- a painful or sad uneasiness, and
- a feeling of pointlessness of goals, or that no certain goals exist.

NOTE: IN THE FINAL FORM OF THE SURVEY, SOME ITEMS WILL BE PRESENTED POSITIVELY AND SOME NEGATIVELY. THIS RELIABILITY FEATURE WILL BE BUILT INTO THE ITEMS AFTER CULLING OF AMBIGUOUS ITEMS AND RANDOM ORDERING OF ITEMS THAT SURVIVE THE VALIDATION PROCESS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Even if I finish school, there are no jobs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am worried about the fact that I'll probably never get a job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I really wanted to change one of my subjects, but the timetable made me stay in what I had chosen.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teachers seem to like putting me down.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Discipline at this school is fair.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I try to keep out of trouble.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I enjoy stirring teachers to get them going.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Other people make all the decisions about me at school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I do not like other people telling me when to eat.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I think that teachers try to give me a fair go.</td>
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(ie. what happens at school makes sense; there’s no point; school is experienced as fair/unfair)

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<td>21. It is ridiculous for a senior to have to ask permission to go to the toilet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. What's the point? I fail just about every test or assignment I do.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23. If they wanted to, they could make school different for seniors - different rules, different timetables, different teaching. It could be quite good.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24. What I think or believe doesn't matter around here.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25. I very seldom do any homework. It doesn't really matter.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26. I think it's alright to miss classes if I don't like the teacher.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27. I only do the work I like.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28. I can't seem to get teachers to listen to how I want my life to be.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. I feel like a prisoner at school.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30. I work for the teachers who seem to like me.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>31. I am at school because I couldn't get a job, so my parents made me come back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>32. I would like to do well at school, but I don't know how.</td>
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<tr>
<td>33. If a teacher picks on me, I've got the right to answer back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>34. I feel that I don't belong here.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>35. School pride and school spirit are ridiculous.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>36. I like school because there's so much to learn.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37. There is just no point in being here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITEM</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. No one wants to listen to what I’ve got to say.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>39. I want more say in my own life.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>40. I think most teachers would rather not teach me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>41. I can’t change anything.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>42. If a teacher picks on me, I’ve got the right to answer back.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>43. I don’t come to school to learn things - I come to get Austudy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>44. I come to school just often enough to keep my Austudy.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>45. School’s OK. At least I’m with my friends.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>46. I don’t think the school rules are too restrictive.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>47. It makes no sense to be bossed around like little kids.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>48. If I could get a job - any job - I’d be out of here.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>49. It wouldn’t matter how hard I tried - I’d still fail.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>50. Different kids get different treatment around here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>51. It really doesn’t matter what I do - I can’t change anything.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. I feel trapped here because there are no jobs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>53. I have the right to do what I like - the rules are made for little kids.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>54. If I can’t get what I want the way the school operates, I’ll just break the rules.</td>
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<tr>
<td>55. It should be my decision whether or not I go to a lesson.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>56. I feel unhappy about having to come to school each day.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>57. I’m here because my parents don’t want me “on the streets”.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>58. It doesn’t matter if you’re late for school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITEM</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>----</td>
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<tr>
<td>59. The school insists on uniform and I think that’s stupid for seniors.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>60. I have to be here because I need Austudy.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>61. Nothing I can do will change my life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>62. Sometimes I feel like wrecking things around here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>63. I am in control of my life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>64. Sometimes I think about where my life’s heading - but there’s no point in talking about it around here.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>65. I feel like my life is out of my control.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>66. I always seem to be doing what other people want.</td>
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<tr>
<td>67. I have no control over the way I use my time.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>68. If there were unemployment benefits for my age group, I’d be out of here.</td>
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<tr>
<td>69. I feel that, at school, other people have too much power over my life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>70. There’s no point - I tried working hard, but I still failed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>71. I find that teachers are interested in what I have to say.</td>
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<tr>
<td>72. It’s up to me to make my own decisions. It’s my life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>73. I hand in all my work when it’s due.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>74. I very seldom do any work for school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.6 Appendix F: Student Response Sheet

The response sheet is double-sided, one side for responses to SSAS items, and the other for information related to the independent variables.

Instructions given to the Ss constitute Appendix J.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
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<td>A2</td>
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<td>H1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Age: 16 □  17 □  18 □ older than 18 □
Male □  Female □

Does your school offer Non-Matriculation Courses? Yes □  No □
   If Yes, do you take one or more of these courses? Yes □  No □
Does your school offer TAFE-link courses? Yes □  No □
   If Yes, do you take a TAFE-link course? Yes □  No □

Do you receive Austudy? Yes □  No □

Is the main source of income in your family:
   one parent working □  two parents working □
   unemployment benefits □  other social security benefit □

Do you have an older sister or brother who is unemployed? Yes □  No □

Did one or both of your parents complete Year 12 at school? Yes □  No □

Do you have a sister or brother who completed Year 12 at school? Yes □  No □

Are you aware of an occupation you would really like to enter? Yes □  No □
   If Yes, do you expect that this will eventually happen for you? Yes □  No □

MY FIRST CHOICE WAS:
   TO COMPLETE YEARS 11 AND 12 □ OR
   TO LEAVE SCHOOL AND GET A JOB AFTER YEAR 10 □

IF YOU CHOSE THE SECOND ANSWER, COMPLETE THE NEXT TWO ITEMS.

IF I COULD NOT GET A JOB, AND UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WERE STILL BEING OFFERED, I WOULD CHOOSE:
   TO FINISH YEARS 11 AND 12 □
   TO LEAVE SCHOOL AND GO ON UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS □

I RETURNED TO SCHOOL THIS YEAR BECAUSE:
   I CHOSE TO □  MY PARENTS MADE THE DECISION FOR ME □
9.7 Appendix G: Letter to School Principals

This letter was printed under University of Wollongong letterhead, and individually addressed to the Principals of the four target schools.
RE: RESEARCH PROPOSAL INVOLVING YEAR 11 STUDENTS

In 1991, I was appointed as Head Teacher (Girls) at Warilla High School. Before that, I was teaching at the Smith Street Unit for emotionally disturbed and behaviourally disordered adolescent students. My work at the Unit involved me in many visits to Illawarra schools. Listening to staff and students, I became concerned about levels of student alienation, particularly in the senior school.

As I became more interested in this topic, and started to read and to ask more focused questions. I felt that I was tapping into a possible connection between increased alienation levels in the senior high school and the 'staying-on' phenomenon in N.S.W. high schools.

I took my concerns and my policy-research proposal to Dr Terry Burke last year, and he encouraged me to proceed with a study of ALIENATION IN THE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, giving me Departmental approval for the study, and some release days to further the study.

This year, this Departmental support for the project has been formalised into a doctoral study fellowship, as I will be writing up the research as a doctoral thesis at the University of Wollongong.

It is my belief that this research is important as more and more students are staying on at school for many diverse reasons. In the light of the current Reports on schooling (Finn, Mayer, Carmichael), it seems important that we listen to what senior students have to say about their experience of school. Their input will inform our policy and curriculum development. Hopefully, the senior-school environment can be made a better fit to the students who are our clients.

I am now preparing the research questionnaire for collection of data from Year 11 students. To focus the research project into manageable data collection, I have chosen to work with Year 11 students in four Illawarra Departmental high schools south of Lake Illawarra. As your school is in this geographical area, I am asking for your support in the involvement of your students in the research.

The data will be collected in two ways:

i) questionnaire (of the "strongly agree .... .... strongly disagree" type) for quantitative data - all willing Year 11 students to participate.

ii) individual interviews with six Year 11 students from each school for qualitative supplementary data (volunteers, as indicated on permission notes).
It is anticipated that the questionnaire would be administered during a 40-minute period. It would be preferable if, over one week, research assistants could administer the test during lessons which would ascertain that all students were given the opportunity to participate (eg. taking each English or Maths class for one period during that week.)

At a later date, six students from your school who have volunteered to be interviewed would be asked to spend about 30 minutes each with the author in a structured interview.

Confidentiality will be ensured. No names will be asked for on questionnaire forms. In the research report, and any other written outcome from the study, the schools will be identified simply as “Illawarra Schools A,B,C and D” - no further identification will be published.

The Principal of each participating school will receive a summary of the findings of the study, and policy recommendations flowing from it.

From the school, I am asking for:

* participation by your Year 11 students in the study,
* a staff member to organise dissemination and collection of parental permission notes,
* co-operation from one faculty in which all Year 11 students are enrolled - to offer each class for one period,
* an interview room, and access to individual Year 11 students for interviews at a later point in the study.

I am hoping to collect the group-based data late in Term III or early in Term IV, 1992. The timing depends on the research questionnaires’ availability from the printer, as well as the convenience of the participating schools.

I hope that you and your staff decide to encourage your Year 11 students to participate in this study, as I believe that its outcomes will benefit senior students of the future.

Yours sincerely,

Joyce McIver
Head Teacher (Girls) - Warilla High School
Ph.D. research student - Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong
RSVP Thursday, July 23, 1992
9.8 Appendix H: Letter to Parents of Year 11 Students

The following information was distributed to parents of all Year 11 students from the four target schools. In accordance with the requirements for research involving, as Ss, school students from NSW government schools, this letter gave information concerning the purposes of the research project and the proposed research methodology, as well as indicating Departmental approval for the research. It included a 'willingness to participate' form, to be signed by the Year 11 student and to be approved by a parent, before being returned to the Year 11 patron.
RESEARCH PROJECT: YEAR 11 STUDENTS IN ILLAWARRA SCHOOLS
INFORMATION FOR YEAR 11 STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

APPROVAL The research has the approval of the Department of School Education, and of your Principal, and is being supervised at the University of Wollongong. The author is a Head Teacher at Warilla High School.

BACKGROUND In the past five or six years, the senior years of our schools have been attraction many more students than in the past. There are many reasons for this change in the senior-school. Not all senior students want to go to University. Many have other life-plans. Many workplaces now require Year 12 level of education as a prerequisite when employing young people.

REASON FOR THE STUDY At this time, it seems really important for the schools to give students an opportunity to express how they feel about being at school, about the subjects offered to them in the senior program, about their employment prospects, and their hopes for the future.

Only by listening to students can the schools address some of their concerns. What they tell us could help to bring about changes in the way schools are organised for senior students, and in the courses offered to them.
PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY Later this year, your Year 11 student will be asked to participate in a research project in which students will be asked to provide such information concerning their experience of school. All responses will be confidential. No names will appear on the questionnaires handed in. To complete the survey form will take one 40-minute period. Six volunteer students from your school will also be involved in an individual 30-minute interview with the researcher later in the project.

If you, and your Year 11 student are willing for him or her to participate in the study, please complete the permission note below, and return it to the school in the next few days.

Yours sincerely,

J. McIver,
H.T. (Girls) - Warilla High School
Researcher for this project.

NAME OF STUDENT .................................................................
I am willing to participate in the group section of the study.

................................................................. .................................................................
(STUDENT'S SIGNATURE) (DATE)

Please tick here if you are willing to have an individual interview with the researcher.

□

Please tick here also if you would be willing for the interview to be taped.

(Your name would not appear on the tape.)

□

PARENTAL APPROVAL

I give my son/daughter, ................................................................. permission to participate in the study as indicated above.

................................................................. .................................................................
(PARENT/GUARDIAN) (DATE)
9.9 Appendix I: School organisation form

The Principals' letter was followed up by an interview with each of the Principals, after time had been given for staff discussion of the proposal. A SCHOOL ORGANISATION FORM was given to each Principal who indicated the school's willingness to participate in the investigation.
SENIOR-SCHOOL ALIENATION STUDY

SCHOOL ORGANISATION FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO:

MRS JOYCE McIVER,
1 Kieman Avenue,
GWYNNEVILLE 2500
ph. home 263982  school 963055

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL RESPONSE TO RESEARCH PROPOSAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPAL .................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL .................................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TO THE PRINCIPAL AND STAFF

Thank you for your consideration of this research project. If you have decided to participate in the study, please return this information sheet to me.

SCHOOL CONTACT PERSON ...........................................

POSITION ON STAFF ..........................................................

NUMBER OF YEAR 11 STUDENTS .................................

DURING WHAT LESSON WOULD IT BE CONVENIENT FOR THE DATA TO BE COLLECTED? ...........................................

H.T. FOR THIS SUBJECT ..........................................................

STARTING/FINISHING TIMES FOR LESSONS IN THIS SUBJECT

| MON ................................................................. |
| TUE ................................................................. |
| WED ................................................................. |
| THU ................................................................. |
| FRI ................................................................. |
9.10 Appendix J: Administration of Survey

This administration format was used to ensure that administration of the survey was consistent across the four schools. For each administration of the survey, these instructions were read verbatim.
SENIOR SCHOOL ALIENATION SCALE

1992

ADMINISTRATION OF SURVEY

This survey is built on comments that Year 11 students have made concerning how they feel about school.

I am asking you whether you agree with these comments - is this how you are experiencing being a senior student at this school?

Each comment will be read to you twice. Take a little while to think about it, then tick the column that indicates how you feel about that comment.

The comment headings are:
   STRONGLY AGREE,
   AGREE,
   NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE,
   DISAGREE and
   STRONGLY DISAGREE.

Where possible, try to avoid the middle response, which indicates that you have no opinion about that comment.

If you wish to change a response, please do so by putting a circle around the first response - the one you are changing. Then tick the response you have chosen.

THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. EVERY RESPONSE YOU CHOOSE IS AN ACCEPTABLE COMMENT ON HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT SCHOOL.

Some of the comments may seem strange, funny or ridiculous to you. Please try not to react in a way that might distract other students, or influence their response in any way.

This is your opportunity to have your say. Please make the most of it.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY.

REMEMBER - LISTEN TO THE COMMENT. IT WILL BE READ TWICE. THEN TICK YOUR RESPONSE.