An ethnographic case study:
Analysing students' learning goal orientations
at a lower-middle decile secondary school

by

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Abstract

In Aotearoa/New Zealand young people generally commence their secondary school education at Year 9. The numerous changes associated with this transition can include new subjects, larger school populations, unfamiliar learning environments, different day-to-day structures and routines; all of which can affect students' motivation and confidence in their learning. Research focusing on students' transition from primary to secondary schooling has tended to indicate a lessening in students' motivation and has shown the types of learning goal approaches of these students can also change. As a teacher with 13 years' experience of teaching at secondary school level, I noticed that achievement at NCEA levels, in my current school, have remained static since my arrival seven years ago. This drove my interest in exploring further the influence of achievement goals on student learning at Year 9. Goal theory research in the field of motivation has increased dramatically over recent decades. Contemporary theories on learning goals have focused on whether mastery, performance or multiple goals best suit the learning needs of students, and whether students develop certain preferences with regards their goals when it comes to learning and achievement. More recently, the relevance of social goals in relation to learning and achievement, and therefore to learning goal theory, has identified that students do not use learning goals in isolation. The type of goal or multiple goals student adopt in their learning has important implications for their motivation, engagement or success and by implication, teachers' approaches to their teaching. This ethnographic case study explores how 26 Year 9 students at a lower-middle decile secondary school set their learning goals. The study establishes whether students intentionally adopt a specific type of learning goal and explores the reasons for particular preferences. It also examines whether social goals have any impact on the type of goals students preferred or adopted. Through a questionnaire and then semi-structured interviews, students reported their views on their learning and social goals. In addition, five students from the study formed a Student Advisory Group to offer advice and recommendations on issues relating to the research instruments used. This study found that participating students did not intentionally prefer a specific goal over another. Further to this, students were generally not aware of the particular types of goals that were available to them and therefore were not consciously adopting a learning goal to any extent or purpose. The students were unclear of how different learning goals supported their learning. However, these students were more perceptive when understanding the implications of how social goals influenced their learning. The results from this research show that heightened awareness and understanding associated with the adaptive nature of learning goals by students and teachers would support student achievement. This would enable students to make intentional and logical choices regarding the strategies related to learning goals. Teachers may find these findings useful when considering how their students set their learning goals, and what influences these decisions. It may also serve as a starting point for a discussion with students on how they focus their learning and why.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

There are many considerations to take into account when exploring the ways in which motivational concepts and theories can support students' learning. Over the years motivational studies and research has focused on a number of approaches and directions in an attempt to explain how motivation works and therefore directly and indirectly supports learning. From the 1930's onwards, behavioural theories linked to drives and needs were purported to be the "answer" concerning what drives motivation (Fontana, 1995). Needless to say, many of the earlier behavioural theories associated with the study of motivational have been superseded. Motivational theory was heavily influenced in the second half of the twentieth century by cognitive models of motivation, and one of the directions focused on how the individual constructs knowledge (Eisner, 2002). Therefore, the individual's disposition, frame of mind, values and expectations, along with how they perceived the world, in what Brophy (2004) termed "subjective experiences" (p. 5) all affected how individuals were motivated. Of the range of motivational theories associated with cognitive theory, learning goal theory, has been at the forefront of achievement motivational literature for a number of decades (Darnon et al., 2007; Dweck, 1986; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Meece et al., 2006). Learning goal theory is often associated with explorations of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Dweck, 1986). More recently, the importance of social and societal influences have become more significantly incorporated into the motivational literature in an attempt to further explain how motivation affects learning and consequently achievement. It has been suggested that a combination of these theories (in part, behavioural reinforcement theories, but more notably cognitive theories and research associated with social goals) can explain the influences on an individual's motivation (Fontana, 1995, pp. 142-143; Illeris, 2009, pp. 7-8; Mansfield, 2010).

This research aimed to identify whether students approached their learning with specific learning goals in mind and if these goals helped students to achieve. In particular, the research focused on what learning goals students preferred or adopted to support their learning. Further to this, the research endeavoured to explore whether students preferred learning goals were linked to their social goals. If students' social goals are associated with a specific learning goal this may serve as a starting point for further considerations about the link between explicit learning goals and social goals.

The research was important for the context in which it took place, given that at this particular school, research of this nature had not taken place until now. Therefore, any information that supports teachers within the school to focus on the link between learning, achievement and social goals and how the interactions between them either support or hinders achievement is beneficial. Focusing on a certain year group also helps teachers to understand or appreciate the ways students perceive their learning and achievement within this cohort. Focusing specifically on Year 9 students was salient as these students, until attending secondary school, had mostly been taught by an individual teacher in a learning environment that is generally constant due to the nature of the systems in place at primary or intermediate school. Therefore Year 9 is a transitional year for most students (from primary to secondary education) and most students will be unfamiliar with the change of systems. As a result, students having a number of teachers and a possible change in curriculum subjects may also allow further insight into understanding how students perceive they learn.

My role as a teacher

As a teacher with many years teaching experience in secondary schools, I have often had cause to reflect on my teaching and how I contribute to my students' learning. Teachers, parents and those who have an interest or an involvement with education, learning and students, talk about and have views and opinions concerning motivation and its influence on learners. Nevertheless, that many people (in particular those not involved in the academic study of motivational theories and concepts) believe motivation is simply a trait related to the individual, and therefore there is very little that others can do to influence individuals positively. Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) state that "often researchers and educators have often conceptualized motivation as an individual difference variable, something that some students simply have more of than other students" (p. 331). In other words, often, it is far too easy merely to suggest that students' lack of academic success is simply down to their lack of motivation.

On too many occasions, I have questioned the motivation of students whom I have taught over the years without really considering what motivation is and how it affects students either positively or negatively; allied to this are my concerns relating to student performance. Quite naturally, a major component of a teacher's remit is to attempt to support students in their learning. Part of that support is to try to make sure that students are constantly making progress in their learning, some of which, (e.g., academic and formal

learning) can be assessed formatively and summatively. Other “learning”, although not necessarily part of a curriculum that can be assessed, for example, learning that is associated with the social development of an individual, is also an important part of a teacher’s involvement with students. With these ideas in mind, I wanted to study an area associated with student achievement related to learning, one which impacts upon other areas of a student’s development.

As a result, more recently, I have begun to perceive that having a better understanding of the different motivational concepts and theories expounded by academics and theorists can only improve my efforts to support student outcomes. My own anecdotal observations and reflections over a number of years have resulted in believing that students would benefit by my being better informed about what motivation is and how my having an improved understanding of motivational concepts can support students’ learning. Partly this study has been an opportunity for me to get “beneath the skin” of my own teaching in an attempt to acquire a better understanding of how students’ learn and how I can best support that learning. Therefore the need for the study is personal and individual, inasmuch as it is a desire by me to be able to inform my own teaching by simply being more knowledgeable about the way in which motivation can support learning. In particular, I aimed for a better understanding of how learning goals support students’ learning, what learning goals students prefer, if specific learning goals can be more adaptive, in what situations and in what ways. The results of this study will enable me to inform my teaching within a secondary school context in order to better support students’ learning at school.

Background

Students’ achievements at NCEA Levels at the school in which I teach have remained static for a number of years. Achievement levels have remained below the national average for the majority of the years I have taught at the school. Although the possible reasons for this statistic are numerous and varied, it has become a concern, particularly, as in my view, teachers and students have been working harder for a number of these years to improve achievement at the high school. A number of government and local initiatives have been integrated into the school’s long-term plan in a bid to raise student achievement. These have included a focus on restorative practices, an exploration around assessment for learning, after-school support sessions for students, and continued professional development for staff. Also, in particular, a number of strategies have been introduced in an attempt to raise

achievement levels for Māori students, which the school believes will raise all student achievement. As a teacher-researcher my interest lies in focusing upon what happens in the intervening years in the lead up to students sitting NCEA assessments in years 11 to 13. Studies have shown that the transfer from intermediate (also known as middle school in some countries) to secondary school can be difficult for students which may result in a loss of academic progress, even if only temporarily (Galton et al., 2000; Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). And, again, there are a number of developmental, social and educational reasons as to why this may be the case (Mansfield, 2012; Meece et al., 2006). The research which I have undertaken explores an area that may be related to the lack of academic improvement and achievement at the school.

Research Questions

To address the pressing issues of what or how motivational intentions influence students' approach to their learning, the study incorporated research questions focused around the motivational intent and influences of Year 9 students' learning goal choices. In particular, the focus of the study addressed the specific learning goals students adopt to facilitate their own learning. The area of research concentrated upon the following:

What motivational intentions influence Year 9 students' choices in learning within one secondary school (decile-4) context?

- Do the espoused motivational intentions of Year 9 students affect their attitudes towards learning and achievement outcomes?
- Do students make a preference for performance-goals over mastery-goals?
- Are performance-goals – at this specific secondary school – predominantly linked to the students' social goals?
- Do these students' social goals play a role in shaping student achievement goal choices?

Therefore the aims of this study were to establish what goals students used to direct their attention to learning and to explore whether and why certain goals were more prevalent than others. The nature of the research allows for further exploration focusing on the “how” of the above questions. Where appropriate the data does address this. However, the first priority of the research was to establish whether students did make a preference of performance-goals over mastery-goals.

Students were invited to participate in a questionnaire which focused on the different types of learning goals. Responses to questions helped to identify what types of learning goal students preferred or adopted when learning. Questions relating to students' social goals explored attitudes concerning how social goals contribute to students' preferred learning goals. Following from this, students were invited to attend an interview where a set of semi-structured interview questions investigated students' attitudes towards their learning goals. Analysis of both the questionnaire and interview findings helped to answer the questions previously asked above.

The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 explores the relationship between the identified goal types, mastery, performance and multiple-goal, and their adaptive or productive natures. It sought to analyse the research concerning the goal types and whether any particular goal type was more conducive towards achievement. This review provided a brief outline concerning motivational literature and then explored the main findings associated with learning goal theories. Intensive research and academic study within the field of achievement motivation has burgeoned over a number of decades, which has resulted in a wide array of terminology associated with goal theory (Murphy & Alexander, 2000). In an attempt to be consistent, the term "learning goal" was used as an over-arching term for specific achievement goals linked to learning throughout the literature review. Further to this, the specific terms of mastery goal (goals associated with a focus on learning new skills and the inherent enjoyment of a task) and performance-goal (goals that focus on the performance of an individual in comparison to others and the importance of assessment as opposed to mastering a skill or understanding) were used to distinguish from the general term covering types of learning goal. Chapter 3 outlines a detailed methodology, and explains the rationale behind the methodology and the methods of the study. A questionnaire focused on understanding students' attitudes and preferences for the different learning goal approaches available to students. Following from this, a semi-structured interview analysed the responses to the questionnaire in greater detail, and allowed students to elaborate upon their previous questionnaire responses. The findings of both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews are discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4 the results from the questionnaires are presented and these findings are grouped around the four sections of the questionnaire, mastery-goals, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals and social goals. The students' responses to the statements are analysed in

detail. Following on from this findings relating to the semi-structured interviews are discussed. Supporting the findings are a number of tables that reveal the range and predominance of students' responses to the questions and a number of these responses are analysed in detail. A summary of the findings from both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews are presented, and then further explored in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5 the students' goal preferences and orientations, the intentionality of goal approaches, the complexity of goal choices and how they support learning, along with the impact of social goals are discussed and critiqued. A discussion on the intentionality of adopting specific goals and how these goals support learning reveals that students do not explicitly approach their learning using specific intentional goals and that students are not generally aware of how their learning goals support their learning. In addition, this chapter considers the implications of the findings and the relevance of the study. Finally, Chapter 6, considers the significance of the study and recommends ways in which the findings of the study can be of value to me as a teacher, teachers within the school and to others who may find the results relevant to their own context.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Motivation literature

Attempting to identify and explain what motivates children and young people has led to a number of ways this phenomenon can be conceptualised as well as different ways this concept can be studied. What motivates young people to learn and how motivation helps them to learn have been areas of significant research (Brophy, 2004; Dweck, 1986; Stipek, 1998). In particular, research and theory focusing on achievement and motivation has had a long and distinguished history - which includes, amongst many - William James' views on the association between achievement and self-evaluation (Elliot & Dweck, 2005), Lewin's field theories, which suggests motivation is the result of tensions created by particular goals or needs (Murphy & Alexander, 2000) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Brophy, 2004), which Pintrich and Schunk (2002) explain as serving "the same energizing and directional functions in earlier theories as goals do in the current cognitive models" (p. 192). In an attempt to identify foundational understandings within the motivation literature Murphy and Alexander (2000) presented a number of sub-categories related to motivation which included intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation, self-schema, interest and goal orientations. Other areas of study associated with motivation have included, the influence of instrumentality beliefs (Kover & Worrell, 2010); Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 1991); Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997); Cognitive Evaluation Theory (Deci et al., 2001); Attributional Theory (Weiner, 1985); and Expectancy x Value theories (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Motivation and Learning

What is evident in these ideas and theories, and the numerous others related to motivation and learning is the importance of motivation *to* learning and goals *to* motivation (Seifert, 1996). Early theories such as classical conditioning, instrumental or operant conditioning, emotional conditioning and Thorndike's law of effect associated with achievement and motivation in learning, traditionally labelled as behaviourism, (Fontana, 1995; Illeris, 2007) focused on the study of observable behaviour in the environment to explain motivational forces. However, later cognitive theories place greater focus on the internal processes associated with learning

and the inclusion of an individual's own knowledge and behaviour (Bruner, 1977; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Incentives, what Illeris (2007) calls “mental energy” (p. 27) are needed for students to engage and actively involve themselves with the learning process, whether these incentives be through necessity or pleasure, whether they are motivated externally or internally or by reward or punishment. Weiner (1985) discusses the idea of motivation being determined “by what one can get (incentive) as well as the likelihood of getting it (expectancy)” (p. 559).

If learning is the process of acquiring, processing, making sense of, and applying knowledge (Brophy 2004; Phalet et al., 2004), then motivation is necessary symbiotically for these learning processes to take place. To be motivated to learn, people who value learning are more likely to require a sense of relevance or connectedness to the task and the content, and to have a feeling of autonomy in acquiring or owning of knowledge (Deci et al., 2001; Sungur & Senler, 2010; Walker & Greene, 2009).

Goals and motivation

Related to motivation is the idea of establishing, setting and working towards goals (Dweck, 1986; Meece et al., 2006). Goals are described as providing “impetus for and direction to action” (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p. 5) and are a pattern of fully incorporated values, qualities or influences that direct behaviours or objectives (Weiner, 1986 in Valle et al., 2003).

Over the years, researchers have devised and tested models incorporating a variety of different constructs, such as motive disposition, attributions, evaluation anxiety, goals, competence perceptions, values and implicit theories. These efforts have contributed a great deal to our understanding of the nature of achievement motivations (Elliot & Dweck, 2005).

The role of goals in understanding learning and motivation is an important aspect to explore because goals are the result of drive and energy which, are in part, used in the process of learning (Wlodkowski, 1999). In the following section an exploration of the literature will examine the different types of goals that may affect an individual and their learning and motivation. It will explore how, and why these different goals impact on the learning of students.

Learning goal theory is a relatively recent but central and dominant phenomena associated with motivation literature and research (Levy & Patrick, 2004; Midgley, 2002). With the prevalence of research related to cognitive theories of learning from the second half

of the twentieth century, learning goal theories have become increasingly important in understanding what motivates people to learn (Dweck, 1986; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

However, relatively recently, focus on the link between motivation and learning goals has been studied intensively. (Ames & Ames, 1984; Meece et al., 2006; Midgley et al., 2001; Midgley, 2002; Murphy & Alexander, 2000; Pintrich, 2000; Wigfield, 1997). In particular, considerable research has focused on the different types of learning goals that exist, what constitutes the distinctive goals, why particular goals are adopted, if they are consciously adopted, and to what extent the goals affect learning (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Harackiewicz et al., 2000).

Mastery and performance-goals

Initially, learning goal theorists put forward two types of learning goals, mastery and performance goals (Brophy, 2005; Walker & Greene, 2009). Early descriptions and explanations relating to learning goal theory identified mastery and performance-approach goals only. However, there were a number of terms available to describe these two types. These included learning goals, task-involvement and mastery goals (Ames, 1992), task goals (Nicholls, 1984; Urdan & Maehr, 1995) and learning goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Performance goals were described as performance or ego involvement goals (Ames, 1992), ego goals (Nicholls, 1984), and ability goals (Ames & Ames, 1984; Urdan & Maehr, 1995).

The development of theories to include performance-avoidance goals and, more recently, mastery-avoidance goals were assimilated or incorporated into the research literature at a later date (Brophy, 2005; Elliot, 2005; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Pintrich, 2000).

There is a general consensus on what constitutes the major differences between mastery and performance goals (Ames, 1992; Brophy, 2005; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Researchers originally advocated the two types of goal as opposites on a continuum. Mastery goals have been almost completely associated with intrinsic motivation, and performance goals, at first, with extrinsic motivation (Harter & Jackson, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Much of the literature focusing on the behaviours associated with intrinsic motivation identifies the learner as having an inherent interest and enjoyment in a task, where their reward is in their participation, in the involvement and the challenge of the activity. A learner's active engagement with the task is believed to be their reward in itself. This is in direct contrast to the beliefs concerning behaviours associated with extrinsic motivation,

where receiving grades or approval, and desiring external rewards are seen as the means to an end and which are deemed to be separate from the learning (Harter & Jackson, 1992; Lei, 2010; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

This apparent polarization of behaviours linked to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation was also originally confirmed in explanations and descriptions associated with learning goals, namely mastery and performance goals. Mastery-goal oriented students are often described as being uninterested in their performance relative to others, where the personal development of abilities and the desire to acquire knowledge and understanding is more important. Mastery-goal oriented individuals are said to seek challenge and to use deep learning strategies or processes in an attempt to understand. Effort and resilience are also attributes associated with those who pursue or adopt mastery goals (Bouffard et al., 1998; Darnon et al., 2003; Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; Levy et al., 2004; Midgley et al., 2001; Murphy & Alexander, 2000; Valle et al., 2003). Dweck (1986) describes these as “adaptive motivational patterns” (p. 1040) in students’ learning. Students with a mastery-goal orientation are able to transfer knowledge and understanding to new learning situations and these students generally believe in incremental rather than entity theories of learning (Dweck, 1986).

This is in contrast to learning behaviours associated with performance-approach goals. If the polarizing explanations that have been suggested are accurate and students who adopt mastery-goals have primarily intrinsic motivations then performance-approach goals are associated with extrinsic motivations. Performance-approach oriented students are deemed to be allied to the need to judge performances, to compare grades and academic success in comparison to others and to avoid any negative judgements on abilities. Students who adopt a performance-approach to learning are concerned about performance, rather than simply understanding or acquiring new knowledge (Midgley et al., 2001). The inherent risk with this approach is that when performance is perceived as being below the standard desired or expected, students with a performance-approach goal approach may feel the risk to their ego or sense of self-worth is undermined and may focus on simply preserving their status (Bouffard et al., 1998; Valle et al., 2003).

Furthermore, it has been argued that students who take on performance related goals are less likely to use deep processing strategies and instead rely on superficial processing when attempting tasks. The implication of this approach is that the use of superficial processing strategies which include rote learning, memorising irrelevant facts and rehearsing information is not conducive to a greater understanding of ideas and concepts and may lead to lower retention of learned material (Nolen, 1988). This in turn may further erode a

student's confidence in their performance and concern about their social status within the classroom, making them vulnerable to learned helplessness when failing at a task believing that effort reveals a lack of ability. Students are also at risk of shifting towards a performance-avoidance orientation in the future (Brophy, 2004; Darnon et al., 2007; Dweck, 1986; Levy et al., 2004; Sungur & Senler, 2010).

Brophy (2005), analysed the different goals that students adopt, and noted "the early work on goal theory led to an apparent synthesis around the idea that mastery-goals are productive but performance-goals are counterproductive," which he calls a "simple generalization" (p. 168). Other researchers also tend to disagree with attempts to place goal orientations in pure opposition. They question whether it is feasible for those within a scholarly environment to be able to approach their studies in such a dichotomous way and reach the conclusion that it is improbable for students to be able to function within such clear divisions (Murphy & Alexander, 2000).

Performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals

The introduction of performance-goals to include approach and avoidance "strands" has meant a need to reassess some of the previous comments concerning the dichotomy of behaviours adopted. Performance-avoidance goals being described or explained as the adoption of goals where students avoid wanting to show their perceived lack of abilities and which are linked to student misbehaviour, including deliberately withdrawing effort, learned helplessness, procrastination, poor retention and shallow processing (Valle et al., 2003; Midgley & Urdan, 2001), which Sungur and Senler (2010) believe is in an attempt for students to "maintain their self-worth" (p. 320). Dweck (1986) portrays this as a "failure to establish reasonable, valued goals...that are potentially within one's reach" (p. 1040).

This separation of performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals has meant further clarification of behaviours and learning strategies. Much of the research on performance-goals strongly suggests that adopting avoidance goals are maladaptive for achievement (Brophy, 2005; Elliot & Church, 1997; Midgley & Urdan, 2001) as:

by the end of 2003, over 60 studies from 12 different countries had appeared in print...This research clearly documented and illustrated the importance of separating performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals, and placed the majority of the deleterious

consequences of performance-based goals on performance-avoidance goals (Elliot, 2005, p. 64).

Possible benefits of a performance-approach goal orientation

The introduction of performance-avoidance goals as a development of the understanding associated with performance-goals has meant that performance-approach goals have been considered in a more favourable light of late, inasmuch as performance-approach goals as a whole should not be entirely linked with maladaptive practices in learning (Brophy, 2005). For example, performance-goals have consistently predicted positive performance attainment and academic efficacy, (Elliot, 2005; Levy & et al., 2004; Midgley et al., 2001) in “some situations” and for “certain individuals” (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001, p. 707) and are not seen as maladaptive when achievement is the focus (Harackiewicz et al., 2000). Indeed, performance-approach goals are seen as positively adaptive in light of the considerations of older students who need to acquire good academic grades to be able to pursue higher levels of learning and education (Bouffard et al., 1998). Nevertheless, as performance-approach goals have been linked to superficial rather than deep learning strategies, Midgley et al., (2001) although affirming that superficial rather than deep learning strategies have a place in learning, question whether the “instrumental value is sufficient to conclude that performance-approach goals are good” (p. 78).

Given the increasingly competitive nature of education with “standardized” reporting of achievement, achievement and attainment tables, referred to in national media as “league tables”, created for public perusal in some countries (Hastings, 2006), it is not surprising that schools might gear their focus towards short term success and strategies related to achievement rather than instilling life-long learning practices in students (Midgley et al., 2001; Ireson, 2008). Although, schools working smarter, pressure being borne to under-achieving schools and better parental information can be seen as possible benefits of reporting on achievement in attainment tables (Muriel & Smith, 2011).

Mastery-avoidance goals

Using competence as a “conceptual centrepiece” Elliot and McGregor (2001) have further conceptualised the dichotomous and then trichotomous (to include performance-avoidance goals) notion of a learning goal theory framework by the use of the term a 2x2 framework.

The framework consists of a mastery and performance element and an approach and avoidance type. They suggest that a mastery-goal approach to learning contains an avoidance factor in the same way as does performance-goal theory and operates in many achievement settings. Therefore, the term mastery-avoidance goal has now been added to achievement goal theory by researchers. Elliot and McGregor acknowledge that the term “mastery-avoidance” can appear counter-intuitive in respects of the traditional notions of what a mastery-goal approach consists but give examples to support the term relating to people wanting to maintain competence, especially those linked to high-profile sports, those in business and members of the elderly community who may not want to perform worst than they have done in the past. They also suggest the inherent nature of some individuals who have a perfectionist approach to tasks makes it likely that they could use a mastery-avoidance approach (Brophy, 2005; Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

This is consistent with the work of Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2000) who also define those with a mastery-avoidance orientation as “students who are “perfectionistic” and never want to be wrong or incorrect relevant to their own high self-standards” (p. 201). Linnenbrink and Pintrich also suggest that “avoid mastery” [their term] students, unlike mastery-goal approach students use more surface rather than deeper cognitive processes and strategies, which is similar to performance-avoidance students. Pintrich (2000) commented on the difficulty in attempting to conceptualize a mastery-avoidance goal but acknowledged that straightforward dichotomies and oppositional categories are less useful for the understanding the complexity of the connection and the association between different goals and outcome and the development of theory and research associated with learning goal theory. Research in recent years concerning the 2x2 framework has proposed, albeit somewhat tentatively, that mastery-avoidance goals are not as adaptive as mastery-approach goals but are nonetheless more desirable than performance-avoidance goals (Baranik et al., 2010; Sideridis, 2008).

Multiple goal approach

The logical development for many researchers studying learning goals has been the advocacy of a multiple-goal approach for learning where a combination of mastery and performance goals is regarded as being most advantageous for learning and achievement (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001). In support of this Valle et al., (2003) posit that a “combination of multiple goals probably generate better academic results” (p. 82). Nevertheless, the use of “probably” reveals that they have some reservations regarding this

statement and they go on to warn of the need to explore a number of related aspects to multiple-goals before making any definitive conclusions to suggest a multiple-goal approach for learning is more adaptive and beneficial to students than either mastery or performance goal approaches.

As with statements that can be construed as too simplistic when suggesting a mastery goal is more beneficial, in terms of learning, than a performance-approach goal, the same could be said of interpretations that advocate a multiple-goal as the solution. For example, Harackiewicz et al., (2000) suggest that the goals themselves cannot be assimilated or combined into one coherent whole as interest, either mastery or performance *is* the goal but if both goals are positively approved or legitimated for learning then students are very likely to attain in outcomes related to both.

Elliot (2005) recommends a combination of the two goals but which distinguish between the strengths of the two goals. He notes “several studies indicated that ‘high mastery-high performance goal’ combination was linked to the best pattern of processes and outcomes ...although others supported the ‘high mastery-low-performance goal’ combination” (p. 58). This view is consistent with Midgley et al., (2001) who cite that “performance-goals are adaptive if mastery goals are also high” and believe in the “facilitative nature of performance goals when combined with mastery-goals (p. 81).

These observations tend to acknowledge, rather cautiously, the use of a multiple-goal approach to aid learning but accept the difficulty in seamlessly combining the two goals when attempting to create a multiple-goal theory to support achievement.

However, Brophy (2005) is altogether less supportive of the multiple-goal approach achieving adaptive learning outcomes. He suggests that for some students attempting to adopt a multiple-goal combination is too complicated and can overload mental cognition which results in not doing anything well due to focus being weakened as a result of combining two goals. A multiple-goal approach can also be especially difficult for struggling learners as the commitment to coordinate both goals means they need to work even harder than some of their peers. He concludes by stating “addressing multiple-goals simultaneously is appealing in theory but difficult to accomplish in reality” (p. 169).

Midgley et al., (2001) believe the adoption of mastery-goals – within a multiple-goal approach – would weaken or subvert the positive effects of performance-approach behaviours and pursuits. Barron and Harackiewicz (2001), although conceding that multiple-goal approaches may be beneficial to adolescents and adults, have concerns over the limited studies that have adopted a methodology that has allowed an adequate testing of both

perspectives, stating, “until a multiple-goal condition is compared with a single mastery-goal condition, we can only conclude that pursuing a single mastery-goal is more advantageous than pursuing a single performance-goal” (p. 707). Brophy (2005) has similar concerns, although accepting that some studies have suggested performance-goals could complement mastery-goals, he proposes the difficulties in concluding whether multiple-goals are affirmative is partly due to researchers induction and measuring of performance-goals.

The questions and issues surrounding goal theory and learning are not confined to the type of goal that is deemed most beneficial to achievement. Multiple-goal approaches bring to the fore other pertinent sources of debate and discussion. Studies have attempted to answer questions whether particular goals are chosen for specific tasks and situations or whether individuals have traits that naturally assign them to either a performance or mastery-goal approach. A trait can be defined as behaviour due to personality that is consistent over time and across situations (Weiner, 1985). Some studies have focused on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation rather than goal types (Harter & Jackson, 1992) but the conclusions are pertinent as the association between motivation types and goal types is well documented as discussed previously. Beliefs and attitudes of individuals suggest that traits may be constant over a long period. Seifert (1996) proposes that if an individual believes being successful means being the best and a particular goal, namely a performance-goal is adopted, then it “seems reasonable to expect such a belief is stable over time” (p. 74). However, there is no mention here about whether students adopting a mastery-approach to learning can be deemed as having a mastery trait or whether they believe having mastery over a task is perceived as success. On the other hand, he concedes that since the “classroom environment can influence the goals students pursue; it may also be the case that those goals are not stable over time” (p. 74). This cautious assertion, suggesting traits can be stable, is tentatively supported by conclusions from Harter and Jackson (1992) in their research on trait versus non-trait conceptualizations of intrinsic/extrinsic motivational orientation when they state that for some, motivational orientation is “extremely consistent and therefore trait-like over situation and time” (p. 228). Also, Levy et al., (2004) suggest that social status and membership of specific groups are generally stable, especially during adolescence but concludes that achievement goals differ depending on subject domains. These comments appear to support the earlier view that students “require a sense of relevance or connectedness to the task and the content” (see p.2). Over recent years the general consensus is that motivation and goal adoption depends more on the subject and subject content than on any specific trait characteristics (Murphy & Alexander, 2000).

Goal orientation and adoption

While there are many influences and variables involved in the students' development and adoption of goals to work towards a specific outcome, conditions within the classroom are key influences on what goal type is adopted (Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Generally, if there is an emphasis on evaluation within the classroom, which can be linked to curriculum needs, the adoption of performance-goals is greater, that is, if students need to attain certain grades for specific academic outcomes.

Another key influence on the choice of goals students adopt is through their teacher. Students may choose goals based on the specific tasks set, their teachers' interest within the subject area, a teacher's pedagogical approach, whether the learning environment is perceived as threatening or safe or if there is an emphasis on competition (Brophy, 2005). Therefore, teachers' ability to create a sense of belonging within the classroom (Ames, 1992) can help students focus on developing understanding, and should result in the adoption of mastery-goals (Church et al., 2001; Walker & Greene, 2009). Ciani et al., (2010) suggest "supportive environments (e.g., mastery-goal structures) can buffer the negative effect of personal vulnerability (e.g., performance-goals) on achievement-related outcomes" (p. 89).

Nevertheless, Brophy (2005) suggests "under natural classroom conditions, performance-goals are a low-incidence phenomenon" (p. 171). The paucity of performance goal conditions, he believes is more desirable as students need to focus on curricular goals and collaboration rather than on competing with one another.

On the other hand, "natural classroom conditions", those that avoid adopting normative assessing of ability, with a link to collaboration and mastery may not exist at certain stages within a student's schooling. In particular, as students' progress from primary and intermediate school settings, and into high school and towards higher education, the emphasis changes from attaining mastery, the desire and motivation to learn new skills, to showing ability to referenced criteria and grades especially when attempting to acquire university places, vocational courses and the like. For many students, at this stage in their education, achieving results and qualifications are more paramount to future aspirations (Church et al., 2001). As students move through the school years, they tend to perceive the relevance of theirs and others' ability in relation to performance and, as Harter and Jackson (1992) state, "students perceived a definite increase in competition, focus on grades, external evaluation, teacher control and concern with their academic ability" (p. 227) and with it, a propensity for extrinsic motivation over intrinsic motivation and therefore performance-goals

over mastery-goals (Murphy & Alexander, 2000). Although acknowledging the adoption of performance-avoidance goals is more prevalent with students who struggle academically, Brophy (2005) suggests that capable and confident students in adolescence are more concerned about social comparison and reputation and may also adopt performance-goals over mastery-goals if they feel vulnerable.

Social goals

This reiterates the view that social relationships become even more relevant and significant to students in adolescence, which may also have an effect on what learning goals approaches student assume. Studies suggest that although the social components of student motivation were included in the early construction of achievement goal theory, only more recently has research begun to consider again the importance of social cognitions and relationships to achievement goal theories (Boekaerts et al., 2006; Levy et al., 2004).

As students mature and spend more time with peers, they tend to spend less time with parents. Social activities outside of school increase as students move through adolescence, (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Peer friendships and relationships become more important for students to help form identities of “self”. At school, there are suggestions that students choose groups that relate to their perceived competence in their own abilities, that students would be generally predisposed to prefer to cooperate with peers who they perceive as similar to themselves and would likely reject peers whom they perceive to be different (Levy et al., 2004), what Valle et al., (2003) describe as “social reinforcement goals” (p. 75).

Intimacy goals, described as students wanting to form positive relationships with peers (Ryan et al., 1997) become important to some, and performance-approach and performance-avoidance oriented students, who are concerned with the way they are perceived by others, may be more likely to employ social identity processes to protect and enhance their self-worth (Levy et al., 2004). Nevertheless, studies suggest that high school in particular becomes a less motivating time for many. The changes in instructional practices, less intimacy with teaching staff due to fewer opportunities for one-on-one interaction, less control of autonomous activities, the focus on performance-goals over mastery-goals for example contribute to less interest in education for some (Mansfield, 2010; Meece et al., 2006; Wigfield & Wagner, 2005). Therefore, it is argued that when “situations in which the learning activity is not very stimulating or interesting, many social reasons are needed for the

student to feel motivated” (Valle et al., 2003, p. 73). Urdan and Maher (1995) suggest that social goals defined by them as “perceived social purposes for academic achievement” (p. 213) are pertinent to students, but in particular, are important to the achievement of adolescent students and that there is a need for social goals, in all their different guises, to be considered as playing a crucial part in achievement goal motivation. In conclusion they suggest that a “consideration of social goals will help us develop a fuller understanding of motivation and achievement in school settings” (p. 236).

Student voice in research

Improvements concerning the learning and welfare of students are always being sought by those involved either directly or indirectly within student education. Student voice has become an important and integral factor in considerations concerning educational reform. Change from “without” is no longer considered viable on its own; those affected by change need the right to have their say about their education and their futures. Greater engagement by students can only be achieved if students feel their views are respected by others in education and that all voices are heard. Until recently, the views and voices of students had not been deemed as particularly salient to educational reform (Cook-Sather, 2006).

The rights for students to have a voice

In recent years there has been a change in attitude regarding whether children are perceived as having a relevant contribution to society and their own lives. This is in contrast to the traditional view of childhood which fails to take into account that young people have the capabilities and the resourcefulness to consider issues that affect them. Historically, the general public’s view has meant that people have not believed in the idea that young people could or should contribute to discussions about their wellbeing and the things that affect them both at school and in society generally (Ruddock & Flutter, 2000). That the rights, the views and opinions of children are perceived as becoming more crucial, more acceptable in creating a fairer society can be seen in the vision of the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child which “gives children a right of participation, that is, a right to express their views, to be heard and to take part in decisions that affect them” (Robinson & Taylor, 2007 p. 5) and what Ruddock and Flutter (2000) describe as an “additional source of legitimacy” (p. 81).

Engagement through student voice

Much research on students' contribution to their education, what has been termed "student voice", explores the issues relating to how students could and should be involved in their education. Research considers the ways in which students can be involved in shaping their learning and how they can contribute to educational policy from a local to a more universal level. It also explores some of the issues relating to students actually being heard and whether, up until now, their "voices" have been taken seriously. Many believe that transformation can take place if the views of those who attend are listened to carefully and properly, what De La Ossa (2005) terms "primary resources to inform," and declares "student views have the potential to enrich discourse about school success" (p. 27).

In particular, within school contexts, there has been a "current zeitgeist commitment to student voice" (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 6). This is partly due to legal changes that have improved children's rights as consumers, and include UN legislation on the Rights of the Child; in the UK, the OFSTED framework "Evaluating Educational Influence 2000", changes in the 2002 Education Act, and more recently the policy "Every Child Matters" (DfES 2006). In the United States the federal legislation entitled "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) 2002 was incorporated into law to further support giving all students an equal right to educational opportunities. Due to these initiatives and policies, those engaged in the education of children have begun to involve students in the decision making processes, as they understand that student voice is a valuable resource in helping make schools a place that is relevant to the lives of those who attend. Students feel empowered and more motivated to engage in their learning if they have had the opportunity to contribute to their own educational experience or research about their experiences when this is explored collaboratively (Bourke, 2008; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2007).

Creating a collaborative context

Nevertheless, for students to feel that they can contribute as equals within a school environment, and for their views, ideas and opinions to be taken seriously and with the full weight and relevance they deserve, there must be a climate conducive to cooperation and power sharing. Robinson and Taylor (2007) state that schools "need to create a climate in which students feel at ease to voice their opinions" and "if schools are to listen to the whole student body there should not be situations where schools favour those with a language and

culture similar to the adults within the school” (p. 11). Research involving students can only be relevant if those who ultimately make the decisions regarding students’ learning and wellbeing recognise that “schools are places in which voices carry, and carry in different bandwidths...but it is in the counter weight and balance of the school acoustic that cultures thrive or whither” (MacBeath, 2006, p. 203). Much of the research exploring student voice as a vehicle for change highlights the importance of listening to voices which may not resonate with those in power, not to dismiss those voices that are vociferous or discordant and not to focus purely on those who are eloquent and lucid (Bragg, 2001; Fielding, 2004; Robinson & Taylor, 2007).

Student voice in educational research

“Historically, the student voice has been silenced in educational research, practice and policy” (Bourke, 2008, p. 156). However, research and researchers who focus on students’ learning recognize that students have distinctive perceptions on their learning and teaching, and that students should be afforded the opportunity to influence the direction of future dialogue and conversations regarding their education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Cook-Sather, 2007; De La Ossa, 2006). For teachers, researchers and those involved in education and educational reform, understanding how students’ learn, what motivates and engages them, what reasons students cooperate or fail to cooperate and engage, in other words, knowing what they think regarding their education and their learning is fundamental, if advancement and improvement is to take place for students (Bourke, 2008).

It is worth noting Fielding (2004) who states that “we can only hesitantly speak on behalf of others unlike ourselves because we lack not only an understanding, but the means to understand those whose interests and causes we would represent” (p. 300). Nevertheless, to avoid attempting to connect with, to listen to, to respect and accept the voices of students would be a backward step concerning educational reform. “However, listening to pupils itself is not sufficient, it is what happens with the information, what is done with it that is also of great importance” (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 14).

Conclusion

As identified in the literature review, achievement goals, and in particular issues relating to mastery and performance goals, have become an important area of motivational studies

relating to educational contexts in recent years (Meece et al., 2006; Midgley et al., 2001). Research in the field of achievement motivation continues to explore whether mastery-goals are more adaptive for learning than performance-goals. As noted by Pintrich (2000), the original dichotomy of mastery and performance-goals has been broadened to include performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals, and more recently mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance goals (Elliott, 2005). This advances the intensity surrounding the concept of whether mastery-goals are indeed more beneficial to learning than performance-goals. The introduction of a multiple-goal theory with some researchers advocating a combination of the two initial goals to best support learning (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001) simply further highlighted the fact that achievement goal theory is a complex area in the field of motivational studies. Numerous variables have been identified that may have an influence on the goals that students adopt in their learning, and as a secondary school teacher I was interested in exploring what the variables could be and how they might influence students' learning goal preferences. The acknowledgement that the social environment in which students study and learn is also a crucial factor in determining what goal orientations they adopt has added to this complex puzzle.

Furthermore, individual teachers' pedagogical approach, schools' academic achievements and results may also influence the way in which a school approaches and creates a learning ethos. In particular, high schools have to balance the need to fulfil its requirements of the curricular with the needs for adolescents to have greater autonomy in their learning, at a time when the opportunities to support mastery-goal objectives are perceived as being more constrained (Harter & Jackson, 1992).

Although research associated with achievement motivation and in particular learning goal theory has identified and established the differences between mastery and performance-goal theory (Ames, 1992; Brophy, 2005), few studies have focused on whether students make a preference of one learning goal approach over another. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore whether students had a preference for one specific learning goal approach over another, whether students consciously and deliberately choose one learning goal in preference of another. In this way, those educators working in high school (secondary school) contexts might understand how to support their students more, and be more informed around targeting their discussions with students about their motivations to learn.

The literature review intentionally focused on learning goal theory, rather than one of the many other crucial aspects associated with motivation and learning. This study set out to explore whether the participating students had a dichotomous approach between mastery or

performance-goals towards their learning or whether this approach was subject to students having a multiple goal approach.

Furthermore, the study attempted to examine whether students explicitly and consciously sought out one learning goal over another. It did not directly enquire *how* students chose one goal in preference to another or how students may have chosen a multiple-goal approach to their studies in preference to a mastery or performance-goal approach. Rather, it was more concerned with attempting to understand whether students simply *did* choose a goal and whether it was an intentional choice to construct such an approach towards their studies. In this way, students' perspectives became a key approach within the methodology as their views formed the focus of the study.

The focus within the literature review on the social aspects associated with motivation and learning was explored within the study with the questions relating to the social influences on students' learning goal preferences. As identified in this literature review there are motivational influences of social goals on learning, and this study explored whether these influenced students' learning goal choices.

The next chapter elaborates on the research questions, and explores the methodological approach and methods used to illuminate this area.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study explored how students related to the learning goal approaches they use in an attempt to facilitate their learning. Gaining the perspective of the students was paramount in the exploration of the research questions. The students' ideas and opinions were the most significant means in which to explore the research questions because the students' views allowed me, as a teacher-researcher, to explore the issue from a different perspective and point of view; to be the other side of the "lens" was crucial in enabling me to interpret how students approached their learning. Students' input is vital for research, as it acknowledges how invaluable the role students and participants play in keeping research relevant and grounded. Also, students' involvement acknowledges research as a two-way process, where students' reciprocity is valued and that no one in the research process is meant to have a more privileged position. Therefore, in order to achieve a better understanding of the various learning goal approaches students adopted or preferred, a methodological approach that actively engaged students in the process was required. In addition, it was necessary for students to provide ongoing advice within the research, and to this end, students were involved in creating an advisory group (Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Ruddock & Flutter, 2000). This Student Advisory Group (SAG) was used to aid any "reconstruction" of the data gathering procedure used. Although, not co-constructing the data methods within the study, the SAG was integral in shaping the reconstructed questionnaire and interview schedule. Greater detail relating to the input of the SAG and the recommendations they made will be part of the following chapter.

Conceptual framework

As Cresswell (2007) states, "researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms or set of beliefs to the research project" (p. 15) and with their paradigms "alternative knowledge claims" (p. 17). As a teacher, the statement from Adams (2007) "that learners shape their own minds through their own actions within given socio-cultural settings; in orientation, learning as construction" (p. 245) is consistent with my own experiences around student learning. As a teacher-researcher attempting to learn about the goal approaches of a specific cohort of students in a particular school setting, these principles hold true for me as a learner also.

Indeed, Boekarts et al., (2006) believe that modern teaching practices have moved away from the idea that students are given knowledge by those who are informed and knowledgeable, namely, teachers, and that both teachers and students construct their own structure on new information and therefore teaching practices are “increasingly based on the principles of social constructivism and community of learners” (p. 33). With these views in mind, I attempted through the research process to construct a view, and “make an interpretation of what [I] find...shaped by [my] own experiences and background” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 21). Therefore, it is important for me to acknowledge that all writing is positioned and is only a particular representation of what we view or what we understand (Creswell, 2007). Consistent with this view, the methodology of this study was associated with social constructivism.

Participants

This study involved 26 students (19 female and 7 male), with five of these students also participating in a Student Advisory Group (SAG). Originally, participants were invited to be involved in the study from a cohort of 185 Year 9 students (86 female and 99 male) enrolled in a lower-middle decile 4 secondary school situated in the lower North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The nature of the study, the rationale behind the research and the procedure that was to take place was explained to students at a junior assembly. All Year 9 students were invited to be involved in the study. Students were given a Student Consent Form (appendix A) and a Student and Student Advisory Group (SAG) Information Sheet (appendix B), which were hand delivered the following day by me as the researcher in students’ lesson time having received agreement from the principal and the teaching staff for this to take place. A Parent/Guardian Information Sheet and Consent Form (appendix C) was posted home to parents and caregivers asking for their permission for students’ involvement in the study. Parents’ permission, as well as students’ permission, was needed for students to be considered for inclusion in the Student Advisory Group (SAG) and the research. The first six students returning the Student Consent Form and the Parent Consent letter created the Student Advisory Group (SAG).

The procedure of obtaining consent

By posting letters home to parents and caregivers, it was anticipated that they would receive details about the study independently of those in their care. It was expected that this would result in parents and caregivers receiving a clear and concise explanation of the study and the procedure as soon as possible after my explanations to students. Also, as parents and caregivers needed to give consent separately of the student, this appeared to be a sensible way of maintaining a balanced approach to gaining consent. In other words, it was imagined that by parents and caregivers receiving their consent letter immediately after my having explained the rationale and procedure behind the study to students, it would allow both parents and students time to comprehend and fully grasp the details in their own time. This may have resulted in students and parents (caregivers) taking the time to discuss the nature and intentions of the study which it was anticipated would result in agreement regarding students being involved in the study. It was also envisaged that by delivering details of the study separately to students and parents would result in less lost and mislaid Parent Consent forms.

By hand delivering the Student Consent Form and the Student Advisory Group (SAG) Information Sheet to students personally, I wanted to show that I was committed to having their individual involvement in the research and that it would reinforce the explanation of the research from the previous day's assembly. It also allowed me to answer any questions that students may have considered following the previous day's assembly.

Rationale

The research adopted a case study design and ethnographic methodology. Chadderton and Torrance (2011) believe that a case study design "is very much within the 'social constructivist' perspective of social science" (p. 54) which aligns with my conceptual framework. As a teacher who has worked at the participating school for a number of years, there were a number of unique features to consider when approaching this particular research study. The cultural, geographical and historical characteristics of the school allow it to be perceived both in the local and regional areas as very much a community school. Students identify the school as an integral part of their culture and community as do staff. Murphy and Alexander (2000) describe "particular educational groups as communities [because of] their

shared purposes or codes of conduct” (p. 3). The research was exploratory in nature focusing on an aspect of the school environment, in this case, the learning environment, but “as it exists in its real life context, [therefore] providing a detailed account’ of students views and opinions” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 49). Therefore, the year group’s views were the “case” itself.

Case study design

Creswell (2007) when defining case study research states that it “involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (p. 73). An advantage of the case study approach is that it can fit well with the needs of small-scale research through concentrating effort on one research site (Denscombe, 1998). The research site in question is a local secondary school in a tight community.

Therefore, this particular case was “bound” by a number of relevant features. It was bound by place, inasmuch as the school itself was vitally relevant to the study; the setting of the school, both geographically and culturally, is crucial. It is close to some of the major cities of the lower North Island but it also has its own geographical and cultural identity. Students at the school within this setting have certain values, attitudes and beliefs separate from neighbouring schools and communities, *because of* the setting of the school. Therefore, as Denscombe (1998) states, “the case study will actually be on the activities, processes and relationships that go on within those physical areas” (p. 38). From my personal point of view, the setting is also of paramount importance as it is the views and opinions of students at this specific school which is of interest to me. As a teacher-researcher at the secondary school, the findings will be highly relevant for my future teaching within this school. As mentioned previously, it is my belief that this particular school has unique features relating to its community aspect and as I will continue teaching at the school after my research, the study becomes even more salient.

Another way in which the study was “bound” was by age of the participants: all students were from the Year 9 cohort. Age and school year group can be seen as a relevant “bounded system” and therefore has contextual considerations, inasmuch as the views, opinions and ideas of a specific cohort in the school were being sought, focusing on their “different types of everyday words and actions” (Davis, 1998, p. 327). Furthermore, another way in which the case study design was a relevant and suitable design for the study was because as Yin (2003) states, “you would use the case study method [if] you deliberately

wanted to cover contextual conditions – believing they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p. 13). The context of the study was apposite; the research focused on one particular school, in one particular setting, with a cohort of students, who in my view, are influenced by the close-knit community of the school (i.e., by actions, behaviours, attitudes and influences of those in the immediate vicinity, namely those who also attend the school). Therefore, the case study was, as Yin (2003) describes “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question...about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9). In respect of the case study design, the “how” relates to how the students in the study approached their learning, (i.e., what goals do they adopt?) and the “why” question was simply, why did students in the study, adopt or prefer specific goals – if in fact they did adopt or prefer specific goals – when approaching their learning? The case study design was complemented by an ethnographic approach, as “the entire culture-sharing group on ethnography may be considered a case” Cresswell, 2007, (p. 72). Further to this Chadderton and Torrance (2011) state “educational case study is aligned with and derives much of its rationale and methods from ethnography” and suggest “current practice can probably be said to include ethnographic case studies” (pp. 54-55).

An ethnographic approach

The use of an ethnographic approach was pertinent to the study as “ethnography is a way of studying a culture-sharing group [and] ethnographers study the meaning of the behaviour, the language and the interaction among members of the culture sharing group” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 68-69). The research focused on the learning goals of individuals but not in isolation. Ethnographers “are interested in describing the culture of a group of people and learning what it is like to be a member of the group from the perspective of the members of the group” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 49). The approach to this study contained elements of ethnography. The research conclusions, through the data collection methods of questionnaires, interviews and the Student Advisory Group’s (SAG) discussion, attempt to interpret the individual and combined meanings of students’ participations (Silverman, 2000). This view relating to interpreting both the combined and individual meanings and the relevance of an ethnographic approach in the circumstances is further supported by Denscombe (1998) who believes “ethnography tends to emphasize the importance of *understanding things from the point of view of those involved*” [author’s emphasis] (p. 69).

The research partly focused on the interactions between learners, and to a certain extent the way in which interaction influences the learning and learning approaches of individuals but within a classroom and therefore a social context. Therefore, the “ethnographic significance is derived socially, not statistically from [my] discerning how ordinary people in particular settings make sense of their everyday lives” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 158).

Procedure

After gaining ethical approval from the Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee (SEPP/2012/29 RM 19379) a letter was sent to all parents/caregivers (legal guardians) asking for parental consent for students to take part in a questionnaire analysing students’ learning goal orientations and the follow-up interviews. The parental consent letter included the rationale behind the research. Students, as explained previously, were given a Student Consent Form and a Student and Student Advisory Group (SAG) Information Sheet whilst at school, as this was logistically a simpler and more efficient procedure. The proposed return time was anticipated as being of approximately one week’s duration (for both parent/guardian and student consent forms) and depended upon the speed and number of forms being returned. However, the actual return time for consent forms took much longer than originally anticipated. As I conducted the research I wrote a journal log of reflection notes to outline my deliberations of the research process (appendix D). The notes from this phase of the research best sums up my concerns at the time. These notes describe the rationale for the separation of parent and student consent forms:

I have some concerns over the procedure I took regarding the separation of students’ consent forms/information sheets and parents’ form and have wondered whether it may have been better, logistically, at least, to have sent all forms to parents. I am wondering whether if I had proceeded in this way that I may have got more consent forms back seeing as both forms are together in one place at one time. Only time will tell. Nevertheless, by handing out forms to many students personally I am hoping the connection, visual as much as anything will help with returns. And it says to students that they have the control over their involvement rather than appearing to transfer power to guardians over the final say – even though if both forms had gone in the post together, students still have to sign theirs individually. However, knowing how students misplace forms – having worked in schools for over a decade – I know the return rate. I am hoping as well that perhaps there might be some dialogue or discussion between parents and students by them having separate forms. (Research reflection notes; 9.8.12)

My experience clearly mirror the views of Dockett and Berry (2011) who state, “promoting research contexts where young children are positioned as competent to make decisions about participation involves working closely with parents/guardians and encouraging them to share the responsibility for decisions about consent and assent with their children” (p. 237).

However, Silverman (2000) takes a positive view when reflecting upon changes that may take place when carrying out research. He states, “what happens ‘in the field’ as you attempt to gather your data is a source of data rather than just a technical problem in need of a solution” (p. 35). The actual number of consent forms eventually returned (n=26) within the revised time frame had an effect on the number of students who were eventually involved in the study and resulted in a reconsideration of the rationale and ultimately a slight change in the methods of the study. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Teaching-staff involvement

The principal and the teaching staff were informed of the study and were asked to give consent for me to undertake the research. The principal assented for me to undertake the study within the school and teaching staff gave me permission to administer the questionnaire and interview students within their lesson time (appendices E and F). Teachers at a staff meeting were informed of the motives behind both the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews. Originally teachers who were to administer the questionnaire were to re-explain to the students at an appropriate time and destination (in timetabled Year 9 subject lessons) the reasons for attempting the questionnaire, and also to inform the students that the survey was voluntary and that there were no right or wrong answers. They were also to reiterate that the students could cease their participation of the questionnaire, and therefore the research study, at any time they wished. However, as the number of participants who were eventually involved in the study were small (n=26; 19 female and 7 male), it seemed a more practicable solution to invite all students to a separate environment (in this instance an empty classroom) and for me personally to explain the procedure of the study. This occurred before students participated in completing the questionnaire.

Methods

The data collection instruments included the creation of a Student Advisory Group (SAG), a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The rationale and the methods for the data collection will be explained below.

The Student Advisory Group

A Student Advisory Group (SAG) was formed with five Year 9 students: one male and four female. Student ages ranged from 12-14; however, the majority of the students were aged 13. The role of the SAG was to offer advice and recommendations to me, the researcher, concerning the presentation, expression and clarity of the student questionnaire and the semi-structured interview questions. I needed to understand the students' perceptions and viewpoints of the research questions and to clarify with the SAG whether the questionnaire and interview questions were not too different, unexpected or inconsistent to their own views and ideas. As a result, there was a need for minor alterations to the wordings of the interview instrument as they were not clearly understood by all those in the SAG. Therefore the use of the SAG was constructivist in approach inasmuch as I wanted to construct a study that took into account the perspectives of those involved (Casas et al., 2012; Watson, 2001). Although the creation of the SAG was primarily to offer advice and recommendations to me concerning the appropriateness of the questionnaire and interview questions to those involved in the study, it must be acknowledged that "no adult, even the most skilled ethnographer, can replicate the richness of knowledge that is inherent in children's own understanding of their world and subcultures" (Kellett, 2011, p. 207). As a teacher-researcher, while I have an understanding of students' learning, I have less of an understanding of the worlds or the subcultures to which only students themselves can belong. This view allowed me to accept and appreciate that the students in this study were not only able to offer suggestions on how to improve the research but also, whether the suggestions and advice greatly changed the processes or not, that they were still an important and valid step in the design of the study. In other words, the creation of the SAG was to help provide opportunities for "meaningful participation" in the research (Skelton, 2007, p. 175).

Students were provided the information and details on how to join the SAG when initially presented with the Student and Student Advisory Group (SAG) Information Sheet (appendix B). The research required parents' consent for both the main study and their child's

participation in the SAG. Therefore, an additional box was presented on the Parent/Guardian Information Sheet and Consent Form for parents to indicate if they were also consenting for their child to participate in the SAG (appendix C). Further to this, the Student Consent Form (appendix A) included a tick box for students to indicate whether they consented to join the SAG. Initially, six students were invited to form the SAG. Those that met the criteria and who had parent consent and indicated their own informed consent were chosen to form the SAG. I had held a previous meeting about the research with all Year 9 students explaining that between four to six students would be invited to join the SAG. Five students were invited to join the SAG. This was due to a number of students, who would have been eligible, returning the consent forms on the same day, making it impossible to accept one student over the requests of others seeing they had returned the form at the same time.

All five students, who formed the SAG (M:03), (F:05), (F:07), (F:12) and (F:16) were present at the first SAG meeting which took place on the 24th February 2012 for sixty minutes. While, it was planned that two SAG meetings might be required, only one meeting occurred because the students' recommendations concerning the student questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were completed at the first meeting. Both the members of the SAG and I agreed that a second meeting was deemed unnecessary.

On meeting with the students who formed the SAG, I reiterated the information included on the informed consent form which allowed students to leave the SAG at any time. It was clearly explained to all members of the SAG that at any time if they wished to remove themselves from the meeting, and therefore the SAG itself, that this would be entirely within their rights and would be totally acceptable. None of the students within the SAG chose to leave and all members were actively involved and contributed throughout the sixty minutes it took the meeting.

Student Questionnaires

The questionnaire, as a data collection method, was used firstly to help generate an understanding of students' attitudes towards the motivational intent behind their learning and secondly to support my attempts to identify students with specific learning goal approaches. Originally, the justification was to enable me to identify students with specific learning goal orientations (through the analysis of the questionnaire responses) and allow me to invite students with specific learning goal orientations to interview. After identifying students as having either a mastery-goal, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal

approach based on their responses to the questionnaires, 15 were to be invited for interview. However, as the number of students who were involved in the study was relatively low, (n=26) it was decided that all participants would be interviewed. This did have an impact on the study and will be discussed later in the chapter.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire (appendix G) had a number of sub-headings relating to areas of relevance for the study. The sub-headings included the following topic areas: mastery-goals (section A), performance-approach goals (section B), performance-avoidance goals (section C) and social goals (section D). The format for items on the questionnaire was on a Likert-type design six point scale. The responses ranged from strongly agree, mostly agree, agree, disagree, mostly disagree, and strongly disagree. It must be acknowledged that sample extracts from appendices of articles were analysed to aid in the creation of the questionnaire that was administered. (Kover & Worrell, 2010; Mansfield, 2010; Tapola & Niemivirta, 2008; Valle et al., 2003). However, the questionnaire was created, rather than attempt to use an already validated questionnaire in use due to my understanding of, and “suitability of the technique of a particular setting [rather] than with the standardization of the technique across different populations” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 161). The questionnaire was developed specifically for this research. It was hypothesised consistent with previous studies (Harter & Jackson, 1992; Sungur & Senler, 2010), that there would be a range of reported goal types.

Analysis and changes to the student questionnaire

When meeting with the students who formed the SAG I explained the procedure that would take place at the meeting. The SAG members were given a pilot copy of the student questionnaire, the content of which analysed students' learning goal orientations (see appendices G and J). The draft copy of the student questionnaire was given to students to allow them, at their leisure, to analyse it. They were asked to highlight on their individual questionnaire any areas that they believed were unclear, lacked clarity or which needed further explanation. Once all members had completed their own individual reading of the questionnaire, an open discussion took place which enabled all members of the SAG to voice their opinions, ask questions and suggest recommendations to me.

Initially, the SAG attempted the questionnaires individually without any researcher feedback or input. They completed the questionnaire within a reasonable amount of time (between five and ten minutes). The feedback centred on whether the wording of the statements in the questionnaire was clear and understandable. Subsequently we discussed possible options for changing the questionnaire. These included different ways to present their answers, for example, a yes/no option and also to explore where questions did not seem relevant to them within the context of the surrounding questions.

Whilst having the procedure explained to them, reading over the questionnaire and discussing any possible recommendations to the questionnaire, students appeared reserved, very quiet and non-committal. Initially, it was difficult to get the students to engage in a “critical” way to the questionnaire, and possibly they were reluctant to appear judgemental of a research tool. Therefore, I adapted my approach and attempted to make suggestions concerning some of the possible options available to the students if they felt changes to the questionnaire would improve it. At this point, I read over the questions to the students whilst they focused on the draft questionnaire. The students unanimously agreed that the wording of the questions and the format of the questionnaire were satisfactory. Apart from removing the phrase “sample – not to be included in the study” from the pilot questionnaire top sheet, the student questionnaire remained the same (appendix K). I therefore focused on the interview questions to be used in the follow-up interviews and the SAG felt some of these questions might need rewording. These changes are discussed in the following section.

Anonymity of participation of questionnaire

Initially, there was concern about the anonymity concerning the administration and collection of questionnaires. Originally, teaching staff were to administer questionnaires in targeted lessons. The concern was that both those who gave consent to participate in attempting the questionnaire would be present along with those who had not given consent to participate. Although there would have been no suggestion of student confidentiality being undermined, it would have been difficult to keep the details of those involved in the questionnaire anonymous, and impractical to accommodate discrete groups of students in different parts of the school. However, as the numbers involved in the research study were ultimately relatively small, as declared previously, (n=26) I was able to accommodate them in a separate classroom at an appropriate time to administer the questionnaire. All 26 students attempted the questionnaire.

Student interviews

Semi-structured interviews enabled me to explore in greater depth the themes and issues relevant to students and the reasons for their choices concerning their learning goal orientations. Boekaerts et al., (2006) in their study exploring contextual factors in the classroom and goal-directed behaviour suggest in the conclusion to their study that in order to establish what goals motivate students' actions and behaviours we need to ask them.

Student interview design

The semi-structured interviews were designed so as to explore students' overall attitudes towards school and also to explore the influences that motivated students in their learning. It consisted of an introduction, thanking students for participating in the interview and confirming that students were happy to continue with the interview process. It also reassured students that they were able to stop the interview if they wanted to at any time. Following from this, the focus was on what influences students believed had an impact on their learning; these included influences relating to how they approached their study and whether peers and friends had an impact on their learning (appendix H). The sub-headings of the semi-structured interview consisted of the following:

- Confirmation of goal orientation
- General overview/student perception of school
- Perceptions of influence on learning
- Social goals

Analysis and changes to the semi-structured interview questions

I explained to the SAG the format of the study; the questionnaire and the individual follow-up interviews. A copy of the semi-structured interview questions was given to all members of the SAG to review. The students appeared slightly awkward and apprehensive whilst I was in the room and therefore to allow students greater freedom to critique the interview questions, I left the room to arrange food and refreshments and returned after approximately 20 minutes duration. On my return the students appeared more relaxed; they were livelier and more animated. By offering students the "freedom" to discuss ideas without the perceived "restriction" of an adult's company may have allowed "peers to act as sounding

boards [which] provides a further layer of ethical scrutiny” within the research (Kellett, 2011, p. 213).

Students offered a number of minor changes to the original interview sheet. These consisted of the following:

- Question 2 changed from “Is this a usual approach for you?” to “Is this a usual way for you to approach your learning?”
- Question 7 was further clarified by adding the words “*brothers and sisters*” after siblings. Therefore the question changed from “What helps you learn best at school? (Explore friends, siblings, teachers, resources, books, equipment etc.)” to “What helps you learn best at school? (Explore friends, siblings, e.g., brothers and sisters, teachers, resources, books, equipment etc.)”.
- Question 8 – the probes were made clearer by breaking the question into briefer full sentences rather than as a series of run-on phrases.
- Question 11 had changes to the probe. Initially, the probe that followed the question “What do you put that down to?” Was [Probe: Your study? Your attitude? Parent help? Teacher effectiveness?] This changed to include within the probe, [Teacher’s teaching? The effectiveness of the teacher’s teaching, i.e., is it the way the teacher teaches that helps you do well?]

After taking note of students’ recommendations, I read back over the changes to the semi-structured interview questions sheet so as to allow students to make further proposals. No more changes were suggested. The changes suggested were implemented and I used the revised questions sheet when interviewing all students (appendix I). The use of a pilot test, therefore, was used to verify comprehension of the items of the instrument and to seek alternatives to the wording of questions that were not suitably clear or understood by participants (Casas et al., 2012).

Although SAG recommendations for changes to the interview questions were minimal and they made no recommended changes to the layout, format or wording of the questionnaire, it was important that the students’ contributions were considered. Allowing students to be part of the process of being involved, of determining the relevance and pertinency of language and meaning in the study was crucial and as Cresswell (2007) states, often terms “defined by participants are of primary importance” (p. 19).

Data collection

Data collection included analysis of the questionnaire findings and coding and interpretation of the interview process. The method for analysis, coding and interpretation will be explained below.

Questionnaire analysis

All student questionnaires were included in the final analysis of student responses. The number of students who responded to each question resulted in a percentage terms for each response ranging from Strongly Agree (1), Mostly Agree (2), Agree (3), Disagree (4), Mostly Disagree (5) and Strongly Disagree (6) and were recorded for the four sections, Mastery-oriented items (Section A), Performance-approach items (Section B), Performance-avoidance items (Section C) and Social-oriented items (Section D) (appendix L).

Interview analysis and coding

The student interviews took place a month after the completion of the questionnaire and over a three week period. The time lapse of a month between administering the questionnaire and starting interviews was partly due to the end of term school break . Other school-related activities at the beginning of term also meant a longer than anticipated interval before interviews took place. All interviews took place in a separate room within the school grounds during school hours. Due to restrictions in student and room availability, timetabled restrictions, (e.g., assemblies and other extra-curricular activities and school-related events), the number of interviews that were conducted ranged between one and four per day. All students who attempted the questionnaire consented to be interviewed.

Interviews were recorded and transcriptions of all interviews were completed (see appendix M for a sample of an interview transcription). All interview transcripts were labelled in the order in which they took place. For coding and identity purposes, each interviewee was designated an upper-case letter: M=male and F=female and a number, e.g., F:07. The number assigned to each student signifies the order in which they were interviewed, therefore, F:01 was assigned to the first student interviewed and denotes that they were female and M:04 identifies a male student and that he was the fourth male student to be interviewed.

The coding system used when analysing the interview responses used thematic categories taken from the initial questions presented to participants (appendix N). The questions for the semi-structured interviews were based on the concepts associated with the questionnaire and were related to learning goal theories and the possible motivational influences of students. After analysing data the results were separated, when appropriate, into different thematic groups. The following show a number of examples of the headings used when categorising students' interview responses:

- The ways in which students approach their learning – WAL
- The reasons that students attend school – RAS
- Defining having done well – DDW
- Social influences (peers) positive – SOCPOS

The thematic categories were further coded into relevant sub-categories. For example, RAS was broken down into the following: friends, education, future, e.g., job, university, etc. In a sense, categorical aggregation (Cresswell, 2007) was used to establish “a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings [would] emerge” (p. 163). By creating codes after transcribing the interviews allowed for a better understanding of the “bigger picture” and were more holistic. Also, as noted by LeCompte et al., (1982) “credibility is established by systematically identifying and examining all...consequential factors” (p. 33).

From this initial data the findings were analysed that consisted of “three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and terms and conclusion drawing/verification” (Silverman, 2000, p. 163). The data was reduced to issue-relevant meanings, and was then displayed through the tables revealing the foremost explanations from the students in the study, which was then interpreted to create conclusions from the data.

Reliability, validity and trustworthiness

A number of strategies were used in an attempt to promote qualitative research validity and to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of the study. The use of the case study design itself was used because as Denscombe (1998) acknowledges, “one of the strengths of the case study approach is that it allows the researcher to use...a variety of types of data and a variety of research methods as part of the investigation” (p. 31). Denscombe suggests that the case

study approach promotes the use of several sources of data which assists the validation of data through triangulation. Therefore, methods triangulation, through the use of a questionnaire, interviews and participant feedback were used in an attempt to validate the findings of the study. However, it must be acknowledged that the use of a number of measures in themselves do not make research more reliable, they alone do not validate findings but combined they allow the strengths of one method to counter the weaknesses of another. By using a variety of methods inconsistencies will arise, inasmuch as the data collected may not verify previous data, but so may convergence occur and it is through these differences that meanings can be made (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982). Therefore, in the present study, the use of interviews to support the questionnaires meant this multi-method approach allowed for further questioning to take place; data from the questionnaires were not comprehensively corroborated by the interviews and provided the opportunity for a different perspective on the data and the findings. This allowed for greater confidence of the study inasmuch as the findings were not too closely tied up with one specific data collection method and enhanced the validity of the data (Denscombe, 1998).

Reliability and validity were further enhanced through the creation and implementation of a Student Advisory Group (SAG). One of the ways in which the SAG helped was as Mathison (1988) suggests to “tap different domains of knowing” (p. 14). The feedback from the students in the SAG regarding the clarity, consistency and relevance of the statements in the questionnaire and of the questions of the semi-structured interview meant that the validity of students’ views was taken into account.

As a teacher-researcher interviewing Year 9 students, I have been reflexive about my role and have attempted to make sure I had a balanced approach when interacting with students, inasmuch as there was a need to try to elicit developed responses from students in the study, but without causing discomfort of any sort for the participants. Protocols concerning interviewing were adhered to throughout the process. An interviewer’s very presence may affect the behaviour of an interviewee, attempting to maintain a position of neutrality can create issues of hostility or indifference in informants or they may behave abnormally. In a school setting, students may desire or demand advocacy from researchers (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). This was an even more pertinent observation, considering I am a practising teacher at the school. One of the ways in which this issue can be “controlled” or mitigated against, is in the acknowledgement of such behaviours when analysing data in the conclusion to the study.

Acknowledging that researcher bias is a potential threat to validity will further enhance the validity of the research. However, acknowledgement of researcher bias is not alone sufficient to negate researcher bias. The use of low-inference descriptors was used in a further attempt to counteract any possible researcher bias; by having students' responses, which are raw data, recorded, enabled me to take a more systematic approach to interpreting students' opinions and ideas. The use of verbatim quotations of students' views and ideas from the interview process in the findings and discussions chapter of the study was another attempt at enhancing the validity of the study.

In an attempt to further negate the effects of researcher bias, I kept detailed reflection notes about my concerns, my interpretations and my understandings of the methods used to gain information for the research. The use of critical self-reflection recorded in my journal entries (see appendix D) about my potential biases and predispositions meant that through reflexivity I was mindful of, and was able to constantly monitor and attempt to control any biases I may have had (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Also, to further increase interpretive validity, I shared my interpretations of students' interview responses with students to check and verify that their viewpoints had been communicated clearly and interpreted correctly (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Therefore, participant feedback was used in a further attempt to promote research validity.

Ethics Consideration

This section explores the ethical consideration to this research. How those invited to participant in research are treated is central to research study and is one of the essential concerns that confront researchers (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). A number of issues relating to the ethics consideration of the research are explored below.

Assent and consent

The students in the study were all from a Year 9 cohort at a secondary school, and therefore were on average thirteen years-old at the time of the study. One of the ethics considerations was associated with the notion of whether the students were seen as being able to give consent to being involved in the study rather than assent. There are issues relating to the uncertainty of what constitutes being a child when associated with research and also there is the difficulty about who makes the decision whether or not children will take part in research

(Dockett & Berry, 2011). Therefore my study took the step of requiring consent from parents and caregivers and assent from the students in the study. Assent, as described by Dockett and Berry, is “an additional process [separate from parental consent] whereby children can exercise choice about their own research participation” (p. 233). Giving students the choice whether to partake in the study, even if the wishes of adults were affirmative gave students a position of empowerment, a sense of agency and recognised that children have the competency to make an informed choice (Davis, 1998; Dockett & Berry, 2011). Although this “double layer” of permission and approval to participate in the study, undoubtedly, in my view, affected the numbers who eventually participated in the research, inasmuch as throughout the consent process, I received a number of assent forms from children without parent consent and vice-versa, it did mean that those who agreed to be involved had the opportunity to make their own choices. Nonetheless, possibly some students who may have wished to be involved in the study were unable to do so due to parental refusal or indifference to the study. This is in itself an ethical issue as in some respects it does mean that children’s voices may have remained silent which could be construed as disempowering students purely because of their age, and results in adults making the decisions for students about the study.

Children’s position and perspective

Until the “United Nations Convention of the rights of the Child (1989) enshrine[d] the rights of children to form and express views freely in all matters that affect them,” taken from Alderson and Morrow (1995), the view of children was often that they were waiting to grow and become full human beings, and from this perspective often their views were not universally taken as being crucial and relevant to research. It is important the researchers work *with* children not *on* children, and to “challenge the traditional notions of developmental psychology that children *become* someone; children are *already* someone” Harcourt and Conroy (2011, p. 41). It is this premise that was central to all consideration of the research study.

Explanation of the process

It was important that students invited to participate in the study had a clear understanding of what the research entailed, how it was implemented and the implications of the results. Therefore explaining to the Year 9 students the reasons behind the study and the procedure

the study followed, whilst in a familiar context, was an important step for gaining their trust and keeping them at ease. It was important that when explaining the processes and procedures of the study that explanation was clear and as Alderson and Morrow (2011) state with an “emphasis on jargon-free age-appropriate language” (p. 59).

Also, having time to answer students’ questions personally, *before* and *after* consent forms were handed out and information letters sent, allowed students time to reflect about whether they felt suitably informed about the processes and the study, and therefore acted as a “conduit” in the process (Jones et al., 2005). This also enabled students an opportunity to discuss the study and processes with family, caregivers or guardians before making a decision whether to participate.

The importance of what has been termed “an insider” as one who is “evaluating their own work” (by being a teacher at the school) allowed me a greater advantage of gaining and keeping trust over “an outsider who tend to lose contact after a research study” (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 24).

Relationships and power balance

Students’ understanding that the research is unique to their learning environment is also an important ethical issue and gives a symbiotic nature to the relationship. Therefore, it was also important that students felt that their contribution to the research was important and vital to this study. Having a shared responsibility is crucial for students to feel equals in all aspects of their involvement of the study, in what has been termed as “ethical symmetry”. Christensen and Prout (2002) suggest, referring to ethical symmetry, the same ethical values should apply to children as they do for adults. Nevertheless, as mentioned previously, a child needing the consent of family or caregivers to participate in research tends to undermine this notion somewhat.

To further enhance students’ confidence and allow them to appreciate their essential involvement in the research, the researcher needs to assume less knowledge than participants and allow them to assume the role of expert. (Kellett, 2011; Shamin & Qureshi, 2010). As a reflective-practitioner and researcher, one whose very research is based on exploring students’ experience within a specific context, these ideas were a crucial tenet in my methodology.

Rights, anonymity and confidentiality

Throughout the procedure, and especially whilst interviewing, students need to be fully aware of their rights concerning their involvement, choice whether to continue and what information they are willing to share. These details were confirmed in a number of ways; firstly, through the information at assembly, then on the consent forms, throughout the interview process by my reiterating the conditions of the study and, finally, through editorial control when checking the interpretive statements I recorded.

The issue of anonymity is important. However, as the subject of the research was not in itself of a sensitive nature (although it must be acknowledged that some students' responses revealed that the questions may have caused some difficulty for them) it was not envisaged to harm students. Students' involvement in the study was anonymous inasmuch as those not participating in the study were unaware of those who were. At no time were any details of the students involved made public to others. Also, students' views were kept confidential, and there was no suggestion that the details were harmful to them or others. This rationale was expressed to all students who were involved in the interview process. Students' names were not used in the final report and number coding was used to identify the views and opinions of the students in this study. Data were kept confidential by means of being kept in a locked environment, either physically for paper records or by password for word-processed or digital components. All data will be destroyed after research has been published, in other words, after "academic examination, challenge and peer review" (VUW, Human Ethics Policy 4.12 (f) p. 9 pdf). Data will be kept for two years prior to its destruction.

Research issues

As with any research study, there were a number of pertinent issues to overcome. Those that may have had an impact on the study are described below.

Time constraints

No research study has an infinite period in which to complete all the procedures necessary to complete and conclude the study: this research study was no exception. The time constraints may have had an effect on the number of students involved in the study. As discussed previously within the chapter, procedures relating to the dispatching and receiving of both

parent and student consent forms were a concern. The issues regarding the procedure taken to manage the sending home and return of consent forms were recorded as part of my research reflection (see below). Parent consent letters were sent out and student information sheets and consent forms were given to students in six out of the eight form classes individually by me on the following day. The other two form classes received their student consent and information forms from form tutors the next day. Details from my research reflection notes reveal the difficulties of receiving consent and information forms from students and parents:

I was able to go round to 6 of the 8 form classes whilst in subject lessons as form classes and reiterated research and handed out both information sheets and student consent forms individually to students. By handed out the literature individually and personally, I felt it showed my commitment to their involvement in the study and assimilated me into their environment a little more. I am hoping that it will also allow a more symbiotic relationship by showing how involved I am in all aspects of the study. Also, it may enable some students to make a decision about whether to be involved in the study by my being around them and allowing them to familiarize themselves a little more with me as a researcher and a teacher, and giving them the perception of better autonomy in their decision making (research reflection notes, 9.8.12).

My concerns were also reported in my journal entries as I attempted to manage the returns from school.

Wed 15/8/12

Checked on returns – very disappointing, only 6 returns within a week. Sent another email out to form teachers reiterating procedure etc. Also, chatted casually to individual form teachers about responses. Did not want to put pressure on teachers considering their workload etc., (research reflection notes).

Mon 20/8/12

Returned to school for collection of consent forms. Went round to form spells to collect any returns personally. Gave “other” form to students who only had one signed etc., (research reflection notes).

Reprinted 5 copies of each information sheet/consent form/information sheet for all form teachers and placed in pigeonholes, separated and clearly labelled and reiterated the need for both forms needed. Have always explained how they, students and form teachers, can contact me if problems (research reflection notes).

Wed 22/8/12

Went to Year 9 assembly to remind students – and form teachers – about research. Explained again the details around the study (research reflection notes).

Time constraints meant that a deadline date was set for the return of consent forms to be part of the study. The deadline for the return of parent and student consent forms was

given for 3 weeks after the consent forms were handed out (the initial time scale of returns within one week was unrealistic). The rationale behind not waiting any longer for consent forms was simply that after numerous reminders about the study to both students and teachers, I believed that very few consent forms would be handed in after setting a deadline; this was indeed the case as there were no returns after the deadline was reached and passed. From a practical point of view, waiting any longer may have had serious repercussions on whether I would have been able to complete the study in the allotted timeframe. I wanted sufficient time to interview students and if necessary return at a later date within the school year to attempt further interviews with students.

A change to the original proposed method of sampling

The low number of consent forms returned meant that the response rate was relatively small in comparison to the size of the cohort. Of the 185 students, only 14% (n=26) of students were involved in the research. Although I acknowledge the view of Silverman (2000) who states, “what you lose in breadth you may gain in telling detail” (p. 69), it did mean that the method of sampling changed. Originally, data collection was to involve purposeful sampling. Initially, equal numbers of students identified as having either a mastery, performance-approach or performance-avoidance goal orientation were to be interviewed. These students would have been selected due to being able to provide information that addressed the purpose of the study and help inform an understanding of the research (Cresswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In particular, students with specific learning goal orientations would have allowed me to focus on whether specific learning goal adoptions were aligned with social goals and if so, what the possible reasons for this were. Due to the small number in the study, it meant that the need to exclude students was unnecessary. This meant that comprehensive sampling took place (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) and all students were involved in both the questionnaire and interview processes. However, what may be perceived as a limitation of the study may in fact not be the case. Ultimately, only a small number of students were identified as having either a mastery or performance-goal approach. It could be argued that if the original number of the sample had been maintained (i.e., 15 students, an equal amount of students with either a mastery, performance-approach or performance-avoidance goal orientation) it may not have been possible to identify one of the key findings of the research, that a larger than expected number of students had a multiple-goal approach towards their learning.

Teacher as researcher

Being a practising teacher at the secondary school at which I conducted the research has some issues associated with it. Cresswell (2007) argues that “to study one’s own workplace, for example, raises questions about whether good data can be collected when the act of data collection may introduce a power imbalance” (p. 122). However, in this particular instance there are a number of caveats that help to negate any power imbalance. First, the Year 9 cohort was relatively new to the school when the research process began. Therefore, the issue of the students identifying me with the establishment and the perceptions that may have arisen with any preconceptions of my position within the school were greatly diminished. Further to this, the Year 9 students had only been at the secondary school for eight weeks when the research study commenced. Very few of the students within the year group had had contact with me; only one student who participated within the study had been taught by me and this was for only six weeks. Moreover, I was on fulltime study leave whilst the research took place, which meant my only time at school was spent in the research, either administering the questionnaire or interviewing students. At no time within the research had I returned in any capacity as a teacher. In addition to this, at the beginning of the study process, it had been clearly indicated that I was a teacher at the school. This information gave students the opportunity to decline the invitation of being participants of the study.

Chapter 4

Results

Students within this study were willing to talk about their learning and the influences that motivated their goals toward their learning. In addition, the Student Advisory Group (SAG) contributed meaningful insight into the type of questions used for the questionnaires and interviews, and how they were posed. This chapter reports on these findings through two sections. First, there is a section on the findings of the student questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. Following this, a summary of the findings is presented.

Questionnaire findings

All 26 Year 9 students who consented to be involved in the study completed the student questionnaire. Their ages range from 12 to 14 (average age 13 years old). Of the 26 students, seven were male and 19 were female. The findings have been clustered around their responses to: mastery oriented learning goals, performance-approach learning goals; performance-avoidance learning goals, and social-oriented learning goals.

Mastery-oriented learning goals

The mastery-oriented items in the questionnaire (section A) focused around the notion of learning for learning's sake, the idea of attempting tasks for the enjoyment of learning. Areas for student consideration on the questionnaire included challenge; whether students were inclined to attempt difficult tasks, and whether they liked being challenged in their learning; how students dealt with difficult tasks, (i.e., whether they used teachers' verbal or written comments, in the shape of feedback or feed forward observations) or new strategies when they encountered difficulties; whether they believed that making mistakes was integral to the development of their learning and also whether learning new skills was reward enough for attempting tasks.

Overall, students' responses to the mastery-oriented items showed a positive position towards adopting mastery-goal attitudes towards their learning. Of the nine items associated with mastery-goals approaches, eight rated over 90% in the "Agree" to "Strongly Agree"

responses. The statement “*The best reward is when I learn something new, e.g., a new skill*” resulted in 100% agreement from respondents (see figure 1). The same result, 100% agreement, was reported for the declaration, “*I believe making mistakes is part of learning*” (see figure 2.).

Figure 1. New skills; the best reward

Figure 2. Are mistakes part of learning?

The only statement within the section focusing solely on mastery-goals, mentioning grades, “*when I attempt tasks, I don’t care about the grade I get as long as I learn*” received a slightly less resoundingly positive response with 80.75%, 21 of respondents agreeing with

this statement. However, of the 80.75% of participants who agreed with the statement, only 7.69% reported that they “Strongly Agree” with the view; 19.22%, 5 responded with either “Disagree” or “Mostly Disagree”. No student answered with “Strongly Disagree”. It is possible that introducing the notion of “grades” into questions on mastery-goals allowed students to consider an alternative to mastery orientations and this resulted in students realising that goals of a performance nature, in other words, linked to grades and assessment, are an essential and integral part of their learning. Overall, 94% of participants reported a positive affirmation of the statements in section A.

Performance-approach learning goals

The performance-approach items in the questionnaire (section B) focused on the notion that attaining the best possible grade was paramount to learning. Areas for student consideration included those linked to the importance of grades and being examined, and whether students preferred assessments or focused more when they were being assessed; competition with other students and wanting to know whether they were performing as well or better than classmates; whether grades were more important than learning new skills and if students’ focused on grades or teachers’ feedback or feed forward comments when teachers returned work. Overall, the results from this section of the questionnaire showed that students were less inclined to believe that grades were more important to their learning than the skills they acquired. Taken as a whole, slightly fewer than 69% of responses were affirmative responses to the questions relating to performance-approach items. In fact, responses varied quite considerably depending on the question being asked. For example, 88.45%, (23 of the 26 participants) gave a positive response to the statement, “*Getting the best grade I can is the most important part of my attempting schoolwork*” (see figure. 3) with almost 70% asserting they “Strongly Agree” or “Mostly Agree” with the statement. However, another question, “*Getting a good grade is more important than learning new skills*” (see figure. 4) resulted in only 46.14%, 12 of the 26 participants, agreeing with the statement. Of the 46% who recorded positive agreements, 66% recorded “Agree” responses. Only 7.69%, two participants respectively recorded positive responses for either “Strongly Agree” or “Mostly Agree”. Overall, student responses with a positive affirmation for the latter statement were just over half of those for the former assertion, even though the item reported a similar statement. The use of the word “schoolwork” and the phrase “learning new skills” may have affected the way in which respondents viewed the questions, inasmuch as students may have

perceived schoolwork as not resulting in learning new skills, but purely as completing tasks, even if in reality all schoolwork or tasks set by teachers has the potential to result in having learnt new skills.

Figure 3. Grades and schoolwork

Figure 4. Grades versus new skills

Concerning the statement in section B, *“I don’t like to make mistakes in my work”* 80.75% of respondents reported an “Agree” to “Strongly Agree” result to the statement, whereas 100% of students agreed with the statement, *“I believe making mistakes is part of learning”* in section A. The high number of students (92.29%) giving an affirmative response to the

statement *“I try new strategies (different ways of solving difficulties) when I get things wrong”* in section A tend to support these findings, whereas, performance-oriented students tend to focus on, and be explicitly aware of revealing their ability to others.

Many students, (21 of the 26 participants) reported that they enjoyed tests and examinations that resulted in grades and that they tended to focus more when they were being assessed which resulted in being given a grade. A large proportion of the participants (80.75% of students) reported an affirmative response to the declaration *“I enjoy tests and exams as I can find out how well I do against others”* and there were no responses in the “Mostly Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” columns for this statement. This contrasts with the 100% of participants who believed the best reward was learning a new skill as reported previously. It might have been expected that a percentage of respondents would have stronger opinions about this statement, especially as nearly 65% of students recorded “Mostly Agree” or “Strongly Agree” for learning new skills as being the best reward in their learning. Nevertheless, this shows that a high number of students (21 of the 26 participants) believe that tests and exams are important and even those who disagree with this statement, no participants strongly disagreed.

However, two of the statements tended to provide an alternative view. Over half, almost 54%, (14 of the 26 students) disagreed with the statement *“Getting a good grade is more important than learning new skills”* and of those who did record a positive response to the statement, two-thirds, over 60% recorded simply “Agree”. So although students responded positively to both statements, one expressing the best reward of learning is new skills and one stating agreement to enjoying tests and exams, there is reluctance on behalf of students to be strongly positive in affirming the importance of grades over learning new skills. Both the percentages confirming grades are more important than learning new skills is less and the strength of feeling in agreeing with the statement is considerably lower too. Few respondents (34.61%) agreed with the assertion *“I tend not to focus [emphasis included] on the teacher’s feedback/feedforward comments on tasks I complete just the grade I am given”*. This is generally consistent with the earlier mastery-approach item that resulted in a strong (96%) agreement with the statement “I use the teacher’s written or verbal comments (feedback or feedforward) to improve my future work”.

A large majority of students, 80.75%, enjoyed attempting tests and exams as it gave them the opportunity to compare their results with others. However, from a performance-approach

perspective, the number of students who believed that doing better than others in their class was important was significantly lower. Only 61.53% of students (16 of the 26) agreed with the declaration *“Doing better than other students in the class is important to me”* and of the nearly 62% no student responded with “Strongly Agree”. An equal number of students recorded “Agree” or “Disagree” to the statement, and no students responded with “Mostly Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”.

Performance-avoidance learning goals

Performance-avoidance items in the questionnaire (section C) focused on exploring the notion that some students with a performance orientation may attempt to avoid revealing their ability and may be reluctant to attempt challenges when learning. Areas for consideration included whether students preferred tasks that did not have grades attached or included assessments of their ability or progress; whether students enjoyed the challenge of tasks which were perceived as difficult or hard; also if students believed whether effort was important if not doing well on a task. Overall, the results for section C were fairly mixed. There did not appear to be a prevalent trend across all of the items. However, responses in section C ranged from 80.76% of students responding in agreement to *“I prefer it when someone tells me how to do a task”* to 19.22% agreeing with the statement *“If I get a low grade score on a test I won’t give my best next time”*. Nevertheless, one of the reasons for such a wide range of responses to the statements could be due to the variation inherent in the statements within this section; the characteristics of performance-avoidance goal orientations cover a wide range of attributes and features. The questionnaire statements are indicative of this wide range.

The 80.76% of students who agreed with the statement above relating to wanting others to tell them how to attempt a task was surprisingly high if compared to the items relating to challenge in section A. For example, in section A, 88.45% of participants (23 out of 26) recorded positive responses to the statement *“I like to be challenged by the tasks I get given”* and although this statement is not a direct contrast to that in section C where students wanted others to tell them how to attempt a task, there are areas for consideration. For example, it is possible to surmise that there is less challenge associated with tasks where you are told how to do them in comparison to those that require students to attempt tasks with less support or structure from others. It is also in contrast to the 92.29% of students who agreed with the statement in section A, *“I try new strategies (different ways of solving difficulties)”*

when I get things wrong". Furthermore, there are other related variables which could account for a high percentage of students preferring others to tell them how to attempt a task. For example, in the particular educational establishment in which the students attend and have attended until recently, they may have come accustomed to teachers' instructional practices and support throughout their education to date, where teachers' directions and requests may have meant there have been fewer opportunities to work more independently. This cohort of students is at their first secondary school, and, it is possible that the learning practices of secondary school differ from intermediate settings. Although without corroborative research this view is merely speculative.

However, there appears to be more disparity and contradictory results concerning preferring being told how to approach tasks if one considers the very low percentage of student responses to the statement, *"If something is hard I won't try it"*. Only 23.07% of students agreed with this particular declaration, and, only 7.69% recorded a response stating "Mostly Agree" and no students whatsoever recorded a "Strongly Agree" response. This contradicts, somewhat, previous inferences about students not being challenged in their work; however, preferring if someone tells a student how to attempt a task is not the same as actually being told how to do it. Therefore, the results from this questionnaire suggests that students may still attempt tasks which require more independent thought even though they may wish for more support and direct instruction.

One of the most prevalent features attributed to performance-avoidance students is the need to avoid letting others know how well they complete assessments and not to reveal the grades that they acquire for assessments and examinations (Darnon et al, 2007; Murphy & Alexander, 2000). An analysis of the questionnaire results suggest that the majority of students involved in the research do not have a performance-avoidance orientation. Over three quarters of the students, 77% disagreed with the statement, *"I don't like others to know what grade or score I get on a test"* with over 38% reporting either "Mostly Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" with the statement. Also, less than one in three of respondents' answers agreed with the statement, *"I avoid letting others know (including the teacher) when I struggle with a task"*. However, this is offset somewhat with the almost 50-50 split for the statement, *"I don't like tasks that have a grade attached in case I do badly"* where 49.98% of participants agreed with the assertion. These analyses support to some degree the findings regarding students not having a significantly performance-approach goal orientation. Rather, through the questionnaire findings at least, there appears that students tend to have a

combination of both mastery-oriented and performance-oriented goal approaches to their learning but with avoidance tendencies in certain situations.

Social-oriented learning goals

The final section of the questionnaire (section D) was based around the influence of social goals on students' learning goals. Overall, the questions covered a number of themes; the themes included whether students preferred working with a particular group of classmates or friends depending on ability; whether students preferred to work with others who were perceived as being popular or unpopular within the classroom and if they preferred working with friends. The "working with friends" statements explored the idea of whether students were willing or had a desire to work with friends even if, they, as individuals within a group, completed work or not.

The over-arching question *"I like to work with students who are going to help me with my learning"* received a response that was *almost* 100% in agreement. Indeed, only one student responded to this statement negatively. Of these respondents, 42.30% of students reported their views with "Strongly Agree". This question was further broken down to include statements associated with whether: respondents preferred to work with those perceived as cleverer than them; did not prefer working with cleverer students than them; they were more inclined to work with students of a similar ability; or they did not care with whom they worked with in the classroom. A large proportion (76.91%) of participants (20 of the 26) agreed with the statement, *"I do not care who I work with in class as long as I learn"* and 88.45% wanted to work with students of a similar ability. The positive response regarding working with their peers was consistent throughout. To the statement *"I prefer to work with students who are cleverer than me"* 65.7% (17 of the 26 participants) agreed.

These responses reveal that overall students used the opportunity to work with others when learning. This is further reinforced by the result that only 11.53% of students, (three out of 26) agreed with the statement, *"I do not like to work with students who are cleverer than me"*. The results suggest that students, generally, are keen to work with peers to reinforce and support their learning.

It would appear that the popularity of other students was not a factor in the students' decisions about with whom they worked. Only two out of 26 students, 7.69% agreed with the statement, *"I like to work with students who others think are popular"* and of these two students, neither reported a "Strongly Agree" comment. The suggestion that students were

not influenced by popularity was further supported when students were asked whether they would work with students who others thought were unpopular. Nearly all (96%) respondents disagreed with the statement, again suggesting that the popularity of other students had no impact concerning who they would work with in class.

However, results relating to questions concerning friends rather than general classmates produced very polarising responses from participants. Only two statements were available for students, these being *“I like to work with my friends only [emphasis included] if I get all my work completed”* and *“I like to work with my friends whether I learn or complete my work or not”*. Of the former statement, referring to working with friends only if they complete work, 65.37% recorded affirmative responses (see figure. 5). The 34.61% who choose to simply “Agree” with the statement, was exactly the same as those who chose “Agree” on the statement that asked whether they would work with friends whether they learn or completed work or not. Overall statistics of a positive nature to the latter statement were 53.84% (see figure.6).

Figure 5. Work before friendship

Figure 6. Friendship before work

Overall, concerning the social nature of their learning, students appear to be motivated to work with others and want to use the opportunity to work with their peers to support their learning. The popularity of their peers had very little bearing on who students were willing to work with and therefore it would appear that the popularity of others within the classroom is not a major consideration for the majority of these students. However, questions relating to friends revealed a more divisive and slightly contradictory response from participants. Students, it would appear, want to work with their friends and complete their work but a slight majority also wanted to work with friends and were not particularly concerned whether they learnt or completed work or not. This result suggests students enjoy the idea of their peers as taking a part in their learning, although friends are not conducive to “completing work”.

Summary of questionnaire findings

The students’ responses to the questionnaire resulted in a complex number of findings. Students overall enjoyed the challenge of tasks and did not mind difficult tasks but, as might have been expected, did not like to make mistakes. However, making mistakes meant, that for the majority of students, that they would try harder in the future. Findings from section A (Mastery-oriented items) were strongly affirmative concerning mastery aspects to their learning goals. However, students also agreed with statements which stated the importance of focusing on grades and being assessed in their learning. Section B (Performance-approach items) of the questionnaire resulted in a majority of students affirming that grades were an

important part of their attempting schoolwork. Students tended to focus more on tasks on which they were examined or graded. Nevertheless, students were not in total agreement concerning whether getting a good grade was more important than learning new skills as approximately the same number of students felt new skills were as important as grades.

Also, the competitive nature associated with comparing grades with peers revealed that a large minority of students were not concerned about how they compared to others. This would help to explain some of the findings of section D (Social-oriented items) in which overwhelmingly students were willing to work with whomever, as long as it meant they were learning. Doing better than others, it would appear, was not as important as learning. Students were not concerned about the popularity of others; the popularity of other students did not influence with whom others would generally prefer to work. However, findings relating to working with friends were less clear cut. Overall, only a slight majority of students would only work with friends if they completed all their work.

The slightly contradictory nature of findings is continued with regards to students' use of teacher feedback and feedforward to improve their learning. Overwhelmingly students agreed that they would use comments to improve learning but a significant minority also tended to focus on the grade they received, rather than the feedback or feedforward comments from teachers. Although, there was an overwhelming confirmation in section A (Mastery-oriented items) from students concerning their willingness to try difficult and challenging tasks, this contrasted with findings in section C (Performance-avoidance items) on the question of whether students preferred to be told how to do a task, where the overwhelming majority of students liked better to be told what to do. This was the only statement in section C in which students overwhelmingly agreed. Students, generally, did not appear to have concerns about other students being aware of their struggles or difficulties with tasks; this would tend to support the findings of section D, and to some extent section B, inasmuch as student learning appears to be more important than being popular or being highly competitive.

Interview findings

A total of 26 Year 9 students (7 male and 19 female) were interviewed over a four-week period in Term Three. For referencing purposes students are coded as either male=M or female=F and then the corresponding interview order, for example, F:01, F:02. M:01, M:02.

As described in chapter 3, a semi-structured interview schedule was developed and used, focussing specifically on the students' perspectives of their learning goal approach, their perspectives of school, influences on their learning and their social learning goals.

Interview procedures

The interviews took place in Term 3, within a four week period in September. All interviews took place in a separate room within the school grounds and during the school day. The number of interviews completed per day ranged from one to four. The number of interviews per day was dependent on a range of issues including: student availability; timetable restrictions, for example, students in subjects where it was impractical for them to be excused for interviews; and other school-related events taking place that prevented students from participating in the interviews. All students who were invited and provided informed consent to participate in the study and who completed the questionnaire assented to be interviewed.

The duration of student interviews varied, between 17 and 36 minutes in length. The average time of each interview was around 27 minutes. Students whose interviews were relatively brief appeared slightly nervous of the prospect of being interviewed and their responses to questions were brief and succinct. As a practising teacher, with extensive experience of working with Year 9 students, I was able to try a number of ways to help the students to feel more at ease and get them to develop, elaborate or clarify their ideas. On occasions, hypothetical and concrete situations were posed to the students in an attempt to clarify questions that they appeared not to understand. When necessary, I also rephrased questions so as to give students a greater opportunity to respond. As noted in my researcher reflection notes at the time, I acknowledge that it was necessary for me as a researcher to adapt my approach:

*As I listen to recordings of interview and transcriptions, I can begin to see “issues” that can arise from interviewing students. Often, when they respond to questions, I notice that I tend not to explore ideas in depth at times, partly, through not wanting students to feel under pressure and having the worry of them “clamming up” on me, but also because I have concerns that they’ll say anything in response, as if they perceive, rightly or wrongly, that there must be more to say, which makes them feel as if they’re inadequate with their abilities. Also, when I get a response and I ask “Anything else?” I often feel that, again, they must “find” more to please me. **Perhaps, I’m becoming a little more aware of the nuances of interviewing and perhaps needed to change my phrases and vocabulary so as to not make students feel that they need to elaborate more.** Is it*

possible that the lack of elaboration is as vital and as telling as the detail that's given but which may not be totally authentic? (Research reflection notes; 17.9.1, emphasis added)

Although the students were encouraged to elaborate on answers, especially answers that appeared unclear, contradictory or irrelevant to the question, I was unwilling to place undue pressure on the students when attempting to get them to elaborate or clarify their answers. As a teacher, I have become versed at identifying students' distress and awkwardness at answering questions that they do not fully comprehend. This experience assisted me in the interviews as a teacher-researcher to recognise when students appeared confused, embarrassed or anxious with the question and allowed me to make judgements about how often questions could be rephrased or reworded.

Also, apart from the brief responses from some students, facial expressions, intonation and body language were also cues for me to terminate a question or to accept the response of the student without attempting to gain further insight. On occasions, I reassured the student by explaining the objectives of the study, reiterating that there were no right or wrong answers, and that any information that I received was invaluable to the study.

On reflection there are a number of other reasons as to why some students' interviews were much shorter in duration than the majority of their peers. A natural tendency of some students simply to be shy and introverted aside, there are other possibilities to consider. Many students may not have been exposed to one-on-one and face-to-face interviews. For some students this may have meant the situation was unnatural for them, possibly making the experience even more challenging. Also, all students were relatively young, the majority being only 13 years of age. This may have meant that some students have not yet developed a sufficiently fluent and expressive vocabulary in which to articulate their ideas fully, especially as the conversation within the interview explored areas of how they learned; topics not usually discussed with these students.

Therefore, it is very likely that for some students the content of the interview was simply not interesting enough or relevant to their own lives, even if they were aware before being interviewed generally what the interviews would be about. For one or two students who did not appear to consider school a priority this may have been the case and was the reason I did not push for greater elaboration on certain questions when their responses that lacked enthusiasm. Another reason for my reluctance to coax students to elaborate on certain responses was when it appeared that some students were becoming aware that perhaps they had not achieved so far to the best of their abilities. On such occasions students began to

appear slightly agitated and frustrated with themselves. I considered that continuing with further questioning would not have been conducive to some students' well-being and self-esteem; and this in itself became an ethical issue of ensuring, that as a researcher I did "no harm".

Challenge associated with the interview questions

For a number of students the biggest difficulty may have been the content of some of the questions asked at the interview, resulting in brief and arguably underdeveloped responses. Being asked about how they, the students, approached their learning may have been an unfamiliar area of consideration for the majority of students. Although brief responses may be viewed as a disadvantage for the findings of the study, there are also a number of possible benefits to be taken from this. That students appeared unfamiliar with the content of questions relating to how they approached their learning and how the approach supported their learning meant they were unable to respond with general or clichéd responses or with the type of responses that they thought I would like to hear. Another benefit from this may be the questions may have meant that students have begun to be more conscious and reflective about how they approach their learning, in ways that may not have taken place before, and which may result in greater considerations about the way they learn in the future.

Teacher -researcher's reflections

As a teacher-researcher, I documented some of my experiences of the research process while in progress (appendix D). In the early phases of the research process, my own nervousness about my transition from teacher to one of researcher may have meant that I was unprepared for students' brevity when responding to questions. On such occasions I was tempted to "fill in the gaps" too quickly, without giving students enough time to consider the question. However, as has been mentioned previously, as a teacher as well as a researcher, I believe this had minimal impact due to my related experience in recognising the signs of student stress and anxiety.

Learning goal approaches

The findings from the interviews highlighted two key issues: (1) a learning goal approach was not a static, assigned disposition in the students, and (2) students could hold a number of simultaneous views about their learning goals and associated approach. While the questionnaire data identified specific determined approaches based on student responses, the subsequent interview process enabled the students to counter and expand some of their own earlier beliefs.

All of the 26 students who completed the questionnaire were interviewed. Overall, the greatest proportion of students expressed a multiple-goal approach 69.2% (18 of the 26). This was followed by 15.4% (4 of the 26) reporting a mastery-goal orientation towards their learning, and then 7.7% (2 of the 26) a performance-approach orientation and a further 7.7% (2 of the 26) expressed a performance-avoidance orientation (appendix P).

When the students were interviewed, the results from their responses of the questionnaire were used to report back to them their own identified learning goal orientation. As the interviewer, I described the student's learning goal orientation acquired from the questionnaire responses; and while the majority of students agreed with the interpretations of the data, 24% of the students, 8% male and 16% female, were unsure and hesitant when asked if the analysis accurately depicted their approach to learning. In my attempt to clarify the particular type of goal orientation the students' responses showed through their questionnaire, some contradictions arose from the students. Initially it appeared that the original learning goal orientations held by the students appeared to be inconsistent. For example, of the four students designated as having a mastery goal approach towards their learning from the results of the questionnaire (i.e., they wanted to focus on learning skills and enjoyed the challenge that this approach would entail), two students (F:16 and F:07) who had asserted on their questionnaire that grades were as important as learning new skills, identified in their interview that *skills* (and not grades) were important to them. Therefore having prior identified a mastery-goal approach towards their learning, (but still purporting that getting good grades was equally important) they later felt that learning new skills took priority over grades.

In another example, two students, (F:09 and F:06), identified with a performance-approach goal orientation in their questionnaire, but changed their stance during their interviews. One of these students (F:09), revealed an inclination towards determining that mastering new skills was just as necessary as a performance-approach to her goals.

Responses to the questionnaire had revealed a strong performance-approach goal orientation. However, when asked, hypothetically, if she would prefer a higher grade but with less understanding over a lower grade but with better understanding, she explained that she would choose understanding over grade. When asked why this would be, her reply consistently identified with the desire to learn, *“cos I wanna learn, otherwise there’s no point to it”*. Another student, agreed with the performance-approach goal orientation assigned to her but when asked the main reasons she attended school, replied *“I think it’s mostly about my learning”*. Although this does not necessarily promote mastery over grades or performance, it was an indication of the importance of learning to her and reveals one of the difficulties in assigning students a specific goal orientation.

Students, who had been initially designated as having a mastery-goal approach, commented upon the importance of grades towards their learning and asserted, after consultation, as having a multiple goal approach. Therefore, the interviews revealed that 27% of students, (7 out of the 26) originally designated as having a mastery-goal approach, after discussions concerning responses to questionnaires, were unwilling to concede that grades were not important to their learning approach: they affirmed a grade component to their goal approach was important. For example, one student (F:11) was confirmed as having a mastery-goal approach towards her learning but when questioned further and asked whether grades were indeed “more important than learning new skills” replied laughingly, *“I can’t choose”*. Also another student (M:05), one of two who were attributed a multiple-goal approach, inasmuch as he enjoyed learning for the sake of learning but also he avoided letting others know how well he achieved on tasks, could not choose if grades were more important than learning new skills. Originally, 35% of students asserted that learning new skills and grades were important.

Do learning goal approaches support learning?

A majority of students, when questioned about whether their particular learning goal adoption or orientation was the usual way in which they approached their learning, responded by saying that it was not intentional. Asked whether they intentionally approached their learning using the specific goal orientation or whether it just happened that way, 73% of respondents (19 of the 26) replied that it just happened. One student (F:19) responded, *“I think and it just comes to my head...I just come in and do my thing”*. Such responses suggest that the students do not approach their learning with explicit goals in mind and that they adopt learning goal

approaches unconsciously and unintentionally rather than using a systematic and deliberate strategy to support their learning. A number of students laughed when responding to the question as if embarrassed by a lack of awareness concerning the nature of their learning goal approach. Also, some students appeared hesitant and diffident in their responses to the question. Typical responses included: *"I think it just happens that way"* (M:06), *"It like happens I guess"* (F:01), *"I think it just happens? I think, yeah"* (F:09) and *"erm, not really sure, (laughs) ...no I kinda do it naturally"* (F:18).

The majority of students were unsure how their particular learning goal orientation helped support their learning. Predominantly, the students revealed difficulties relating particular learning goal types with how it supported their learning. In other words, students with a mastery-goal approach orientation rarely mentioned the importance of enjoying learning for the sake of learning and learning new skills without focus on how well they achieved in comparison to others. Furthermore, those with a performance-goal orientation tended not to explain the relevance of, or the importance of grades and the need to know how well they had done in comparison to their peers.

Students did not know how their approach to learning was relevant. Typical responses from those who appeared not to know how it helped ranged from: (very quietly) *"I don't know..."* (laughs), and (long pause and slightly embarrassed laugh) *"n-o-t too sure"* (F:05) and *"Mmm, I don't know really"* (very hesitantly) (F:11) to include *"er...it's hard to explain"* (F:01) to more generally, *"it just helps me learn"* (F:18) and it *"makes me focus more"* (F:17) and *"because I can learn more than...I can get better grades"* (M:01).

Also, students had difficulties in relating the relevance of how learning goal approaches could help support their learning and therefore how it helped them learn. When asked how their learning goal orientation helped with their learning 23% of the students made a reference to their grades, whether directly or by suggestion. Nevertheless, responses were not necessarily cognisant of how this helped with learning. For example, when asked how their goal approach helped with learning, one student replied, *"when I look at my old grades, compare my grades"* (F:14) but was unable to elaborate further. In a similar way, another student responded to the same question by stating, *"when I get my grades then I know I'm going higher levels and that"* (F:19). One student designated as having a performance-avoidance goal orientation responded with, *"because I can learn more than ...I can get better grades"* (M:01).

Another student could not make a salient link between her learning goal approach and how it helped her with her learning. She failed to mention how learning for the challenge or

enjoyment supported her learning but she did cite effort. When asked about the role of her mastery-goal approach in aiding her learning, she replied, *“it just does...cos you actually get on with the work and then you don’t have to stay after school and all that”* (F:07). For this student, there appeared to be a motivation towards getting work done and minimal understanding of the link between her learning goal approach and how this goal orientation supported her learning. Such responses were typical of the majority of the students’ statements inasmuch as there appeared to be a lack of understanding about the possible symbiotic relationship between learning goal approaches and how learning goal approaches could support learning.

Some students, albeit a small proportion, (four of the 26) one male and three female were aware of how their learning goal approach supported their learning. These students made reasonably salient links between their approach and the significance of their approach towards their learning. For example, a performance-approach orientated student, (F:09), said, *“I’m not like one of those people who don’t really care about grades they get, I actually want to get really good grades”* thus revealing how she uses grades as a way in which to influence her learning. However, this response could also be implying that she thinks others are not focused on learning and have the wrong attitude as much as saying grades are more important to her than mastering new skills and obtaining new knowledge. In addition, another student, focused on the mastery-goal component of his multiple-goal approach when responding to how it helped his learning. His response, *“I don’t focus on my grades, which sometimes can make it harder for me. I just get onto work and then I’m good”* (M:04) did align with a mastery-goal approach to learning. Later in the interview he reported that tests and therefore through association, grades, was one of the factors that helped him learn best. Two of the four students who were identified as having a mastery-goal approach were able to appreciate and understand how their mastery-goal approach to learning helped them learn. When asked how it, a mastery-goal approach, helped with her learning, one student replied *“cos I don’t focus on my grades just on the work...”* and when asked why not focusing on grades helped her learning she responded by saying, *“more of my concentration [goes on] on mastering the work”* (F:16). And consistent with someone expressing a mastery-goal approach, one student stated, *“I don’t focus on where I need to get to...I don’t care as long as I’m learning”* (F:12). However as the numbers reported above reveal, these responses are few in comparison with the number of interviewees who did not know or could not explain how their learning goal approach helped with their learning.

Notions of learning

Participants were asked a number of questions linked to the notion of what makes a difference to their learning, in other words, what or who influences them in a positive or a negative manner and what helps them learn best at school. Further questions focused on whether students knew when they had done well on a task or in a subject, and what or who it was that had helped them do well, or not so well, on a task or subject, therefore further developing the notion of what supports their learning. Again, the responses to these questions were varied. A number of students cited more than one idea when responding to what is a generally over-arching but ultimately complex set of questions. However, a number of themes were reiterated throughout the interviews.

Positive influences on student learning

The following findings are separated into what influences students in their learning and what makes a difference to student learning, both positively and negatively, and is followed by how students define doing well in a subject or a task (see table 1). The number of responses does not necessarily tally with the number of students involved in the research, as in responses relating to learning positively, two questions were asked of students. Students stated a number of reasons in response, and not necessarily just one reason for each question. The two questions were: “*What helps you learn best at school?*” and “*Who or what do you think has the most influence on you when it comes to you doing well on a task or in a subject, i.e., who or what makes the difference to you doing well?*” These questions focused on students’ perception and understanding of positive and successful learning.

Positive influences on student learning	Student numbers
Teachers	30
Friends	22
Family	18
Self-regulated attitude/approach to learning	9
Enjoying task/subject or being involved	6
Ease of task/subject	3
Class environment	6
Being good at a subject	2
Previous knowledge	1
Needing subject for future success	1

Table 1. The positive influences on student learning

Each category of influence in the table above had a number of differing but related influences, for example, the category “Teachers”, included teachers’ explanation, praise and other factors etc. On a number of occasions, students gave more than one possible reason for what or who influences them. Four of the responses to the question were more widespread than the rest. These will be explained in greater detail in the following sections.

Teachers

From the students’ perspective, teachers influence their learning or make a difference in positive ways. Of the 30 responses that cited teachers as an influence, six were male and 24 were female. However, 23%, although citing teachers as either influencing their learning positively or making a difference to them doing well, were unable or unwilling to give a reason or to elaborate further about why or how they made a difference. Nevertheless, 30% responded by saying the teachers’ explanations and help was an influence on them doing well. Typical responses included: “*teachers explain it more...they come and help*” (F:16), and it “*helps me when teachers tell me examples of things*” (F:04), and “*probably teachers and the way they teach...they would show me new things*” (M:01) also, “*the teachers, they help me most of the time...if I don’t know what they’re talking about, they come and explain it to me*” (F:02). Four of the 30 responses mentioned how teachers praised them and encouraged them to do well, and one response stated that teachers’ expectations were an

influence on their learning. Only two students stated that because teachers' lessons were fun or interesting it influenced their learning positively. One student, identified as having a performance-avoidance goal approach, stated the teacher as an influence because "*the teacher gives me easy work*" (F:13). This response indicates clearly one of the characteristics associated with a performance-avoidance goal adoption. Often students with a performance-avoidance goal orientation avoid challenges in an attempt to avoid letting others know how they are performing in relation to them.

Friends

After teachers, the next most prevalent reported influence on students doing well or someone or something making a difference to their learning was friends. However, 25% of students who stated friends as an influence on their learning or who made a difference did not elaborate on why friends had an impact on their learning but the remaining 75% asserted very similar reasons for why friends made a difference to their learning: it was due to either the support and help friends gave or the ability and willingness for them to share ideas.

Of the 22 who cited friends or classmates as an influence, three were male and 19 were female. Typical responses included: "*if I don't know something they back me up*" (F:11), "*like if nobody can help, I could ask if they knew, just see if they knew*" (F:01), and also, "*some friends help me out for [what] I need and I usually help them out if they don't understand what it does or what it means....so we just help each other out*" (M:01).

Family

The next most common reported influence concerning what makes a difference to learning, what influences learning positively was identified by the students as their family. All male participants (7 out of 7) made a reference to family being an influence or making a difference to their learning and 58% (11 out of 19) of female participants also affirmed family as being a positive influence. Again, there were a number of reasons as to why students reported that family had an influence on their learning. Almost 56% of respondents asserted that the help and encouragement they received from family members had a positive influence on their learning. Of the respondents who cited help and encouragement as a reason for family positively influencing their learning, 50% of respondents were male and 50% were female. Typical responses included when family are "*helping me at home when I need any help and*

having the right time to do homework instead of mucking around at home” (F:08), and, of a student’s mum, “she always gives me her persuasions, persuading ways to get on with my work, so that I can actually finish my tasks and says that I would be able to get good grades and stuff like that” (M:05).

A further 28%, (n=5) of the students stated that family had gone through “challenging times” and had the experience to help them and that they wanted to follow in their families’ footsteps. Of the five students who reported this as a reason, two were male and three were female.

Students’ attitudes and approaches towards their learning

A number of respondents identified their own role in making a positive difference to their learning. Of the nine who stated the way in which they self-regulated their learning was an influence, 29%, (2 out of 7), were male and 37%, (7 out of 19), were female. Typical responses stated that they were focused and keen to do well, for example, *“I like getting my task completed on time and correctly...I-just-listen to what the teacher’s saying (giggling) and I make sure I’m focusing in class even if I’m tired” (F:03), another stated, “it’s my future, and my now, not other people’s” (F:16) and, “I start school with a, like a happy mood, I don’t come with anything negative” (M:02).*

Negative influences on student learning

A number of the reasons that supported or influenced students to do well in their learning were also present when exploring the notion of what influences affect students negatively in their learning and what makes a difference to their learning, again, in a negative way (see Table 2). These included, friends, teachers’ practices, a self-regulated attitude and approach to their learning and also other students’ behaviour within the classroom environment.

Negative influences on student learning	Student numbers
Self-regulated attitude/discipline	14
Other students' behaviour/classroom environment	10
Teachers' practice	9
Friends' behaviour	9
Not understanding/lack of knowledge of subject	3
Students' perception of ability	3
Boring/uninteresting subject	3
Absenteeism	3
Events out of school	1

Table 2. The negative influences on student learning

A self-regulated attitude and discipline

Of the 14 students who stated that it was their approach towards their learning that influenced learning in a negative way, or made a difference to them not doing well, three out of seven, (42%) were male and 11 out of 19 (58%) were female. For a number of students, eight of the 14 (two male and six female) not listening in class or not paying enough attention were the reasons for stating they, themselves, had a negative influence on their learning. Typical responses, when asked who or what influences their learning negatively or made a difference to them not doing well, included: *“myself...[having a] lack of concentration, getting distracted too easily”* (M:07), and, *“if I hear people talking...I wouldn't focus really...I get distracted like listening”* (M:04), also, *“I haven't listened enough”* (F11) and, *“and not paying attention in class”* (slight laugh) (F18).

Other students' behaviour and the classroom environment

The students' environment was identified by 10 students as having a negative influence on their learning. Replies described noise and distractions from peers within the classroom environment as not being conducive to their learning: eight out of the 10 responses (80%) were female and two (20%) were male. Responses within this category were general comments regarding others within the classroom, whereas nine students did state friends in particular. Again, there were similarities within the range of responses, and included, *“some*

of the classes, the boys are like so annoying, it's kind of hard to learn like when they're noisy or don't know how to shut up" (F:01), and another explaining the effects of the environment on their learning, *"just the loud and shouting and throwing stuff, you don't really get anywhere"* (F:18) and *"the noisy people...it's really hard to concentrate"* (F:07).

Teachers' classroom management or pedagogical practices

As well as being a positive influence on students' learning, teachers were also mentioned as having a negative influence on students' doing well or making a difference to students not doing well also. Of the nine responses, four were male and five were female. Two students suggested that it was that the *"teacher's too busy...talking to people not behaving, instead of helping you"* (F:06) and *"if they're too busy sorting out the class and then you don't learn anything"* (F:18). A further five respondents declared it was due to either teachers not explaining clearly, one stating, *"the teacher might not have explained it, like well enough to me"* (F:12), or that, they, the teachers, were talking too much. One student stating, *"the teacher keeps talking and talking...they've said so much you forget"* (F:05) and another when they [the teachers] are *"talking too long"*. However the student accepted that that "all teachers had 'bad hair' days" (M:07). Another student, explaining how teachers can influence learning negatively, cited a lack of support saying *"if you don't get extra help if you need it or not"* (M:03). And one student (F:04) candidly replied it was due to *"b-a-d teaching..."* [the teacher] *writing stuff on the board and doesn't explain it, what you're doing*". This final statement can be linked to the three responses citing a "boring/uninteresting" subject, inasmuch as responses suggested making lessons more interesting would influence learning positively.

The role of friends

The replies linking to friends' behaviour were very much in agreement as to what element it was of friends' involvement that was deemed as having a negative influence on their learning or made a difference to students not doing well. All of the nine responses (100%) implicating friends agreed it was being distracted by them. Of the participants who believed this to be true of friends, two were male and seven female. Therefore, as a positive influence, friends were supportive of the students' learning but the drawback was too much talking was disruptive. Typical replies included, *"sometimes they can distract you by talking a lot and so*

you're not focused on your work" (F:09), and *"my friends are kinda hard cos they always, kinda distract me"* (M:03).

Perceptions of having done well

Linked to the questions relating to what or who influences students' learning both positively and negatively was the question of how do students define doing well in a subject and whether students know when they had done well on a task or in a subject. As of previous responses to questions, students gave a variety of replies (see Table 3). Again, numbers recorded are not indicative purely of number of respondents, (i.e., participants, on occasions, gave multiple reasons for defining doing well or having known they had done well on a task or in a subject). Of the responses indicating knowing they had done well, 14 students out of 26, (54%) responded by simply saying completing the work set or giving their best effort, 21% of respondents were male and 78% of respondents were female. Typical responses included if you *"believe you've tried your hardest"* (F:16) and *"getting on with your work...studying for tests and trying your hardest"* (F:18) and also *"me with my head down, doing my tasks, me getting on with my activities, and then sorting out other things I have to get done"* (M:05).

The next most common response from students stated that their grades defined whether they had done well on a task or in a subject or had let them know they had done well. Of the seven responses, one was male (14%) and six were female (86%). However, of this number, when asked if they knew if they'd done well *before receiving grades*, in an attempt to ascertain any alternative ways in which they knew they had done well, all student responses indicated that they did not know beforehand. Typical responses included, *"no, I just wait for results"* (M:04), *"I don't know actually"* (laughs) (F:01), *"erm, I don't know"* (F:07) *"I don't really know,"* (F:03) and *"I would need to wait"* (F:15).

Perceptions of having done well	Student numbers
Completion of work/effort	14
Grades	7
Understood	5
Not sure	4
Work is easy	3
Teacher feedback	3
Remembering	3
Amount of work completed	2
Intuition*	2
Higher challenges	1
Confident	1

Table 3. Students' perceptions of how they achieve

*this included one response where the student spoke of the feelings that ancestors give you.

Influence of social goals

An area for consideration within the study was what was the influence of social goals on students' learning? The interviews focused on exploring the influence of both peers and friends on the students' learning.

Positive influences on learning - peers

The interview schedule had a number of questions that explored students' learning and social goals. These questions included what students believed were the positive influences of working with their peers on activities in class, what they believed were the negative influences and whether they preferred working with friends rather than peers in general. Of the final question they were also asked their reasons for their choices.

The overwhelming response to the question, *"What do you think are the good things, the positive things that come from working with classmates on activities in class?"* was being able to cooperate on activities and to share ideas: 58% of all responses to the question stated this as a reason. Seven of the 21 students (33%) who responded in this way

were male, and 14 of the participants, (66%) were female. Fewer than 20% of participants' responses (6 out of 31) reported that working with classmates meant learning was fun. Apart from these two responses, no other replies gained more than two responses as can be in Table 4.

The good things, the positive things working with classmates	Student numbers
Cooperating/sharing ideas	21
Having fun	6
Working with different abilities	2
Making new friends	2
New workmates	1
Sharing workload	1
Being able to socialise	1
More comfortable to learn	1
Help keep on task	1

Table 4. Positive influences of the role of peers

Negative influences on learning – peers

Also asked of participants when discussing social goals was the question “*are there, in your view, any bad or less positive things that come from working with classmates on activities in class?*” Again, as of previous questions, students often gave more than one reason for why working with general classmates could be a negative influence on their learning (see Table 5). However, of the 32 responses given, over 59% of them were linked to the notion that classmates would distract them from their learning. Of the 19 out of 32 who stated distractions, 15 of the 19 were female and four were male. There were a number of different reasons within this category as to why distractions impacted upon their learning negatively. For example, 47% of respondents cited too much talking within group work as a negative influence on their learning. Typical responses were, [of classmates] “*sometimes they like, just keep talking and talking and talking*” (F:12) and “*they don’t finish off tasks...and just like talk and that*” (F:14), also, “*sometimes people get carried away with talking...and that’s distracting*”(M:04). Two students who stated that talking with classmates had a negative

influence on their learning regarded themselves as being part of the distraction. One stating of her relationship with classmates, *“I just talk to them...and I don’t do work”* (F:13) and the other, simply, *“I talk too much”* (F:10).

Too much noise in the classroom to be able to focus sufficiently was another significant response. Of the responses, 26%, five of the 19 cited this as a reason; two of the five were male and three were female. Another nine responses of the 32 cited arguing or bullying within groups or disliking others as impacting negatively on their learning. The five responses associated with arguing or bullying of which two were male and three were female, could have been placed, due to their similarity, in the category of being distracted or off-task as arguing or bullying could be construed as a distraction. If this were the case, then the percentage of students who stated being distracted as a negative influence would rise to almost 76% of responses.

The bad, less positive things working with classmates	Student numbers
Being distracted or off-task	19
Arguing, fighting or bullying	5
Disliking others	4
Lack of cohesion within group	2
Prefer to work alone	1
Not willing to share responses	1

Table 5. Negative influences of the role of peers

Positive Influences on learning - friends

Questions in interviews focusing on social goals were aimed at seeing if there were any significant differences between how students interacted with peers generally and how they interacted with friends. The questions relating to friends attempted to inquire if friends were more or less of an influence on students’ learning. The question was fairly general in its scope so as to give students the opportunity to consider all areas of friendship within their learning environment. Therefore, the over-arching question was, *“does it make a difference to your learning if you work with friends rather than general classmates?”* A prompt was

used in an attempt to gather further detail from students. This was simply, “*why do you think that is?*”

Of the 25 responses that were positive concerning working with friends, nine (36%) stated the familiarity with friends was the most helpful to their learning (see Table 6). Familiarity was explained as being more comfortable in friends’ company and how friends understood how they operate; this they believed helped them learn; two of the nine (22%) were male and seven (77%) were female. Another influence that students reported affected learning positively, also linked to the idea of being familiar with friends, was enjoying friends’ company which resulted in working better. Of those who stated this as a positive influence when working with friends, 28% of the total responses cited this, with 29% being male and 71% female. Typical responses included, “*I work better with friends. Yeah, cos I’m not shy I talk to them*” (F:12) and “*if you’re with your friends you feel comfortable and like you can do anything*” (M:02)

Working with friends – positive findings	Student numbers
Familiar with you and the way you learn	9
Work better/enjoy company	7
Can be yourself	3
Share ideas/support each other	3
Help stay focused	2
Alternative to teachers/others	1

Table 6. Positive influences of working with friends

Negative influences on learning – friends

Students’ responses confirmed that working with friends was not always a positive influence on their learning (see Table 7). Some of the explanations mentioned influences that affected learning in a negative way. Regarding working with friends, 40% of responses stated that working with friends meant they would likely be off-task, of which nearly 17% were male and 83% were female. A further 40% of students, again 17% male and 83% female, cited talking with friends as a negative influence on their learning. Both responses, totalling 80% of all responses, can be seen as having a disruptive influence on student learning. Only three other variations in responses were given that signalled working with friends did not support

their learning. These less typical responses included the explanation that working with friends resulted in a lack of challenge, inasmuch as friends may not be as critical or as robust with their responses to views or ideas. One student stated, *“they [friends] won’t criticise you they’ll just think that everything’s good...they don’t really push you to your fullest”* (F:06). This is a view that juxtaposes being familiar and comfortable with friends as a positive influence on student learning. Being held back by friends was linked to ability. Again, rather than supporting each other, this view suggested the opposite. In reference to friends, the student’s response highlighted that she was also aware of her friends’ relative academic ability, stating, *“depends how smart my friends are”* (laughs) *“because if they’re not bright then you’ll have to explain stuff to them and then you’d get sidetracked explaining everything to them”* (F:18). Another response *“if I work with my friends I just listen to the same ideas”* (F:08), reiterates the view above that familiarity with friends is not always necessarily conducive to learning.

Working with friends – negative findings	Student numbers
Off-task behaviour	6
Talking	6
Lack of challenge	1
Hold you back/sidetrack	1
Lack of variety	1

Table 7. Negative influences of working with friends

Student preferences - working alone or with others

Linked to the previous questions regarding working with friends or peers were two questions focusing on whether students preferred working alone or with others. These two questions, *“In what subjects do you prefer to work alone?”* and *“In what subjects do you prefer to work with others?”* were designed to inquire if there were specific areas in students’ learning where working alone or with others was more prevalent, and if so, the possible reasons for this taking place. In general, the students reported that they preferred to work with others. Data from the final two questions of the interview that focused on whether there were specific subjects in which students preferred to work with others or alone highlighted minimal variation between subjects. Nevertheless, certain responses were more prevalent

than others but the reasons for similar responses, (e.g., prefer to work with others in maths), were not necessarily associated.

Preferences for working with others

The majority of students stated a preference for working with others but did not stipulate any particular subjects (see Table 8). Nine of the 26 respondents (35%) responded to the question by stating that they would prefer to work with others in all or most of their subjects; two of the nine (22%) were male and seven of the nine (78%) were female. Only one student (F:13) asserted that they did not care whether they worked with others or not. However, this student, who was assigned a performance-avoidance goal orientation, gave contradictory responses to a number of the questions. When given the example of going to class all week and working on her own she replied *“I wouldn’t really care”* (F:13) and when asked if there were any subject where she would prefer to work alone, stated, *“mmm...not really”* (F:13).

Nevertheless, six students did cite mathematics as one of the subjects in which they preferred to work with others; two of the six (33%) being male and four of the six (66%) being female. Five of the six students stated mathematics as a subject they preferred working with others as it allowed them to help each other out. Responses included, *“because maths is confusing for most people and so you get confused it’s just easier to ask someone sitting next to you”* (F:18) and *“because I find that a challenging subject so I like working with others so they can help me”* (F:06) and also, somewhat from a different but similar perspective, *“I need help in some of them [subjects, including mathematics] cos I get distracted and I don’t hear what the teacher’s saying. So I need them to tell me what it is”* (M:04). Of the four students who stated that they preferred to work with others in English, three students said it was because the help they required and one cited working with new people as a reason. Nevertheless, for one student (F:03) it depended on the content and the context: *“there are some parts of English that I prefer to work alone and some parts of English I’d rather work in a group”*. Of the responses who said they prefer to work with others in physical education or dance, one stated it was because they were *“not really much of a writing person eh?”* (M:07). The remaining three, all female, asserted that it was due to the social nature and the sharing aspects of the subjects. Responses included, *“in PE it’s kind of a social thing”* (F:18), and *“they’re the subjects most people enjoy, so you can fit in”* (F:17) and also *“because we show each other, like what’s, how different we are dancing, listening to each other’s music and stuff”* (F:08). In the remaining subjects, drama, technology studies and social studies,

support and sharing was the main reason why students preferred to work with others. In science, one student claimed that working with friends made the work more interesting and in languages, where they also preferred to work with others, they could not explain why when they struggled with pronunciation how working with others could help (F:02).

Some responses appeared contradictory in nature. For example, of the five students who stated that they preferred to work with others in all their subjects, three also reported they preferred to work alone in some subjects. The reasons for their choice for working alone were all logical and pertinent: *“you have more space [in graphics]to work – spread everything out and all that”* (M:03). Another student, cited, albeit, a little hesitantly *“erm, maybe cooking”* and gave the reason: *“all of yous taking turns at making stuff and if you do it by yourself you know what you did wrong and then know how to fix it up next time but if you do it in a group you don’t know who mucked it up”*(F:04)

The final student, again, although not sounding totally convincing, responded by stating that *“probably, like, erm, social studies, I guess?...cos it’s all about the stuff I really know about so it’s easier for me”* (F:05). This revealed the difficulty in attempting to base a simple subject-based rationale to student preferences when there may be a number of other considerations to take into account.

Prefer to work with others/subject	Student numbers
All of the time/most of the time	9
Mathematics	6
English	4
Physical education/dance	4
drama	3
Technical subjects (hard materials, soft materials, food, graphics,)	3
Social studies	2
Science	2

Table 8. Students’ subject preferences when working with others

Preferences for working alone

Of the 26 students interviewed, eight female students stated quite categorically that they did not prefer working alone in any subjects. There were however a number of reasons why other

students preferred to work alone in specific subjects. One student, (F:03) preferred to work alone in science because they *“found it difficult to work with a group in science cos they [other students] don’t really listen or most people in my class don’t like science...so they don’t listen”*. The student did not want to *“rely on others to get the work done; I know that I’d get it done”*, thus revealing a desire to complete work.

One other student, who had an aversion to noise, stated that he preferred to work alone in almost all subjects because of the noise associated with working in groups or with others. Two students gave the explanation of being distracted by others as a reason for preferring to work alone in some subjects. When deciding in which subjects he preferred to work alone, one student stated *“it would probably be, like art, like hard materials, all the drawing and stuff”* because *“sometimes I get into it...I get quite angry, if like friends distract me”* (M:04). However, he also stated that there were times when he prefers to work with others when he needed help because *“sometimes I get distracted”*. There were also some slightly contradictory responses from other students. For example, a student who said she preferred working with others in mathematics because she finds it a challenging subject so working with others helped, also stated *“I really like working alone in I guess like, challenging subjects cos then I can think for myself and see if like I can think, like, a good idea...”* (F:06). Another student, (F:19) who had previously stated that she preferred to work with others in English as she struggled, also stated, that in English, *“some of us are good but if we know what we’re doing, yeah, then I’ll prefer to work on my own”*. This could be interpreted as a student who is aware of her strengths and weaknesses in a particular subject and who has the understanding to know when it is more practical and appropriate to work either with others or alone.

Five students, two male and three female, preferred to work alone simply because they felt they were good at the subject and did not need the support and help of others. All of the female students also explained that working with others in subjects they perceived to be good at would be distracting for their own learning. One student reported that in social studies, *“most people don’t really understand it. So, it’s just easier to work by myself so I can learn what I want”* (F:18). This was similar to the response of student (F:07) who on the subject of textiles *“or those technology ones”* stated, *“it’s easier to do work than it is to listen to other people...[as it’s]less distracting”*. Conversely, one female student preferred working alone in languages because she felt she was not competent and was scared of others’ reactions to mistakes. Another student (M:07) preferred to work alone in music, especially when playing instruments.

Summary

The involvement of a Student Advisory Group (SAG) in this research supported the process in developing the questions used in the interview, and they endorsed the questions and the formation of the questionnaire.

The creation and the involvement of the SAG was important as it helped me in my role as researcher to understand that the research process required reciprocity if it were to truly be about exploring students' learning and the perceptions and attitudes of their learning approaches. While the actual recommendations of the SAG appeared to be fairly minor; their involvement nonetheless was important. The fact that these students were satisfied with the procedure, clarity and format of the study supported the process in implementing this within the secondary school. After meeting with students, I understood the relationship that would be needed between me and them. Changes which may have appeared negligible to me were, in essence, far greater, in terms of what they signified to students and about the students. Being part of the process was more important than any possibly seismic changes in the process itself.

I soon recognised too, that my previous "teacher" role was different to that of "researcher". The environment, in particular when interviewing the students, was very different to what I had been used to and what I had expected. As a teacher, generally conditions do not often prevail that allow you to discuss students' beliefs, perceptions and understanding about their learning, especially, on a one-to-one basis. Ironically, the tasks required within a secondary school context to get through the prescribed curriculum and associated teaching and learning can get in the way of having the dedicated time to ensure this happens. If these conditions were unnatural for me, they were, I believe, also very atypical for many of the students. That students were willing to be involved in the SAG, made me realise how seriously these young people valued their education and learning and how much they wanted to be partners, rather than simply recipients of the research process.

The questionnaire results revealed the majority of students tended to believe that the challenge of learning and learning new skills (having a mastery-goal orientation) was important to their learning, but they also believed that grades and their general achievement levels were almost as equally important. Therefore, for these students a performance-approach orientation to their learning was also valued. Before analysing the interview

findings, the results from the questionnaire showed that students appeared to have an almost “black and white” perception of how they approached their learning. The results showed that the students viewed learning new skills as “most important” to their learning while also believing that getting a good grade was equally “important”. What the questionnaire findings did show was that students did not always adopt one learning goal in opposition to another, but that they were comfortable with positioning themselves and their learning in relative ways demonstrating often somewhat contradictory and incongruous messages. The questionnaire highlighted how the students understood the importance of enjoyment of learning for learning’s sake but also how they were fully aware of the importance of performing well, albeit, perhaps against themselves rather than others, if they were to attain academic success at school. (See appendix L for a statistical breakdown of responses to questionnaire statements.)

If the questionnaire findings tended to suggest that students wanted both the challenge of learning but with the knowledge of how they were doing, via the receiving of grades and other performance indicators, then the interview findings further highlighted the complexities and ambiguities surrounding their learning. The interviews revealed that students did not simply have either a mastery-goal approach or performance-goal approach towards their learning: the interviews revealed that the majority of students were unaware of which goal approach they adopted. They also revealed that there were quite subtle and sophisticated reasons for students choosing to work with peers or friends, and in some cases when they preferred not to work with friends or peers. The results from the interviews also showed that, for students, being good at a subject did not necessarily mean they enjoyed the subject or achieved in it. Students reported that enjoying the subject was much more conducive to motivating them to learn than their ability within any specific subject.

Overall, the findings showed that students appeared to adopt a multiple-goal approach to their learning but were not aware of, or intentional towards their learning goal orientation. The majority of students were unable to perceive when using a mastery-goal approach was more beneficial to their learning than the performance-goal approach or vice-versa. As a result, students did not choose a specific goal approach over another to support their learning. Even students who seemed more aware of their learning goal orientation could not convincingly explain or articulate how they thought having a particular goal approach supported their learning. Generally, students were much more cognisant about how their social goals either hindered or supported their learning. The following chapter examines these results further and explores the implications of these.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The overall aims of the study to establish what type of learning goals Year 9 students used at secondary school to direct their attention to learning enabled a nuanced understanding of how students made choices about their learning. It also examined whether any of the espoused learning goals were more prevalent than others and possible reasons. Further to this, analysing the influence that social goals had on shaping students' learning goal choices provided further understanding of what was important to these students.

The results from this study clearly show that students adopt learning goal orientations without conscious intention and that, generally, students do not adopt a mastery-goal approach over a performance-approach goal or a performance-avoidance goal approach or vice-versa. A multiple-goal orientation approach is more prevalent among the majority of students and is adopted by students without a conscious understanding of the benefits or drawbacks of its use.

The fundamental premise of learning goal theory is that the adoption of specific learning goal approaches can be used to aid achievement in learning. Clearly specified concepts and ideas relating to different learning goal approaches have been documented over a number of decades (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Mansfield, 2012; Nicholls, 1984; Nolen, 1988). With these different types of learning goal have come specific and well documented characteristics to describe the different adoptions and approaches towards learning, including both the pros and cons associated with these learning goals. Nolen (1988) suggested that having an understanding of motivation depends on having an understanding of the learning goal types being used in research, in other words, identifying the difference between what are commonly described as mastery and performance goals.

Students' learning goal adoption

This research found that a number of motivational theories, not purely learning goal theories specifically, were evident in the students' approaches to their learning. The study focuses on the influence of learning goals on learning and this is discussed below. An important finding

in this research is that the students' own acknowledgement and understandings concerning the learning goal types they adopt was ad hoc and unplanned.

The implication is that it is crucial for students and their learning to be aware of the ways in which they approach their learning and the particular strategies that they use within these different learning goal types.

Intentional use of goal adoption

The research findings suggest that learning goal types and the adoption of these types are not a major influence on students' learning and achievement outcomes. Although it is possible to identify how students may hold a specific learning goal type, it is difficult to come to the conclusion that a learning goal approach *alone* has a major impact or influence on the majority of students' learning. It is possible to identify different learning goal approaches and orientations for students as can be seen by the findings from interviewing all of the students involved in the questionnaire (see Orientation Table, appendix P) but identifying students' learning goal orientations is not the same as affirming that the learning goal preferences or orientations have actually influenced learning. Nearly three quarters of all the participating students (73%) were unaware of their learning goal orientations. When the students were asked if the learning goal type that had been identified through the questionnaire was usual or intentional, many students could not fully comprehend the question being asked of them. In some respects there is a disparity between what is defined as a learning goal and what is actually taking place in the learning environments of those in the study. Molden and Dweck (2000) when defining what constitutes the construct of goals focus on how the construct of goals was meant to enable us an understanding into the cognitive processes that take place in creating specific achievement behaviour. Meece et al., (2006) suggest "achievement goal theorists focus on students' intentions or reasons for engaging, choosing, and persisting at different learning activities" (p. 490). The notion of purpose and intention contrasts with the way in which many students described their relationship with their learning goals.

In this study, there is little evidence from the student interviews to suggest that most students are explicitly or overtly choosing a specific learning goal to adopt whilst learning. This is consistent with Pintrich's questions concerning whether the assumptions of goal theorists that goals are accessible cognitive representations and are conscious motives are in fact correct (Pintrich, 2000). The majority of students were unconvincing in their responses to questions that probed their intentionality towards their learning goal, either giving a reply that

did not correspond or was not pertinent to the question or by responding in a very hesitant or diffident manner. A number of students adopted strategies such as awkward laughter or trailed off in their responses when unsure. These responses contrast with the definition of goal theory behaviour in Meece et al., (2006) which states “goal theorists view behaviour as purposeful, intentional, and directed toward the attainment of certain goals” (p. 490). For the majority of the students in this current study, their learning approach *just happened*. Further detail and elaboration was often given in an attempt to help make the specific learning goal types clearer to individuals and to clarify what type of learning goal adoption they were perceived to have through their questionnaire responses. However, I was reluctant to pressurise for more detailed responses and made the personal judgement to limit the scope of my questioning (Christensen & Prout, 2002). In a number of cases the students appeared awkward and slightly bemused by the question and I did not want to add to their discomfort by attempting to elicit additional explanation, which may have resulted in further difficulties for students or responses that may have been purely to “please” me as a researcher (Davis, 1998). It appeared as if a number of the respondents had never purposefully considered how they approached their learning and were unaware, if in fact, there were specific approaches available to them. Overall, only a very few respondents managed to sound convincing regarding learning goal adoption being an intentional way in which they approached their learning. Nolen (1988) acknowledged that “many have argued that understanding of motivation depends upon an understanding of the specific goals towards which individuals are oriented” (p. 270). As a group, some research supports the idea that adolescents may be less likely to approach their learning with specific goals (Kover & Worrell, 2010). The majority of students participating in the study were not cognisant of specific learning goals and the responses from the students support these views.

However, it must be acknowledged that the questions about learning goal types, and if it, the designated learning goal type, was the usual way they approach their learning, were the very first statement and question to students. It is certainly possible that they could be viewed as being rather abstract and complex, and this would not necessarily help a participant relax and to “ease” into conversation, especially as the questions related to achievement goals and goal orientations are expansive. Achievement goals have been regarded as systems or patterns of values and attitudes about accomplishment, endeavour, capacity, errors, and evaluations within an extensive structure described as orientation (Elliott, 2005). Further to this, research reports that achievement motivation cannot be separated into discrete categories, again revealing the complex nature of achievement motivation, of which learning

goal theory is part. Murphy and Alexander (2000) noted with regards motivational terminology, that studies tended not to:

define, illustrate or elaborate its central constructs by mentioning related motivation terms. This pattern suggests there is little true independence among achievement-motivation constructs. Instead, there is a great deal of interrelationship among them (p. 40).

Questions from both the student questionnaire and the student semi-structured interviews focused on many of these characteristics of goal achievement, and as a “wide-ranging framework” may have been difficult for a number of students to fully comprehend. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that these Year 9 students overall were conscious of the learning goal types they adopted whilst at secondary school. Although these students did correspond to the different types of learning goal theory that has been advocated, the findings suggest that many of the students appeared to be simply unaware of the approach they took when approaching their learning or were not convinced with the types explained to them. In other words, they did not respond positively or compellingly when asked if this was the usual way in which they approached their learning when given a description of the specific learning goal they appeared to adopt.

Multiple goal approach

Multiple goal theory is a relatively new term in learning goal theory and one premise as to why or when students adopt a multiple goal approach is that “learners match their goals to the contingencies of situations and coordinate their goal striving so as to pursue multiple goals efficiently and minimize the likelihood that they will find themselves working at cross purposes” (Brophy, 2004, p. 107). This, however, did not appear to be the case with the students within this study. This supposes that students are aware of the strategies that they use when attempting tasks and activities and that they explicitly make a choice and then adopt an approach towards their learning. However, none was able to explain coherent strategies as to why a multiple-goal adoption was right for their particular learning goal approach. Nevertheless, there are a number of possible reasons as to why a significant majority of students, almost 70% of all participants, were believed to have a multiple-goal approach to their learning. That the majority of students were assigned a multiple-goal approach towards their learning (owing to their responses on the questionnaire and when being interviewed)

was due to students simply not being able to decide what was more important to them, mastering new skills or achieving good grades. This contrasts with students having an explicit and consciously considered learning goal adoption, even one which understands the relationship between grades and mastering new skills and learning.

Many students in this study revealed that although they supported the belief that learning new skills was important to their learning, they were unwilling to relinquish a link between learning and attaining grades. In light of the emphasis on grades, evaluation and academic performance that is often more explicitly asserted as students continue through the different phases of school (Ames, 1992) students in this study were more aware of the need to be seen as performing and judged their own learning in terms of how they performed. Interestingly too, performance-approach students made very little reference within the interviews of the need to outperform others or to compare their grades to others. It would appear that the performance related nature of their goal adoption was focused on how well they were doing or had done in comparison to previous grades, rather than in comparison to others. This is in contrast to achievement goal literature where a main characteristic commonly asserted of students with a performance-goal orientation is the need to, or the importance to perform better than others in class and being aware of the need to be thought of as cleverer than classmates (Darnon et al., 2007; Nolen, 1988).

For students in this study, it appeared that the only way in which they could gauge any indication of improvement or the need for improvement in their learning was through the awarding of grades by subject teachers. One student when asked how having a multiple-goal approach helped with her learning replied, *“when I get my grades then I know that I’m going higher and levels and that”* (F:19) and another, *“if I’m like not doing well in class and I need a little bit of a boost I’ll see how other people are doing that are there and I’ll challenge myself”* (M:02). These responses, consistent with a number of student replies, reveal how students believe that grades show their progress. However, the findings suggest that grade identifications are not used in a strategic or symbiotic manner along with mastery-goals to aid their learning.

Interestingly, of all the students who were asked how a multiple-goal approach helped with their learning, nearly half were able to cite grades and performance in some respect. However, none mentioned the balance or the prioritising of goal approaches between grades and mastering new skills. This is surprising if the characteristics of someone with a multiple-goal approach are to be believed.

However, research focused on performance-approach goals often state that students are more inclined to focus on completion of tasks, students judge their “performance” relative to others and that positive judgements of student ability is vital to those who have a performance-approach goal orientation (Darnon et al., 2007; Mansfield, 2010; Valle et al., 2003). As mentioned previously, students’ understanding of their learning goal approaches within the study was difficult to comprehend. For students, concrete indicators of learning were often associated with the receiving of grades through assessment. Possibly, when students opt between mastery and performance orientations in their learning, (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2000), grades are perceived as a tangible and concrete part of their education and learning, whereas the mastery of skills and learning are seen as an abstract or conceptual ideal to which students may determine they do not have the ability to articulate or express fully.

In addition, students’ understanding and awareness of assessment and its specific meaning to them may also contribute to the need to combine both a mastery and a performance orientation in their goal approach. Molden and Dweck (2000) argue that for some people performance tasks, which naturally link to performance goals, assess intelligence whilst others believe performance tasks give them an indication of their current level of skill.

Learning goals to support learning

The following sections focus on how students in this study perceived their learning goals to support their learning and whether it is possible or salient to separate learning goals into discrete orientations.

The complexity of learning goals and student adoption

Another finding from the study is that the majority of students were unable to comprehend how their designated learning goal orientation supported their learning. As already discussed, the majority of students were not fully aware of having a particular goal adoption and therefore struggled to comprehend how it helped them focus on achieving. Students who were able to explain how their learning goal helped with their learning, albeit briefly and without elaboration or too much certainty, were students who associated with the definitions of initial learning goal theory, namely, mastery or performance goal theory, rather than the

large majority of students in the study designated as having a multiple-goal approach to their learning. Students who tended towards more mastery-goal orientations or performance-approach and performance-avoidance orientations were best able to show how the goal adoption helped, or in the case of performance-avoidance orientations, how goal adoption hindered their learning. Half of the students (4 of the 8) who had either a mastery-goal approach or a performance-approach or avoidance goal approach were able to offer reasonably salient comments about how their goal approach supported, or in the case of the performance-avoidance goal orientated student, did not support their learning.

This suggests that when students perceive their approach as being fairly straightforward, even if explanation needed to be clarified or confirmed by me in the interview, then they are able to perceive the significance and relevance to their learning. Nevertheless, the majority of students were unable to make a clear distinction between the types of defined goal orientations they were designated, which in turn meant they struggled to see the relevance of their defined orientation in supporting their learning.

The notion of unconscious learning is relevant here. As Illeris (2007) stated, “it is important to be aware of the fact that we can learn something without being conscious of it – all of us probably do this every single day” (p. 17). The reticence from a number of students concerning how their goal approach supports their learning may be associated with unconscious learning. This was evident in the responses students gave to how they thought their learning goal approach helped with their learning. Furthermore, as outlined in the literature review, regarding the adoption of a multiple-goal approach, Harackiewicz et al., (2000) suggest that the goals themselves cannot be assimilated or combined into one coherent whole as interest, either mastery or performance *is* the goal. This view would support the idea that many students in the study were able to comment upon the performance “side” of their multiple-goal orientation but were unable to connect this with their understanding of a mastery-goal concept. Students in the study were aware of the importance of new skills and mastering new skills in aiding their learning, as the questionnaire findings revealed, but had difficulty contextualising and finding reference to their own perception of what constitutes “real” learning.

Furthermore, students in this current study generally were unable to elaborate in any detail as to how the learning goal approach they adopted helped with their learning. Such responses are understandable, if in the majority of cases, students were not fully aware that they did in fact adopt a particular learning goal, mastery, performance or multiple-goal in the first place.

Discrete categories of learning goals

When interpreting the findings of the study it is interesting that it may not be feasible to separate students' learning goals into discrete and convenient categories of mastery and performance-goals, even if these are then further split into both approach and avoidance goals. Murphy and Alexander (2000) question whether it is really possible to separate mastery and performance goals into "unidimensional constructs within motivation" (p. 38). Although they acknowledge that there is improved understanding of the multifaceted nature of motivational constructs, they are wary of the notion of motivation constructs that are deemed fully independent of others. More recently, classification of learning goal constructs has developed to include multiple-goal and mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance terminology, along with high and low mastery and performance goals. Even acknowledging that learning goal identification has become more nuanced, nevertheless, they are still categories with certain borders into which students' learning goals are required to fit in an attempt to support specific goal orientations.

Consequently, a considerable finding of the current research concerns the identification and acknowledgement of complex nuances associated with students' goal orientations. While one of the research questions explores whether students opt for performance-goals over mastery-goals, the analysis of the findings showed this was not straightforward. If it were simply a case of identifying how many students had a performance-approach goal orientation in comparison to a mastery-goal orientation then it would appear that students generally do not opt for a performance-goal over a mastery-goal. Also, if the responses to the questionnaire are used in an attempt to answer this question, then again, it would be difficult to reach the conclusion that students opt for a performance-goal approach over a mastery-goal approach.

Overall, the students acknowledged the importance of mastering new skills, but were mindful of grades and the relevance towards their learning. It may have been more useful and constructive to rephrase the question to ask whether students believe that having a performance dimension to their learning goal approach is important or whether students believe that grades are a priority or are more important than mastering new skills in helping them achieve at school. These types of questions and statements, which were used in the questionnaire, were not conclusive in affirming that students opted for performance-goals

over mastery-goals whereas interviewing students revealed the complexities of students' goal orientations. For example, one student (F:08) has some of the characteristics of a student with performance-approach *and* avoidance goal orientations inasmuch as she did not like others to know her grades, apart from the occasions she was willing to share details with friends. However, when asked what at school is most important to her, she replied, "*just trying new things, and giving everything a go*". These comments do not appear to conform to a student more inclined to performance-goal orientation, students who feel the need to protect and guard their accomplishments or lack of perceived accomplishment (Bouffard et al., 1998; Valle et al., 2003). However, they do serve as an example of the difficulty in attempting to create specific learning goal categories in which to place students and reveal the complexities of students' learning goal preferences. It is possible to infer that tasks that are not perceived as academic or more formal learning tasks, and therefore, to some students, appear less challenging, may lessen the need to adopt an approach which protects students' sense of competence. Again, this reveals the complexity surrounding the identification of learning goals students can adopt as performance-approach goals affect learning only when the task is challenging (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Nevertheless, students' "giving everything a go" response has some of the hallmarks of a mastery-goal orientation, inasmuch as being prepared to be challenged and not focusing on grades or performance in comparison to others; thus it is possible to conclude that these students, (ones who adopt this attitude towards tasks) have partly mastery, partly performance-avoidance goal orientations. It could be argued that these two orientations or adoptions sit rather awkwardly together which add to the difficulties of identifying students with particular learning goal orientations (Brophy, 2004). Also, students who avoid working but who do not attempt to disguise their attitudes towards their learning, similar to student (F:13) who acknowledged that she worked only when tasks were easy and preferred to sit back and talk, are not normally associated with students with a performance-avoidance orientation.

Performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal oriented students need to affirm their abilities by gaining approval from others or obtaining confirmatory evaluations of ability or by attempting to avoid negative assessment (Bouffard et al., 1998; Darnon et al., 2007; Valle et al., 2003) or are highly concerned with their social status (Levy et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 1997). Making mistakes in their learning is not conducive to the desires and the attitudes relating to students who covet a performance-goal orientation (Harackiewicz et al., 2000; Midgley & Urdan, 2001).

The findings of this study suggest that, overall, at this particular secondary school within this set of students, concerns about performance in comparison with others is not the case. Students appear to be using assessment purely to gauge whether they are achieving or making progress. That there is little comparison with others and the students are not highly concerned with their social status amongst their peers confounds research findings somewhat. It is possible that the “community aspect” of this school has a bearing on both performance and socialisation amongst students. For example, many of the students have wider “whanau” (extended family) within the school and are comfortable socialising across the age range. For many, school is known to be a place to meet with family and friends. However, the students did not opt for a mastery-goal orientation over a performance-goal either. Overall, the students were mindful of learning new skills, and valued the enjoyment that accompanies mastering skills but were unwilling to adopt mastery-goal approaches at the detriment of performance.

In addition, students identified as having a multiple-goal approach also revealed some interesting insights into their goal orientations. Students with a multiple-goal approach would be expected to pursue different goals, be it a mastery or a performance approach, at different times, in the pursuit of achievement. In other words, advocates of a multiple-goal theory (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Harackiewicz et al., 2000; Pintrich, 2000) believe that this combined approach is generally adaptive but this again does not take into account students who may have a mastery and a performance *avoidance* [my italics] goal approach. Most learning goal literature concludes that a performance-avoidance goal orientation is maladaptive but appears not to consider the combination of a mastery-goal orientation along with a performance-avoidance orientation. One student (M:05) explained that he had adopted a performance-avoidance orientation in “*certain subjects*”, ones which he was “*not really good at*”. He went on to explain that with subjects he believed was not really good at he “*kinda just shut down*”. He perceived himself as a student who does not get involved if he is not doing well on a subject. However, he acknowledged that “*we always learn from mistakes*” and one of the things he wanted to achieve at school was a “*sense of joy of working with other people*”.

These examples reveal that students appear to have complex and seemingly contradictory goal theory approaches. Further to this it reveals the difficulty identifying students with particular or specific learning goal approaches. Barron and Harackiewicz (2001) when exploring what type of learning goal supports optimal motivation suggest, “it would appear that identifying the optimal goal to assign depends on having individual

difference information about the intended recipient” (p. 719). Valle et al., (2003) suggest that researchers often attempt to identify students with either an intrinsic, and therefore, mastery-goal approach or an extrinsic, namely, a performance-goal approach, what they term, the “ideal subject” (p. 82). They state that this is not the case in reality and that students with a preferred goal approach may still opt for the opposite when the needs arise. This study did not use a theoretical sampling method to select participants and therefore made the identification of students with specific learning goal orientations more difficult through the questionnaire and interview processes. All students in this study were interviewed after completing the questionnaire and, as identified through the questionnaire and interview process, a number of students’ approaches towards their preferred goal adoption were consistent with the comment from Valle et al., above.

Returning to the research question “*do students opt for performance goals over mastery goals?*” the answer is “no”. Instead, what emerges is that students appear to opt for a *multiple-goal approach* over a performance or a mastery-goal approach to their learning. Generally students in the research did not opt solely for a performance-goal orientation over a mastery-goal orientation. However, it is unclear whether students, within their multiple-goal approach prioritise a performance-goal adoption more readily than a mastery-goal approach.

As has been mentioned previously, students were not generally mindful of their goal approach and thus the question does bring up the same difficulties and issues as the original research question. A majority of students did recognise the importance of grades, many students did allude to grades and performance as a way in which they could gauge how well they were doing at school and virtually all students failed to comment on the mastery of new skills as a way of supporting their understanding of learning.

Performance goals and social goals

A focus of the study was explored through two of the research questions “Are performance goals of students – at this specific secondary school – predominantly linked to social goals?” and “Do these students’ social goals play a role in shaping student achievement goal choices?”

The study highlighted that these questions are far too substantial in terms of determining a comprehensive response. Again, if the question is reshaped and becomes, “are social goals important in shaping student learning?” the answer would be an affirmative. This

study indicates that students perceive their social goals as invaluable in influencing their learning and achievement.

Similar to the studies surrounding learning goals, social goals and learning environments are seen as a complex and multi-faceted area of education research (Church et al., 2001; Levy et al., 2004; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). When Urdan and Maher (1995) defined social goals in terms of the relevant social purposes to students for academic achievement, they highlighted the importance of social goals. They argued that in order to have a deeper and fuller understanding of motivation and achievement with a school context, recognising the role of social goals is important. In a similar study, Levy et al., (2004) argued that depending on the perceived worth of the social interaction, students may adopt different learning goals. There are a number of reasons why students create, maintain and nurture social goals; these can include constructing relationships and companionship, to attempt to enhance one's reputation, to please others and simply to enjoy the interactions with classmates and teachers (Brophy, 2004; Ryan et al., 1997; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). Given that classrooms are community spaces of a social nature, both the nature and success of relational interactions that occur in these contexts can have an impact on student motivation and achievement (Mansfield, 2010).

This study highlights the contrast between students understanding of how learning goals influence learning and how they perceive and understand the role in which social goals influence their learning. When students were asked to consider the learning goal orientation identified by them through the question results, and were asked how the particular goal helped with their learning, a large majority of these students acknowledged having no real comprehension of their goal type or how it helped them with their learning. Illeris (2007) suggests there are three dimensions to learning which involve the interaction between an individual, society and the acquisition process, and that all three dimensions need to be in play for learning to take place. Lave (2009) argued that learning was not simply the acquisition of knowledge, and that it was "ubiquitous in ongoing activity though often unrecognised as such" (p. 201). Wenger (2009) suggests "learning is, in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing" and therefore learning takes place within a social environment (p.210). Interestingly, Jarvis (2009) agrees with many modern theories of learning, that learning is inherently a social activity, and is not simply a cognitive or mental process. He suggests that we need to focus on both the psychological and social aspects of the learner, but with the learner squarely placed in the middle of this process. The students within this study through

their perceptions of how peers and friends influence their learning and their overwhelming affirmative to the importance of friends and peers to their learning appear to corroborate these views.

Theories of learning are generally academic and scholarly in nature and often appear abstract and complex. With this view in mind, it is possible to conclude that the students in this study were much more able and willing to appreciate and perceive the social nature of learning. As revealed in chapter 4, most students did not respond saliently or confidently when asked to explain how their learning goal approaches supported their learning; many appeared awkward or hesitant and the responses suggested that students were not aware of how learning goals influenced their learning or achievement. In contrast, responses from students to questions concerning social goals were much more forthcoming and they discussed a number of reasons as to why social goals, in their view, influenced their learning. Barbour and Schostak (2011) suggest that when interviewing participants “if...questions, themes and issues were relevant in their lives, the interviewees would generally raise them during the interview” (p. 65). This tends to support my experience that students were more forthcoming with responses to how social goals influence their approach to their learning. Further to this, these students were also able to identify ways in which social goals influenced their learning both positively and negatively. While nearly three-quarters of students appeared to be unaware of their learning goal orientation, 85% of students cited friends or classmates when asked about the positive influences in their learning.

Nonetheless, the data do not provide the full picture of the influences social goals may have on students’ achievement. Students in this study showed, for the most part, a measured and thoughtful, if at times, seemingly contradictory understanding of how social goals can aid or thwart learning. Generally, students did believe that working with friends and classmates had a positive influence on their learning, especially when they were intent on mastering a skill or attempting to learn (Ryan et al., 1997; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). There was a qualification associated with this. From the responses of the questionnaire, the data showed that students were torn between working with their friends and completing their work, with a majority stating that they would only work with friends if they completed work and others expressing a desire to work with friends whether they completed work or not. These findings are consistent with Boekaerts et al., (2006) who suggest that midlevel achievement goals, those associated with academic achievement may be in conflict with midlevel social goals, namely the goals that pertain to “primary socializing agents...e.g., peers, teachers” etc. (p. 37).

What these data reveal is that students are aware of, even if they are not always consciously mindful of, the importance of the social dimension of learning, inasmuch as they appear to understand that not only do friends and peers (referred to as classmates in the questionnaire and interview questions) support learning by being cooperative and sharing ideas but that cooperation and familiarity can be a negative influence at times through distraction and talking. Nevertheless, what the findings reveal is the importance of belonging to students' well-being, how crucial it would appear that peer support is to students' motivations at school, even if these motivations are not all of an academic nature or focus. As Walker and Greene (2009) argue "learning is a complex process that must take into account the central role of personal interactions and the perceptions that stem from those interactions" (p. 464).

Nevertheless, student interviews revealed some interesting findings concerning students' willingness to work with others, and in particular, at times, an unwillingness to stop working with friends and peers even if it meant work was not completed. For example, one student (M:04) when questioned on inconsistent statements concerning whether he will only work with friends if all work is completed or not stated "*it's sort of in the middle*" On his questionnaire he had stated that he likes to work with friends only if all work is completed and also he likes to work with friends whether all work was completed or not. However, he was able to explain that he prioritised whether he socialised or whether he was concerned about completing all his work; it depended upon the perceived importance of the subject. Another student, who appeared to be a very conscientious and driven student (from responses to questions from the semi-structured interview) remarked that "*maybe sometimes I really hate the subject so we chat*" (F:17), which reveals a similar attitude concerning socialising and work.

Other students were able to discriminate between students with a similar work effort and attitude as them. For example, one student (F:14) explained "*there's probably, like only, one or two friends that I only, I only work with...because they get straight to their work, and like, that's all they'll talk about is the work*". These and other similar discerning comments suggest that it is possible that students have a insightful appreciation of how to balance the need to continue working, and arguably learning, whilst maintaining social relationships and when to decide when it is necessary to temporarily discontinue talking and chatting with others. These views appear to link to views regarding intrinsic motivation where "some goals are much closer than others to individuals' core values and developing interests so they are assigned higher priorities" (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999, in Brophy, 2005, pp. 168-9). However,

these students' views suggest that not only do they assign a core value or an interest to their learning but desire a social outlet to help drive or influence their willingness to learn.

That students were not abashed when discussing what can be construed as contradictory comments on the influences of social goals on their learning may be simply because they have a more secure understanding about what works for them regarding the balance between learning and socialising within the classroom. It is possible to suggest that the students have a more insightful understanding about what works regarding their learning than perhaps others who observe them at their learning, for example, teachers and researchers (Wentzel, 1994). This is highlighted by the comment of one student, who when asked how he would define doing well on a subject and what would it look like, stated, "*probably like asking enough questions, probably having a little muck around and then getting straight to work*" (M:04).

Another important finding of the study that was associated to social goals is that the majority of students did not express specific preferences regarding with whom they worked. Levy et al (2004) suggest "that a general concern with self-worth in the academic domain would also appear in the social domain" (p. 154). However, of the four students identified as having a performance-goal approach towards their learning, and therefore possibly a greater concern with self-worth within the academic domain, three students, two of whom encompassed a performance-approach goal orientation and one student with a performance-avoidance goal orientation did not care who they worked with and overall nearly 77% of students in the study were of the same view. Also, interestingly, it would appear that status goals, popularity or admiration for and by others, (Brophy, 2004) did not play an important part in students choosing who they would work with.

In answering the original research question, "are performance goals of students – at this specific school – predominantly linked to social goals?" the data appears inconclusive. Virtually all students perceive social goals in terms of socialization as an influence on learning as the views and comments of students make explicit and multiple references to the importance of friends and classmates in supporting them within their learning. Although as revealed in chapter 4, the influences are not always of a positive nature regarding students' learning. If students who have a mastery-goal approach towards their learning are not influenced by their grades, do they express a need to "perform"? In contrast do those with a performance-goal orientation, whether approach or avoidance, gauge their abilities in comparison with others? Therefore, indirectly, the question is also asking do students care about how they are perceived by others academically and if so, does this affect who they are

willing to work with? The questionnaire and interview responses suggest that students are not significantly influenced, and therefore motivated by the abilities of others as almost 77% of students responded positively to the questionnaire question, *“I do not care who I work with in class as long as I learn”*. Interestingly, only one student commented on the academic ability of others as making a difference when deciding who they chose to work with in class or it having a detrimental influence on their learning. Even so, some individuals did make informed choices not to work with others, but this was mostly due to the fact that they perceived their ability to be better than others in certain subjects. On these occasions they reported choosing to work alone, so as not to be encumbered by others, and thereby revealing a sense of autonomy. This is not the same as students deliberately avoiding to work with others because of their concerns that others were more able and therefore they did not want to feel inferior or stupid around them, which is the finding of a number of studies which focus on social goals related to social status and learning goals (Levy et al., 2004; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).

Another difference between students’ understanding and awareness of the influence of social goals and their awareness of how their learning goals influence their learning was evident in both the general reactions to the question about whether they preferred to work alone or with others. Whereas students had been mostly very unsure or awkward and confused with their replies focusing on the importance of learning goals on their achievement and learning, they were much more forthright, confident and immediate with their responses to whether they preferred to work alone or with others

The questions concerning working preferences followed on from questions regarding the positive and negative influences about working with general classmates (peers) and friends; therefore students had been contemplating the pros and cons of social goals prior to answering the questions. This may be significant to the findings. Eight students out of 26 simply stated “no” to the question of whether they preferred to work alone. Another two replied that they preferred working with others in all their subjects, which could be inferred as they preferred not to work alone at all and one student said “sometimes maths” in response to when he preferred to work alone. He qualified his response by explaining that he does not actually work alone in mathematics at all.

Given many students did not appear to be aware of the range of learning strategies available to them; they may have turned to working with others as a “default” strategy to help them with their learning. And although this in itself is not counter-productive

concerning their learning and achievement, it may partly explain the importance of social goals in respect to their learning.

Learning strategies, learning and social goals

This study highlighted students' perception of what "doing well" looked like. It uncovered students' insight into how they knew they had achieved within a subject or on a task. A question from the semi-structured interview asked students how they define doing well on a subject; further to this, students were asked whether they knew when they had done well in a subject or on a task. The rationale behind the questions was to attempt to ascertain whether students focused on a performance or a mastery-goal approach in deciding what was a priority in their learning. With this in mind, it was anticipated that students would produce a variety of explanations in which to reveal their understanding of achievement, but nevertheless, they were more likely to be explanations that were associated with either mastering new skills or with attaining improved grades. However, the comments and explanations cited revealed an interesting finding one which can also be linked to students' understanding or awareness of their learning goals.

As would be expected, a number of students stated that the grades they received from teachers helped them understand when they had done well on a task or on a subject, (see Table 3). However, the majority of responses, mentioned either how hard they had worked on a task or within a subject or whether they had completed the work. There appears to be a link to students' learning goals as students' lack of understanding of their goal approaches may be associated with the way in which they consider how and when they have done well in a subject or on a task. For example, it might have been anticipated that there would have been some comments linked to specific strategies but there appears to be a belief that to work hard, complete all work and the more work completed then the better, as a way of students believing they had done well. When it was put to students that completing all work or working hard did not necessarily mean they had achieved, few were willing or able to offer, or elaborate upon, other strategies to explain achievement. Previous research has shown that learners who struggle academically often do not know the learning or cognitive strategies needed to be successful (Margolis & McCabe, 2003). Ames (1992) argued "motivation is often equated with quantitative changes in behaviour, (e.g., higher achievement, more time on task) rather than qualitative changes in the way students view themselves in relation to the task, engage in the process of learning, and then respond to the learning activities and

situation” (p. 268). The students’ comments and perceptions relating to their own achievement support this view inasmuch as there were no responses that spoke of the way in which students engage with the process of learning, only that they worked hard and therefore had been successful.

Three students reported that their teachers’ feedback was their way of knowing if they have done well. While the questionnaire results overwhelmingly showed that students agreed with the statement “I use the teacher’s written or verbal comments (feedback or feedforward) to improve my future work”, this could be attributed to the fact that they use teacher feedback to improve their learning, or their “performance”, but not necessarily to know they had “done well”. If students are not explicitly or consciously aware of how they are making progress, (e.g., what specific strategies work for them or when to switch to another strategy when necessary) then it could be difficult for them to make greater progress other than through natural development or maturation. This becomes more significant if students are not necessarily using the valuable resource of teacher evaluation of their work to further support the learning as may be the case from the findings. That an overwhelming number of students as reported in the questionnaire preferred it when others tell them how to do a task, suggests a link to their self-regulating learning practices. Zimmerman (1989) suggest that self-regulated learners “involve the use of specified strategies to achieve academic goals” and “self-regulated learning strategies are actions and processes directed at acquiring information or skill that involve agency, purpose and instrumentality perceptions by learners” (p. 329). However, it is feasible to suggest that these students’ learning environments may also have an effect on the types of approach they use to aid their learning, which may or may not lead to the use of independent learning strategies and approaches to support learning.

Other motivational influences on students’ learning

This study found that student learning goals, whether mastery, performance or multiple goals may have limited influence and effect on their achievements because the majority of students were unaware of their specific learning goal orientation or how it helps them with their learning. In cases where the learning goal orientations that students hold may help or have an influence on their learning, this is likely to be an unconscious, unintentional act, and is not the result of a conscious adoption of any particular goal. Part of the concluding statement concerning the aims of the study was to see “what goals students use to direct attention to

their learning”; there are a number of motivational influences linked to the goals that students adopt when they approach their learning.

Future goals

In an attempt to understand how particular learning goals influence and motivate students and their learning, the interview explored this aspect in more depth. Questions were posed relating to the reasons students attend school, what was most important to students at school and what the students wanted to achieve at school. Data from the interviews provided a clear perspective on how students’ future goals were both influential and motivational, in terms of the reasons for students attending school and also in helping them to reach their future goals. As defined by Mansfield (2010) future goals are “goals pertaining to students’ future desires including career and employment, materialistic possessions, success and happiness” (p. 46).

Extrinsic motivation and instrumentality

The need to understand the goals Year 9 students use to motivate themselves in their learning, and to explore their motivational influence about what they want to get from their time at school drove this study. The research questions allowed a focus on exploring the motivation towards school and their learning with these Year 9 students. The research process enabled participating students the opportunity to consider such issues.

The students provided a range of responses to the question “*what are the main reasons you attend school?*” and often an individual student provided multiple reasons. Only one student did not appear to know why she came to school and therefore was unable to suggest any particular reasons. However, overall, students understood that learning was the factor that enabled them to get a “good education”.

In exploring why students attend school, the participating students were very aware of their distal goals and responded in a range of ways, for example, getting a good job or for their future careers, getting an education, obtaining good grades to further their learning at university. Over half of these responses indicated the importance of instrumental goals and rewards when associated with the reasons they attend school and what they want to achieve whilst at school. Both of these responses are inextricably linked to what is instrumental to them in the future.

The Year 9 students in this study viewed school as a means to enhance their job and future life prospects. This is “a forward-looking endeavour, with implications for future educational opportunity, job prospects, and financial success” and is associated with “a desired future outcome” (Kover & Worrell, 2010, p. 471). For these students, personal future goals are important for their motivation and the learning in the present (Walker & Greene, 2009).

This study also highlighted how social motivations are also important reasons that students cite for attending school. There were nearly as many responses that mentioned to see friends or “*hang out with friends*” (F:02) as there were for getting a job, or getting an education; more students mentioned friends than gaining qualifications. That students were able to reconcile coming to school with socialising and with learning and getting a good education seems to equate with their approach towards their learning and with using friends and classmates as a way in which to enrich their learning experience. Many students talked about wanting to learn, or getting an education while also maintaining the importance of having contact with their friends. As one student noted, “*the truth?...to see my friends*” (F:04). The observation from Valle et al., (2003) may be salient here when they state, “It may be that in those situations in which the learning activity is not very stimulating or interesting, many social reasons are needed for the student to feel motivated” (p. 73). This is a view identified over 20 years ago that is still relevant in today’s context (Blumenfeld, 1992).

A number of questions focused on why students attended school. As has been reported in Chapter 4, responses concerning getting a good education and learning were often cited. However, there is a disparity between students understanding the need or desire for a good education and learning and the appropriate strategies available to them to achieve. In particular, students had difficulties perceiving how their learning goal orientations or preferences may have helped them achieve their overall goals of learning and getting a good education. That a majority of students (as had been mentioned previously) believed the effort and the completion of tasks and class work was the way in which they knew when they had done well, does not necessarily equate to enhancing their learning. Many of the students made a link between effort and learning and reveals there may be a lack of alternative and arguably more useful and relevant strategies available to them to develop their learning. Nevertheless, the Year 9 students in this study were able to appreciate and comprehend the relevance that working with others plays in influencing motivation and ultimately in aiding their learning. They were also aware of the role that teachers play in also supporting their learning.

Interest as motivation

Studies have shown that a student's interest in a content subject area has a positive effect on learning and the motivation to learn (Ainley, 2006; Schiefele, 1991). Hidi (2000) explored this area and identified the notion of "interest" with regards learning as requiring increased mental actions or processes, determined attention and emotional connection which in itself needs continuing mental engagement. In relation to Hidi's notion of interest, the responses of the Year 9 students in this study did suggest focus and concentration, effort and getting more from a subject was more likely when they were interested.

Ability versus interest in subject content

One of the questions students were asked was *"who or what do you think has the most influence on you when it comes to you doing well on a task or in a subject, i.e., who or what makes the difference to you doing well?"* Accompanying this question was the probe that explored the relationship between specific subjects and motivation. In particular, two questions asked whether students' perceived ability or enjoyment of a subject was an influence on whether their perceived success made a difference to them doing well. What is surprising was the Year 9 students in this study reported that being "good" at a subject had little influence on their learning, and did not generally motivate or influence them to do well. Interestingly, however, one of the two students identified as having a performance-avoidance approach to her learning, (F:08) made a comment in support of being good at a subject having a positive influence on her learning. When asked why being good at a subject was a positive influence, she replied, *"cos I really know what to do"*. It would appear that for her, knowing what to do in a subject, and therefore being good at a subject, helped, as being a student with a performance-avoidance orientation could possibly have meant that she was less confident and willing to be influenced by subjects or tasks that were perceived to be challenging or where there was a possibility of failure, which is the prevalent finding amongst a number of studies (Brophy, 2004; Bouffard et al., 1998; Darnon et al., 2007; Harackiewicz et al., 2000).

This is in contrast to the number of students who believed having an interest in a subject or enjoying the tasks and activities within specific subjects (and therefore simply enjoyed the subject and its related content) influenced them doing well. With regard to students who had an interest in a subject and its content for example, a greater number of

students who associated enjoyment with interest and vice-versa than those who acknowledged their ability within a subject, believed liking or enjoying a subject influenced their learning positively. Some students acknowledged that if they did not enjoy the subject they did not try as hard, lost attention or simply shut down. However, surprisingly few students who associated being good at a subject as having a positive influence on their learning.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Students come to school with a number of intentional goals to realize. Do the students within this study want to achieve whilst they are at school? The answer to this question is an almost resounding yes. Even for students who are less focused on learning and achievement, and appear more determined on socialising and want to avoid challenging tasks and situations whenever possible, achieve success relative to their own goals. Yet for some, meeting up with friends is the single most important reason for attending school. Within this study, it is certainly an important factor for most when they are at school. Linked to this, students believe that friends and peers do influence them within their learning.

Also, for many of the students within the study, receiving “good” grades and working hard to complete all the set work represented having done well. In theory (from the views reported on the questionnaires) mastering a task, learning new skills and not being concerned how success related to others was an approach that most within the study agreed with. However, interviews with students rarely corroborated this view. Therefore, a mastery-goal approach was not prevalent among students within the study. Furthermore, although as discussed previously, students believed grades revealed achievement, no more students identified with having a purely performance-goal orientation than did those who adopted a mastery-goal approach.

Over a number of decades, research has focused on what type of learning goal is more adaptive for achievement. However, even when research agrees on what learning goal type or combination of goals is more significant for achievement (and the consensus of the literature is that it depends on a number of influencing factors and is therefore very complex and difficult to assign one learning goal over another as being more beneficial without further qualification) it would appear that students are achieving without the knowledge of how their learning goal or combination of learning goals supports their learning. In other words, students within this study are learning and achieving *despite* not knowing how learning goals can aid or support learning. It is unfeasible to conclude that if students in this study had a better understanding of their learning goal preferences it would aid achievement more. However, it is possible to surmise that if students were better informed of how different

learning goal types supported achievement, they would be able to make more conscious decisions to support their learning and consequently, their achievement.

This study explored how learning goal motivational intentions influenced students' learning and whether students adopted performance-goal orientations over mastery-goal orientations. Further to this, the study examined how important social goals were in shaping students' goal choices.

As has been previously acknowledged, learning goal theory has often been observed as being an individual approach to learning, which focuses on personal development and the acquisition of new skills, the avoidance of revealing one's ability within a subject or the comparison with others, (Allodi, 2010; Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Bouffard et al., 1998; Levy et al., 2004; Midgley et al., 2001; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). This study revealed that students' learning goals, both mastery and performance, are not adopted by students in isolation of other motivational influences. Boekaerts et al., (2006) have disputed that achievement goals are not isolated driving forces but simply one of the multitude of goals that students bring to school and the classroom. This is described by Boekaerts et al., as "the kaleidoscope of goals that become salient in diverse learning settings" (p. 35).

Studies have shown that for adolescent students, other determinants are as crucial in the learning process. In particular, social goals and future goals are important factors which influence the motivation of adolescents (Mansfield, 2010; Wentzel, 1994; Wentzel, 1999). The findings of the study suggest that the students tend not to be "goal specific"; in other words, students, overwhelmingly adopt a combination of both mastery-goal and performance-goal orientations.

However, the most striking finding of this research is that the students are not overtly aware of the goal approaches they adopt in their learning. That they adopt learning goals is clear but the students in this study were generally unaware of the specific (i.e., mastery or performance goal) or combination of goal approaches they adopted and how these learning goal types helped or hindered their learning. For the students in this study a number of motivational approaches influence their learning. The support of friends and peers within the classroom appeared to exert a strong influence on their learning. Also, students were mindful of how friends or peers supported or hindered their learning and achievement. Furthermore, students' understanding of instrumental goals also played a part in motivating them, inasmuch as students were aware of the importance of education to future success and happiness. Moreover, this study highlighted that student interest in a subject area played a greater role in motivating them in their learning, than perceived ability within that subject.

Limitations of the study

The small number of participants can be considered a limitation of the study because it is impossible to deduce whether the broad range of attitudes and approaches towards their learning that students within the year group may have possessed was fully present in the study. Of the 2012 Year 9 cohort consisting of 185 students, only 26 students (14%) provided informed consent and subsequently participated in the study. There are a number of challenges regarding the gaining of informed consent in a secondary school context. Issues surrounding gaining *consent* as opposed to *assent* may mean, as was the case in this particular study, that both students and parents or caregivers are required to affirm student participation by means of completed and returned consent forms. Although it is crucial to have comprehensive and inclusive confirmation surrounding students involved in research, it does mean that the organization and management of consent forms becomes a more complex logistical task. My reflections in Chapter 3 support this view. Furthermore, in general, secondary schools tend to be larger establishments (in terms of numbers) than primary schools and with larger populations there is the tendency for less intimacy and familiarity between teachers, students and others involved in a student's education. This can mean that communications between more rather than fewer parties can result in missed opportunities to be fully involved with events and activities that take place within a school. It is also possible that students at secondary school have less interest in some aspects of school life and may focus on activities unrelated to their learning.

Given the relatively small number of participants in this study, there are nonetheless a number of positive outcomes to consider. Silverman (2000) focuses on the positive aspects of small scale studies when he states, "what you lose in breadth, you may gain in telling detail" (p. 69). In the case of the present study, having the opportunity to interview all 26 participants who completed the questionnaire rather than only a subset as was the intention of the original proposal meant that the views and the ideas of *all* participants were taken into account when interviewing. This allowed all students within the study to share their ideas and become valuable contributors to the research.

The case study design used within this study means that the findings may be experienced, understood and even "known" by others in similar contexts, but cannot be claimed to be generalizable to other populations. However, the results of this study are not intended to be used across populations. Rather, as acknowledged at the outset, the focus for this study was on a specific school with its own identity which is pertinent and important to

me as a teacher at the school. Nevertheless, the results contribute to learning goal research, inasmuch as questions are raised about the conscious awareness of students' learning goal orientations. The importance of student awareness concerning their learning goal orientations are discussed below.

Considerations for future focus

A number of further considerations have arisen from this study. One of the most significant of these is related to learning goal orientation. Student awareness of their specific learning goal orientations is important; however, arguably, more crucial is how students could use specific goal orientations for the purpose of achieving. In particular, knowing when to adopt a performance-goal over a mastery-goal approach or vice-versa, or indeed when to use a multiple-goal approach for learning, or how different learning goals can complement each other are important issues for students to consider. There are situations when performance-approach goals can be more useful for learning than a mastery-goal approach. For example, when needing to memorise a complex system of numbers, dates or equations (which may be necessary to contribute towards further learning and achievement), the need for "deeper understanding" may be deemed as insignificant or inconsequential. At other times, being aware of specific criteria needed to reach a particular grade could be seen as more salient than inherent enjoyment or mastery of a skill or task. Balancing the need for enjoyment and mastery of skills along with reaching specific criteria to progress within a subject or a set of tasks may need the use of a multiple goal approach.

This study reveals that Year 9 students may not consider in any great or lasting detail the strategies pertaining to their own learning goal orientation and adoption that they use or might use whilst they attempt to learn. If this is the case across a number of the cohort at large (at this specific school) then teachers could enhance their students' learning by being aware of how their students approach their learning, being aware of the possible strategies open to them and how these strategies might impact both positively and negatively upon their achievements could be areas to consider within the school environment. As Illeris (2007) has observed to "acquire appropriate habits and procedures in connection with different forms of learning" are a part of being mindful of the "fundamental conditions for ordinary assimilative learning" (p. 68). The need for mindfulness, for awareness and understanding associated with the adaptive nature of learning goals would support student achievement. There are certain practices and behaviours involved when a student explicitly chooses one goal approach over

another in a particular learning environment to support learning, and consequently achievement. For students within the study, different influences and preferences are available to support learning; nevertheless, it would be advantageous for students to be mindful of both the adaptive and maladaptive nature of the different learning goals available to them. As mentioned above, if teachers are aware of the ways in which learning goals can support achievement this may offer assistance to students. Emphasising or re-emphasising when a mastery, performance or multiple-goal approach would be most adaptive and conducive to student learning could aid the learning process.

The findings of the research allow for further exploration within the learning goal field of study. Exploration that more fully focuses on “how” students make their learning goal preferences and the reasons why they do so would add to this research and allow for a greater understanding of student choices.

The situational context should play a part in the choosing of and therefore the adoption of learning goals. For teachers, creating a learning environment that focuses on the mastery of skills rather than simply on gaining grades, in other words, creating an environment that avoids competition or “winners and losers” may avoid students adopting a purely performance-avoidance goal approach towards their learning, which studies confirm is maladaptive for learning (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Meece et al., 2006). Further to this, for teachers to foster an environment that encourages challenge and allows for mistakes tend to negate the effects of performance-avoidance goals (Brophy, 2005).

From a teacher’s point of view, explicitly and clearly explaining to students the differences concerning the learning goal approaches available to them to aid learning and demonstrating when one or a combination of goals may result in supporting student achievement may also help students to make conscious strategic choices about what goal or combination of goals might best help them achieve. Nonetheless, this is an area of study with limited research to support whether an explicit and conscious focus on learning goals has beneficial outcomes for students. Further study within this area is recommended.

Another area for further consideration related to teachers highlighted the importance of also further exploring the influence social goals have on students’ learning and achievement. While the nature and the scope of the research study has not allowed for greater exploration of this area pertaining to learning goals, the findings did show this is a relevant and important area for students and their goal setting. Students within the study, showed an understanding of how the role of friends and peers supported or hindered their learning, and

therefore, further exploration about the symbiotic nature of learning goals and social goals would be valuable.

In recent years, research studies have acknowledged that learning goals are not adopted in isolation, and that the different social goals identified, when studied in conjunction with learning goals, have an important part to play in attempting to support students' learning (Boekaerts et al., 2006; Mansfield, 2012; Ryan et al., 1997). Therefore, further attempts to evaluate the motivational links between learning and social goals are needed.

This study also revealed that students appear to be mindful of the importance and influence instrumentality and future goals play in their future success. Teaching and learning environments that highlight and contextualise learning content and activities in relation to future goals may have a motivational effect on students.

One of the key motivational drives for students' learning and achievement has been reported as an interest in the subject (Schiefele, 1991). Consistent with this view, this specific study showed that student interest and engagement in the subject area appeared to have a more significant motivational influence than being competent at a subject. Therefore, teachers can take an active role in facilitating their students' learning by formulating learning activities that are relevant to students' interests in order to increase the likelihood that student motivation is increased and subsequently their achievement.

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Appendices

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

APPENDIX A

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations Student Consent Form

Dear student,

I am a Master's student in the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. The project I am undertaking is examining students' approaches to their learning. I would like to find out about Year 9 students' motivation around learning and the types of goals they set for their learning. The university requires that ethics approval be obtained in the form of a student's written consent for research involving human participants.

1. I am inviting you to participate in this study. If you agree it will involve you completing a brief questionnaire about your learning goals and your approaches towards your learning. The questionnaire will be administered by a subject teacher in lesson time. It will take about 15 minutes to complete. Your responses will be known to me and my supervisor only.
2. In addition, I would like to follow up with an interview. This will take place later in the term and will require you to discuss ideas related to the questionnaire. You will miss part of a timetabled lesson.
3. Also, I am inviting you to participate in a Student Advisory Group (SAG). You will be required to meet twice in Term 3 for approximately 30 minutes each time.

Any information received by me will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone else, apart from my supervisor, without your permission. The results of this research may be published in a professional journal. No details that could lead to the identification of a student will be present.

Yours faithfully,

Nicholas Gartell

☐ I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. This has included a Student and Student Advisory Group (SAG) information sheet.

- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project (before data collection and analysis is complete) without having to give reasons or without penalty of any sort and any data I have provided will be destroyed.
- ☐ I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the published results will not use my name, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.
- ☐ I understand that the tape recording of interviews will be electronically wiped at the end of the project unless I indicate that I would like them returned to me.
- ☐ I give my permission to be involved in this research project
- ☐ I understand that feedback of the research will be provided in the form of a written summary sheet
- ☐ I would like to be a member of the Student Action Group (SAG) if I am one of the first 6 to return this form.

Student name _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations Student & Student Advisory Group (SAG) Information Sheet

Dear Year 9 Student,

My name is Nick Gartell and I am a teacher at this school. This year I have taken a year off to study at the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. The project I am undertaking is examining students' approaches to their learning. I would like to find out about Year 9 students' motivation around learning and the types of goals they set for their learning in this school. I also want to set up a Student Advisory Group to inform this research. The University requires that ethics approval be obtained in the form of a student's written consent for research involving human participants. The school has given permission for this research to take place and for me to invite you to take part.

How will you find out the information you need?

The research will include you attempting a questionnaire in which you will agree or disagree with statements linked to the ways in which you approach your learning at school. The questionnaire will be administered in lesson time within school hours by your regular teacher.

What else is involved in the research?

You may be asked to be involved in a follow-up interview with me where you will be invited to discuss your thoughts and ideas in greater detail. This will take place later in the term. It is anticipated that this interview will take no more than thirty minutes. Any information shared by you with me will be confidential. Your comments will be recorded for reasons of being able to accurately report your views. Any identifying features will be removed (confidentialised). All data and details will be kept in locked storage or password protected files and will be destroyed within two years of the completion of the research project.

How will we know what you have found out?

Feedback to all participants will be provided, if required by individuals, in the form of a written summary. It is anticipated that this will be available within six months of the completion of the research.

The Student Advisory Group

I am inviting you to be a member of the Student Advisory Group (SAG) for this project. As a member of the Student Advisory Group (SAG) you will be involved in discussing with me, the researcher, what you think about the type of questions I want to ask and how I ask them.

How many will be on the SAG?

There will be 6 students that make up the SAG. Students will be chosen from those who send in the consent forms first. The first 6 available students who willingly agree will be invited to participate.

What will it involve?

Being a member of the Student Advisory Group will involve trialling the questionnaire before the rest of the year group attempt it. You may wish to recommend ways in which the questionnaire, after reading and attempting the questions, can be improved. You will also get to look at the details on the interview schedule before students are interviewed. Again, you might suggest ways in which the interview could be improved. It is anticipated that we meet as a group two times during Term 3 for 30 minutes each time. Part of your involvement will be when lessons are timetabled although it may go into a lunch-hour. At both the SAG meetings I will provide food (e.g., pizza) and non-alcoholic drinks.

Will other people know what I say?

There will only be 5 other students in the SAG working with you. You will hear the opinions of these students, but apart from that your comments will be kept confidential. Agreement of students in the SAG to respect confidentiality will be discussed at the first meeting. Any personal details, suggestions or recommendations that you make will not be shared with others. Any information you share, either written or oral, will be destroyed after two years of the completion of the research project.

Thank you for taking the time to read over the information. If you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on 04 234 6968 or contact my supervisor, [Dr Roseanna](#) Bourke, Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Victoria University, Wellington. roseanna.bourke@vuw.ac.nz or on 04 463 9773.

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Participants can contact Dr Alison Kirkman, Chair of the VUW Ethics Committee on either 04 463 5064 or at allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz to ask questions or to make a complaint.

APPENDIX C

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations Parent/Guardian Information Sheet and Consent Form

Dear parent or guardian,

I am currently a Master of Education student in the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. I am also a teacher at Wainuiomata High School although I am on study leave this year to complete my Master's degree. As part of this qualification I am undertaking a research project that examines students' motivation around their learning and the types of goals they set for their learning. The University requires that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants. The school has given permission for this research to take place and for me to invite your child to take part.

I request your permission to invite your child to participate in this research.

What involvement is needed?

If you agree to this, your child will be invited to take part. If your child is interested in participating in this research, she or he will be invited to complete a short questionnaire in which they agree or disagree with statements linked to the ways in which students approach learning at school. The questionnaire will be administered in lesson time within school hours by your child's regular teacher.

The research may also involve your child being invited to take part in a follow-up interview. If this happens, I will interview your child to discuss their ideas in greater detail. This will take place later in term 3. It is anticipated that this interview will take no more than thirty minutes. Any information shared by your child will be confidential. Students' comments will be tape-recorded for reasons of being able to accurately report their views.

What if a student changes their mind?

Involvement in the questionnaire and follow-up interviews are entirely voluntary and students may withdraw from either at any time.

Up to 6 students will also be invited to become a member of a Student Advisory Group (SAG). This will also be voluntary and will involve 4-6 members. The students will be selected based on the first 4-6 students who return their consent forms indicating that they would like to be involved as part of the SAG. Involvement in the SAG will involve meeting twice during Term 3 for a half hour meeting (a total commitment of 1 hour over the term). It will consist of giving feedback and recommendations about the questionnaire and interview schedule. SAG members will also trial the questionnaire before it is given to the year group. Members of the SAG will meet twice as a group during lesson time in term 3. This will not be for more than 30 minutes duration.

Who will know about students' ideas and comments?

The results from this research may be published in a professional journal, but your child's name and any other identifying school or child information will not be revealed. All data and details will be kept in locked storage or password protected files and will be destroyed within two years of the completion of the research project. Feedback of the research will be provided in the form of a written summary sheet.

You are under no obligation for your child to participate in this research. If you give your consent, you are free to change your mind without any negative consequences. Also, your child is free to refuse to participate at any time without any consequences for their learning.

If you are willing for your child to participate, and your child indicates an interest to participate, please tick the relevant boxes and sign and return this form to school with your child. If you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on 04 234 6968 or contact my supervisor, Dr Roseanna Bourke, Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Victoria University, Wellington on 04 463 9773 or at roseanna.bourke@vuw.ac.nz

Yours faithfully,

Nicholas Gartell

Please tick if applicable:

- ☐ I give permission for my child to be approached to participate in this research. I understand that my child will also need to give consent separately of my agreement for them to be involved in this research and that my child's identity and views will be anonymous and that any records or conversations will not be shared with others.
- ☐ I give permission for my child to be involved in the Student Advisory Group if they so wish.

Child's name

Signature of parent/guardian

date

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Participants and parents/guardians can contact Dr Alison Kirkman, Chair of the VUW Ethics Committee on either 04 463 5064 or at allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz to ask questions or to make a complaint.

APPENDIX D

**An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations
Reflection Notes**

Wed 8/8/12

I went to all form classes to discuss the research project with students and covered all the areas that appear on the information sheets. Printed out parent consent letters and sent copies out to all caregivers. Spoke to LR re; students within her SEN class and about their involvement in the research. Her judgement was that the students would not be able to participate in the study and therefore have not been included in the process. The number of students is 2 or 3 but will check.

Thurs 9/8/12

Was able to go round to 6 of the 8 form classes whilst in subject lessons as form classes and reiterated research and handed out both information sheets and student consent forms individually to students. By handed out individually I felt it showed my commitment to their involvement and assimilated me into their environment a little more. Hoping that it will also allow a more symbiotic relationship by showing how involved I am in all aspects of the study. Also, it may enable some students to make a decision about whether to be involved in the study by my being around them and allowing them to familiarize themselves a little more with the researcher and giving them the perception of better autonomy in their decision making. Have some concerns over the procedure I took regarding the separation of students' consent forms/information sheets and parents' form. Have wondered whether it may have been better, logistically, at least, to have sent all forms to parents. Wondering whether I may get more back seeing as both forms are together in one place at one time. Only time will tell. Nevertheless, by handing out forms to many students personally I am hoping the connection, visual as much as anything will help with returns. And it says to students that they have the control over their involvement rather than appearing to transfer power to guardians over final say – even though if both forms had gone in the post together, students still have to sign theirs individually. However, knowing how students displace forms – having worked in schools for over a decade – I know the return rate. Hoping as well that perhaps there might be

some dialogue or discussion between parents and students by them having separate forms. Explained to form tutors the procedure in place. Gave out folders for collection of forms for students. Gave choice of either placing returns directly into my pigeonhole or to put folders in their pigeonholes where I would look through every couple of days.

Wed 15/8/12

Checked on returns – very disappointing, only 6 returns within a week. Sent another email out to form teachers reiterating procedure etc. Also, chatted casually to individual form teachers about responses. Did not want to put pressure on teachers considering their workload etc.

Mon 20/8/12

Returned to school for collection of consent forms. Went round to form spells to collect any returns personally. Gave “other” form to students who only had one signed etc. Reprinted 5 copies of each information sheet/consent form/information sheet for all form teachers and placed in pigeonholes, separated and clearly labelled and reiterated the need for both forms needed. Have always explained how they can contact me if problems. Have decided to downsize sag due to poor number returns. Decide on 5 rather than 6 due to numbers who returned form first – as of details on info sheet. Was going to be 4 (min. Requirement) but 5 handed in at same time and couldn’t choose one student over another, unethical.

Wed 22/8/12

Went to year 9 assembly to remind students – and form teachers – about research. Explained again the details around the study. Gave out sealed envelopes to SAG group to invite to meeting on Friday re; piloting questionnaire & interview questions. Also, emailed form teachers about assembly (many were not present) and what I had said to students. Emailed entire staff about their consent forms and procedure re; students and their consent. Had spoken to entire staff at PD earlier in the year and had no teachers unhappy with my procedures re; students leaving lessons for interviews etc. Placed consent forms in teachers’ pigeonholes.

Fri 24/8/12

Met with SAG, spell 4. Discussed protocols etc. and reiterated whether happy to consent to meeting etc. students were quiet and appeared relatively shy. 4 of the 5 were female and 1 male. Have recorded notes from meeting and read over these to make sure students agreed with their involvement and remarks etc. Students were happy with my notes. I have records of more detailed notes taken. Some changes agreed on re; interview questions. Said current ones were slightly unclear. The probes in particular were too long and only in note form type detail. Although, clear for me when using as prompts, agreed to make clearer and read my changes to them to which they agreed. Deliberately gave them time alone to discuss changes. Went for food to give them more time to analyse critically without my presence affecting their responses. This I think allowed them more freedom and made them less self-conscious about my being there. When I returned they were much more vocal, appeared more relaxed and less self-aware.

Mon 27/8/12

Spoke to staff at staff meeting about the importance of their consent returns and the procedure for the next stage of the research, which will be students attempting the questionnaire on Thursday 30/8/12 and if any concerns or objections to students missing their lessons. At time, no objections. Have booked room and will administer questionnaire myself – due to small numbers involved - rather than disrupting up to 8 subject lessons. Teachers fine with this course of action. At this moment in time I have 22 confirmed returns from a year group of 185. Of 7 form class, 2 classes have nil returns and 1 class has only 1 return.

Monday 3/9/12

Went into school to commence interviews – power cuts disabled register therefore was unable to find students for interviews.

Tuesday 4/9/12

Began interviews today. Was nervous before beginning. Realised as I was interviewing and when beginning to transcribe first interview that I have been talking too much. Was aware of this whilst interviewing but trying to get students to elaborate on their answers has been difficult. There may be a number of reasons for this. They are only Year 9 students and may

not have been exposed to a one-to-one interview before; they may not have the vocabulary as yet to explain themselves in the way they want to: this was evident with some of their responses, where they trailed off, as if not able to find the “right” words to complete their thoughts. The questions may not be conducive for detailed responses. I may need to reconsider the wording of some of the questions; even though they were checked by the SAG they may be, at times, a little too abstract. Perhaps, I “jumped in” too early. However, my intuition at the time was that further responses were not forthcoming and the silences were awkward for the students. I did feel as if I were leading students with my probes and when I filled in the “gaps” to responses and this is something I am aware of and will continue to monitor. Possibly, and an area that I will naturally consider later, students hadn’t really thought of the ways in which they learn and being a first time to reflect on this may have put them on the spot too much. I may need to re-interview at a later stage with a number of follow-on questions linked to their responses. Will check if this is appropriate with supervisor (and school)

Wed 5/9/12

Continued with interviewing. Have sought to change, slightly, the wording of questions. Hoping to make a difference. However, it may simply be that individuals have different understanding and therefore reply differently to questions. I am aware that if I push for answers too much that it may mean that students “dry up” with their responses and may feel that they are inadequate and feel self-conscious. However, it does mean that the level of insight I gather may be restricted and that the “depth” of my understanding is lessened somewhat. It may also mean that the interpretations I gather will be open to more scrutiny, inasmuch as I may end up “filling the gaps” to create understanding. Nevertheless, it makes me realise that there are so many meanings from individuals and that the lack of comment, the body language and the tone of voice, speed of response etc., are all part of the understanding process.

11/9/12

Have completed more interviews and am becoming more aware of my voice, my position within the interviews. Am trying to find a way of finding the right balance of getting students to elaborate and for me to “summarise” their meaning without putting words into their mouths. Also, I am trying, albeit, not too successfully, thus far, to try to cut down on the

amount of involvement when interviewing. Still having difficulty getting students to explore the learning approach to their learning and what it is about them they makes them learn in a specific way. It's possible that the idea is too abstract and not part of their conscious day-to-day learning. This would make sense considering all the literature I've read about learning suggests it's incredibly complex and abstract at times. This would be the same, regarding the motivation inherent in learning. This is an area that is "hidden" deliberately in the questions, the question about motivation, and the reasons for learning. I am wondering if at a later date I may need to be more explicit in this area.

14/9/12

After a week of intermittent interviewing, I feel that my technique is improving and I'm less "involved" when not so necessary. I'm making a conscience effort to let students speak – or not, as is often the case – but there still appears to be a lack of development of ideas from students. This, I believe, is to be expected. Why? Well, I believe the age of students has a lot to do with it. I experience this inability, or lack of desire to elaborate on ideas when teaching generally when using a Q&A technique in class, even when working one-to-one. There are, I'm sure, a number of determining reasons for this. I have my own views too. I am now a little less concerned, even if I haven't mentioned it previously, about having to paraphrase, or reword students' ideas just to get a better understanding of their views and ideas. When reading back the main ideas of their responses, students appear happy with what they've shared with me. I have started to get, what feels like a pattern regarding certain responses but I'm trying not to pigeonhole responses or "direct" responses a certain way, or at least, consciously I'm aware of not wanting to do so. Again, my own views concerning learning goal orientations – at this particular school – appear to be borne out but this may change by the time I get to the end of the interviewing process and when I look over the interviews in much greater detail. I am always consciously aware that the process is not about my views or opinions but about the students' voices and am attempting to keep that to the forefront of my mind when interviewing. However, it's difficult not to interpret ideas, pauses, and facial expressions etc., in particular ways. Still have concerns about not "pushing" too much for clarification but am also concerned that I'm not getting enough clarification that will truly help with my research. Sometimes, feel it's all very "surface" and am not getting below the surface. Further interviews, either in groups or pairs etc., may be useful. Will depend on what happens when I come to interpret findings after completing interviews.

19/9/12

Have almost finished my initial interviews. Depending on what information, ideas or interpretations of the data derived or garnered from interviewees, I may need to “re-interview” students, so as to “fine-tune” my interpretations. Having interviewed 25 students so far, and without analysing the data at all yet, I have still got a feeling that my interpretation of the data will be only one of what could be a number of ways of looking at what students have said. There feels like some similar themes already emerging from what students have said but there is also a wide range of differences. I guess that agendas and thoughts and feeling from students are numerous. Also, I’m starting to understand the “fragility” of what is given, offered to me. What is meant today, sincerely, by a student may not be the same tomorrow, next week or next year. My interpretations may truly be a mere “snapshot” of the myriad possibilities from, even such a small sample as mine. It’s making me think that numbers, sample sizes are not necessarily more convincing, valid or useful. Am I getting a sense of “place, space or community” from what I’ve encountered? Yes and no. And this could be simply due to my knowing the area, the community and the possibly prevailing “approach(es)” that students do/might take towards their learning. Interviewing as a method of data collection has many pitfalls, not least, the “skill” or lack of, in the actual interviewing process, e.g, expertise, experience etc., when knowing when to surrender pushing too far with an idea, when to accept that a student hasn’t the vocabulary to fully articulate an idea they have. Many other issues have come to the fore, regarding my use of interviews, e.g., am I unintentionally, or subconsciously pushing students with my prompts, my summaries of their words, to where I want them to go as the person with arguably a wider range of understanding due to age, experience etc.; have I been a little wary of pushing an idea too far to get to the crux, to the depths of an idea and is that, in itself, a weakness of interviewing? However, it’s also made me realise that parallel understanding can be happening at the same time. This is similar to the idea from Illeris about using the idea of the dna helix, where interpretations can intertwine but at the same time be separate. Perhaps “less is more” inasmuch as a researcher “filling in the gaps” must be part of what you do. The “lack” of something can be as revealing as what is said. This could be the same regarding the amount of returns I have received over the period. Yes, flaws in the method of getting out information and receiving consent forms but surely there must at least be alternative reasons and interpretations of why the sample is so low. Lack of interest in the subject, apathy towards schooling in the local environment, issues unrelated to school “getting in the way” of goals, i.e., a desire to get involved but life getting in the way of being committed or involved, etc.

24/9/12

Transcribing interviews are very useful with regard to reflecting on your approach, why you've followed a certain "path" with your enquiries, what you'd do differently if you could attempt the same interviews again, and seeing how participants' personalities can affect the result you get. I've noticed that trying to get a response from participants can mean "gilding the lily" somewhat, which in turn, means you run the risk of "backing them in a corner" where they give you an answer simply to end a particular line of questioning. This makes me think that this type of approach depends purely on the "type" of individual you're interviewing and how they respond to further questioning on a particular theme or topic. You certainly do have to be careful when to keep on with something and when to accept that moving on is more beneficial than repeatedly going down a "blind alley". You also have to think about the reasons you continue to push on a certain question – is it as much to do with the type of response you expect from a type of individual? It feels as if there is a danger of "pigeonholing" participants' expected responses to fit types which means, as an interviewer you lose the authenticity of responses. Perhaps, the lack of response can tell you as much about an individual's approach to their learning as much, if not more, than the pushing for a response when, eventually the respondent will agree with anything you say, simply to be let "off the hook" so to speak.

27/9/12

Whilst transcribing notes, it's made me think about whether the order of the probes would make a difference to students' responses and what information they give you. I know, at this particular time, I have no real way of knowing, which I suppose is another of the interesting things about attempting interviewing with students. Do we ever get any continuity in responses? Does the tone of my voice affect how students respond, or the body language I give off? How quickly I'm willing to jump in with support? This in particular I am fully aware of and think with more experience I might be willing to let silences go on a little longer. At present, I may over sympathise or empathise with students' confusion or lack of safety or comfortableness when given a question they can't respond to immediately. What's quite ironic is, as a teacher, I'm fully aware of the need for students to have time to reflect on and deliberate over questions, the down time given to students is very important whereas in interviews, seeing it's one-to-one with nowhere to hide as it were, students, I perceive feel they have to answer immediately. They tend to behave a little like "rabbits caught in the headlights" somewhat, which makes me think, what would the benefits be in allowing

students time to take the questions away and have a think about them, to give them time to really think about their responses. I suppose this would be the other end of the continuum, inasmuch as one end you have the immediate, almost impulsive and impetuous response and the other end you have the fully reflected but perhaps influence by others and events that can also have an important effect on the way you respond to questions. I also wonder what the effect would be if we allowed students to interview each other – give them the questions and see what the responses would be towards someone their own age, with a friend or fellow classmate. This, I suppose, is the difficulty with any type of interviews. Would they be more open with someone interviewing them who is, say, only 7 or 8 years older, but still an adult? Would their responses be different if culturally I was more in line with their own cultures. Some of the students have, I believe, similar backgrounds to me but many more will have completely different backgrounds. I'm wondering if gender would also make a difference? Would allowing the students a focus group give be better insight to their true feelings? Even then, will some students take control of events and others decline to become involved? This is the other side of the coin; have some students enjoyed the process of an "intimate" one-to-one face meeting to discuss their learning? These are all questions that can be raised in my final analysis of the events.

3/9/12

Just going over interviews whilst transcribing, I am wondering how much the thoughts and reflections of participants are linked to pre-secondary school. I has just occurred to me that it's possible that the amount of time, so far, at secondary school, may mean that for some, especially those who haven't "slotted" easily into their new environment, or if friends have gone to different schools, that they may be basing their responses on what happened in the not so immediate past, and are needing to supplement ideas from afar. Although, this isn't a problem, as my interest, although with Year 9 in particular, it is about learning goal orientations. I wonder if it's worth me asking the question whether learning goal approaches have changed since attending secondary school.

8/9/12

Again, just going over the interview transcriptions is allowing me to see how embryonic my interview skills are. I have listened to an interview where I keep pushing a point. I'm almost screaming at myself to shut up and move on because the participant cannot add anything to what they've already said. I think it's because I'm concerned about not missing something important, something that if I let go too early I'll miss. I can see why much qualitative research, especially ethnographic research, needs lots of time in the field. Time to really get to know participants and get them relaxed enough around you to be honest and not to try too hard to give you another example, a "better" answer just to please you. It's difficult finding the balance between being too passive and too "in your face".

10/9/12

Again just going over transcribing, has made me think about the way in which questions are put to participants, especially when attempting to probe with possible "answers". When there are a number of possible choices or options, do participants, especially as probes or there because participants are having trouble elaborating or give possible responses, just hear the first one off a list and agree? I wonder if mixing up the order of responses would affect the responses given back? It's a little bit like the "rabbit in the headlights", or it feels like it a bit with some of the participants' responses. Makes me think whether you ever really know whether your research has real authenticity.

17/9/12

As I listen to recordings of interview and transcriptions, I can begin to see "issues" that can arise from interviewing students. Often, when they respond to questions, I notice that I tend not to explore ideas in depth at times, partly, through not wanting students to feel under pressure and having the worry of them "clamming up" on me, but also because I have concerns that they'll say anything in response, as if they perceive, rightly or wrongly, that there must be more to say, which makes them feel as if they're inadequate with their abilities. Also, when I get a response and I ask "Anything else?" I often feel that, again, they must "find" more to please me. Perhaps, I'm becoming a little more aware of the nuances of interviewing and perhaps needed to change my phrases and vocabulary so as to not make students feel that they need to elaborate more. Is it possible that the lack of elaboration is as vital and as telling as the detail that's given but which may not be totally authentic?

APPENDIX E

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations Principal Information and Consent Sheet

Dear Principal,

As you are aware, I am currently on study leave from my teaching position within the school to pursue my masterate studies in the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. The project I am undertaking examines students' approaches to their learning. I am exploring Year 9 students' motivation around learning and the types of goals they set for their learning.

Part of the research requires consenting Year 9 students to complete a questionnaire which focuses on the types of goals they adopt towards their learning. Following on from this, up to 15 students may be invited to attend an interview where they can discuss in greater detail their approaches to their learning.

I seek your consent to undertake the research in this school and to approach the students and teachers for their consent to participate. This will require the need to administer the questionnaire during part of lesson time. The questionnaire should only take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. In addition, up to 15 students may also be invited to attend a 30-45 minute interview within lesson time.

Feedback to all participants will be provided, if required by individuals, in the form of a written summary. It is anticipated that this will be available within six months of the completion of the research.

In addition, I seek your consent to invite students to be involved in a Student Advisory Group (SAG). There will be 6 students that make up the SAG. Students will be chosen from those who send in the consent forms first. The first 6 available students who willingly agree will be invited to participate.

Being a member of the Student Advisory Group will involve trialling the questionnaire before the rest of the year group attempt it. They may wish to recommend ways in which the questionnaire, after reading and attempting the questions, can be improved. It is anticipated that the group will meet two times during Term 3 for 30 minutes each time. Part of their involvement will be when lessons are timetabled although it may go into a lunch-hour. At both the SAG meetings I will provide food (e.g., pizza) and non-alcoholic drinks.

Thank you for taking the time to read over the information.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on 04 234 6968 or contact my supervisor, [Dr Roseanna](#) Bourke, Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Victoria University, Wellington. roseanna.bourke@vuw.ac.nz or on 04 463 9773.

Yours faithfully,

Nicholas Gartell

☐ I give consent for the above research to be completed at the school and for students to be invited to provide their consent to participate

☐ I give my consent for students to be absent from lessons to take part in a 30-45 minute interview relating to the above research.

☐ I give my consent for students to be invited to complete a questionnaire within lesson time. I understand that the questionnaire should not take up more than approximately 15 minutes (maximum) of the lesson.

Principal's signature _____
(Mr Martin Isberg)

Date _____

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Participants can contact Dr Alison Kirkman, Chair of the VUW Ethics Committee on either 04 463 5064 or at allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz to ask questions or to make a complaint.

APPENDIX F

**An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations
Teachers' consent form to request researcher access to students**

Dear member of staff,

As you are aware, I am currently on study leave from my teaching position within the school to pursue my masterate studies in the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. The project I am undertaking examines students' approaches to their learning. I would like to find out about Year 9 students' motivation around learning and the types of goals they set for their learning.

Part of the research requires consenting students to complete a questionnaire which focuses on the types of goals they adopt towards their learning. Following on from this, a number of students may be invited to attend an interview where they can discuss in greater detail their approaches to their learning.

I seek your consent to administer the questionnaire during part of your lesson time. The questionnaire should only take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. In addition, up to 6 students may also be invited to attend a 30-45 minute interview within lesson time.

Therefore, I am requesting your consent to invite students to participate in these activities if necessary within lesson time.

Yours faithfully,

Nicholas Gartell

Name _____ Date _____

☐ I give my consent for students to be absent from my lesson to take part in a 30-45 minute interview relating to the above research.

☐ I give my consent for students to be invited to complete a questionnaire within my lesson. I understand that the questionnaire should not take up more than approximately 15 minutes (maximum) of the lesson.

APPENDIX G						
Name: _____	strongly agree (1)	Mostly Agree (2)	Agree (3)	Disagree (4)	Mostly disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)
Mastery-oriented items (Section A)						
I believe making mistakes is part of learning						
When attempting tasks I don't care about the grade I get as long as I learn						
I like to be challenged by the tasks I get given						
I don't mind difficult tasks						
Making mistakes makes me try harder						
I try new strategies (different ways of solving difficulties) when I get things wrong						
I use the teacher's comments (feedback or feedforward) to improve my future work						
I try my best on all tasks even if I find them boring						
The best reward is when I learn something new, e.g., a new skill						
Performance- approach items (Section B)						
I enjoy tests and exams as I can find out how well I do against others						
I don't like to make mistakes in my work						
Getting the best grade I can is the most important part of my attempting schoolwork						
Doing better than other students in the class is important to me						
I like to know if my grade is better than others in the class						
Getting a good grade is more important than learning new skills						
I tend <u>not to focus</u> on the teacher's feedback/feedforward comments on tasks I complete						
I focus more on tasks on which I'm graded or examined						

	strongly agree (1)	Mostly Agree (2)	Agree (3)	Disagree (4)	Mostly disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)
Performance-avoidance items (Section C)						
If something is too hard I won't try it						
I don't like others to know when I think a task is hard						
I don't like others to know what grade or score I get on a test						
Getting a low grade or score is because I don't try my best						
I avoid letting others know (including the teacher) when I struggle with a task						
I don't like tasks that have a grade attached in case I do badly						
I prefer it when someone tells me how to do a task						
If I get a low grade score on a test I won't give my best next time						
Social-oriented items (Section D)						
I like to work with students who are going to help me with my learning						
I like to work with pupils of a similar ability as me						
I do not care who I work with in class as long as I learn						
I <u>do not</u> like to work with students who are cleverer than me						
I like to work with my friends <u>only if</u> I get all my work completed						
I like to work with my friends whether I learn or complete my work or not						
I like to work with students who others think are popular						
I <u>do not</u> like to work with students that others think are unpopular						
I prefer to work with pupils who are cleverer than me						

APPENDIX H

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations Questions for semi-structured student interview

Introduction

Thank you for coming to talk to me about your goals for learning and the reasons behind the way you approach your learning. I have your Informed Sheet here so I just want to check again that you are happy for me to interview you about your learning and your goals for learning. Also, I'd like to make it clear that if for whatever reason you want to stop the interview that it will not be a problem at all.

Confirmation of goal orientation

1. (After having assessed the questionnaire to get an idea of the student's prevalence, pertaining to goal orientation)

When you answered the questionnaire you seemed to indicate that you set goals that are (here add the relevant goal type, i.e., mastery, performance approach or performance avoidance type). In other words, you said that you... (Choose the correct goal orientation that best fits their "type" from the results of the questionnaire).

- Focus on learning for enjoyment and don't tend to focus on the grades you get as long as you're learning
- Focus on learning but like to know if you've done well by seeing if your grades are as good or better than others
- Worry that you're not doing as well as other and try to avoid others knowing how well you're doing

Does this sound like your general way of approaching your learning?

2. Is this a usual approach for you? Is it intentional or does it just happen that way – can you explain?
3. How does it help with your learning?

General overview/student perception of school

4. What are the main reasons you attend school?
5. At school, what is most important to you?
6. What do you want to get out of your time at secondary school?

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations
Questions for semi-structured student interview

7. What helps you learn best at school? (Explore friends, siblings, teachers, resources, books, equipment etc.)

Perceptions of influences on learning

8. How are you and your study habits viewed by others at school?

What I mean by this is whether other students or teachers think of you in a certain way - [Further probe: For example, are you considered as being a student who gets on with the task, or are really competitive who wants to be best at everything, or as being worried about not being the best and therefore not really getting too involved, or someone who likes to have a bit of fun who likes to be with friends even if it means work's not always completed?]

9. Who or what do you think has the most influence on you when it comes to you doing well on a task or in a subject, i.e., who or what makes the difference to you doing well? [Further probe: for example, is it the type of subject, whether you enjoy the task or subject, or if you are good at a subject or task, or whether your friends are around or whether you get on with the teacher etc.?]

- Why do you think that is?

10. How do you define "doing well" in a subject? What subject(s) would that be?

- If you do well in [name specified subject], on a task or an assessment, do you know before you get the results?
- What do you put that down to? [Probe: Your study? Your attitude? Parent help? Teacher effectiveness?]

11. If you don't do so well on a task or in a subject, who or what makes the difference to you not doing so well?

- Why do you think that is?

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations
Questions for semi-structured student interview

Social goals

12. What do you think are the good things, the positive things that come from working with classmates on activities in class?

13. Are there, in your view, any bad or less positive things that come from working with classmates on activities in class?

14. Does it make a difference to your learning if you work with friends rather than general classmates?

- Why do you think that is?

15. In what subjects do you prefer to work with others?

16. In what subjects do you prefer to work alone?

This is the end of the interview. May I thank you for your contributions and cooperation. Can I just repeat your responses you gave me back to you so as to make sure that I have understood and interpreted your comments correctly?

APPENDIX I

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations Questions for semi-structured student interview

Introduction

Thank you for coming to talk to me about your goals for learning and the reasons behind the way you approach your learning. I have your Informed Sheet here so I just want to check again that you are happy for me to interview you about your learning and your goals for learning. Also, I'd like to make it clear that if for whatever reason you want to stop the interview that it will not be a problem at all.

Confirmation of goal orientation

1. (After having assessed the questionnaire to get an idea of the student's prevalence, pertaining to goal orientation)

When you answered the questionnaire you seemed to indicate that you set goals that are (here add the relevant goal type, i.e., mastery, performance approach or performance avoidance type). In other words, you said that you... (Choose the correct goal orientation that best fits their "type" from the results of the questionnaire).

- Focus on learning for enjoyment and don't tend to focus on the grades you get as long as you're learning
- Focus on learning but like to know if you've done well by seeing if your grades are as good or better than others
- Worry that you're not doing as well as other and try to avoid others knowing how well you're doing

Does this sound like your general way of approaching your learning?

2. Is this a usual way for you to approach your learning? Is it intentional or does it just happen that way – can you explain?

3. How does it help with your learning?

General overview/student perception of school

4. What are the main reasons you attend school?

5. At school, what is most important to you?

6. What do you want to get out of your time at secondary school?

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations
Questions for semi-structured student interview

7. What helps you learn best at school? (Explore friends, siblings, e.g., brothers and sisters, teachers, resources, books, equipment etc.)

Perceptions of influences on learning

8. How are you and your study habits viewed by others at school?

What I mean by this is do other students or teachers think of you in a certain way regarding your learning -

[Further probe: For example, are you considered as being a student who gets on with the task, or are really competitive who wants to be best at everything. Do you get worried about not being the best and therefore are you the type of student who doesn't really getting too involved, or are you someone who likes to have a bit of fun who likes to be with friends even if it means work's not always completed?]

9. Who or what do you think has the most influence on you when it comes to you doing well on a task or in a subject, i.e., who or what makes the difference to you doing well? [Further probe: for example, is it the type of subject, whether you enjoy the task or subject, or if you are good at a subject or task, or whether your friends are around or whether you get on with the teacher etc.?]

- Why do you think that is?

10. How do you define "doing well" in a subject? What subject(s) would that be?

- If you do well in [name specified subject], on a task or an assessment, do you know before you get the results?
- What do you put that down to? [Probe: Your study? Your attitude? Parent help? Teacher's teaching? The effectiveness of the teacher's teaching, i.e., is it the way the teacher teaches that helps you do well?]

11. If you don't do so well on a task or in a subject, who or what makes the difference to you not doing so well?

- Why do you think that is?

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations
Questions for semi-structured student interview

Social goals

12. What do you think are the good things, the positive things that come from working with classmates on activities in class?

13. Are there, in your view, any bad or less positive things that come from working with classmates on activities in class?

14. Does it make a difference to your learning if you work with friends rather than general classmates?

- Why do you think that is?

15. In what subjects do you prefer to work with others?

16. In what subjects do you prefer to work alone?

This is the end of the interview. May I thank you for your contributions and cooperation. Can I just repeat your responses you gave me back to you so as to make sure that I have understood and interpreted your comments correctly?

APPENDIX J

Analysing Students' Learning Goal Orientations Student Questionnaire

Information and Instructions:

*The questionnaire consists of 4 sections, A, B, C and D.

*Each section consists of a number of statements linked to your learning.

*For each question please make sure you tick only 1 response.

*Please do not share your responses with other students.

Please place your name clearly in the area provided on the next page.

**SAMPLE ONLY
NOT TO BE USED IN STUDY**

APPENDIX K

An ethnographic case study: analysing students' learning goal orientations

Student Questionnaire

Information and Instructions:

*The questionnaire consists of 4 sections, A, B, C and D.

*Each section consists of a number of statements linked to your learning.

*For each question please make sure you tick only 1 response.

*Please do not share your responses with other students.

Please place your name clearly in the area
provided on the next page.

APPENDIX L

Name: _____	Strongly agree (1)	Mostly agree (2)	Agree (3)	Disagree (4)	Mostly disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)
Mastery-oriented items (Section A)						
I believe making mistakes is part of learning	30.76	42.30	26.92	0	0	0
When attempting tasks, I don't care about the grade I get as long as I learn	7.69	30.76	42.30	15.38	3.84	0
I like to be challenged by the tasks I get given (one non-respondent)	19.23	53.84	15.38	7.69	0	0
I don't mind difficult tasks	15.38	30.76	50.00	0	0	3.84
Making mistakes makes me try harder	19.23	50.00	26.92	3.84	0	0
I try new strategies (different ways of solving difficulties) when I get things wrong	23.07	30.76	38.46	3.84	3.84	0
I use the teacher's written or verbal comments,(feedback or feedforward) to improve my future work (one non-respondent)	40.00	36.00	20.00	4.00	0	0
I try my best on all tasks even if I find them boring	11.53	73.07	7.69	7.69	0	0
The best reward is when I learn something new, e.g., a new skill	34.61	30.76	34.61	0	0	0
Performance- approach items (Section B)						
I enjoy tests and exams as I can find out how well I do against others	11.53	30.76	38.46	19.23	0	0
I don't like to make mistakes in my work	15.38	30.76	34.61	15.38	3.84	0
Getting the best grade I can is the most important part of my attempting schoolwork	23.07	46.15	19.23	11.53	0	0
Doing better than other students in the class is important to me	0	23.07	38.46	38.46	0	0
I like to know if my grade is better than others in the class	11.53	7.69	61.53	19.23	0	0
Getting a good grade is more important than learning new skills	7.69	7.69	30.76	42.30	7.69	3.84
I tend <u>not</u> to focus on the teacher's feedback/feedforward comments on tasks I complete just the grade I am given	0	7.69	26.92	26.92	19.23	19.23
I focus more on tasks on which I'm graded or examined	19.23	15.38	42.30	23.07	0	0

	Strongly agree (1)	Mostly agree (2)	Agree (3)	Disagree (4)	Mostly disagree (5)	Strongly disagree (6)
Performance-avoidance items (Section C)						
If something is too hard I won't try it	0	7.69	15.38	34.61	19.23	23.07
I don't like others to know when I think a task is hard	3.84	7.69	30.76	38.46	11.53	7.69
I don't like others to know what grade or score I get on a test	7.69	7.69	7.69	38.46	23.07	15.38
Getting a low grade or score is because I don't try my best	15.38	15.38	26.92	23.07	11.53	7.69
I avoid letting others know (including the teacher) when I struggle with a task	15.38	7.69	7.69	38.46	23.07	7.69
I don't like tasks that have a grade attached in case I do badly	3.84	15.38	30.76	23.07	15.38	11.53
I prefer it when someone tells me how to do a task	23.07	19.23	38.46	11.53	3.84	3.84
If I get a low grade score on a test I won't give my best next time	3.84	0	15.38	26.92	23.07	30.76
Social-oriented items (Section D)						
I like to work with students who are going to help me with my learning	42.30	23.07	30.76	0	0	3.84
I like to work with students of a similar ability as me	15.38	50.00	23.07	0	3.84	7.69
I do not care who I work with in class as long as I learn	19.23	15.38	42.30	7.69	3.84	11.53
I <u>do not</u> like to work with students who are cleverer than me	3.84	0	7.69	46.15	11.53	30.76
I like to work with my friends <u>only if</u> I get all my work completed	19.23	11.53	34.61	23.07	3.84	7.69
I like to work with my friends whether I learn or complete my work or not	0	19.23	34.61	19.23	11.53	15.38
I like to work with students who others think are popular	0	3.84	3.84	50.00	11.53	30.76
I <u>do not</u> like to work with students that others think are unpopular	0	0	4.00	44.00	16.00	36.00
I prefer to work with students who are cleverer than me	3.84	19.23	42.30	19.23	7.69	7.69

APPENDIX M

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations

Transcript of interview from 18/9/12 (transcript #22)

I: now I've looked over your questionnaire and it suggests, or it, it indicates that you set goals that are, what we call a multiple goal approach. Now what that means is the following: you focus on your learning for enjoyment, and you don't tend to focus on the grades you get as long as you're learning but, at the same time, you do like to know if you've done well by seeing if your grades are as good or better than others. So, a multiple goal is that you approach your learning cos you enjoy the learning for the learning's sake but you do want to know how well you're doing with your grades. Would that sound about the right approach for you in your learning?

P: yeah.

I: yeah? Okay, and, is that erm, a usual way for you to approach your learning?

P: erm, I think so.

I: yeah? Okay and would it be intentional? In other words, would you deliberately approach it like that and consciously think about it or is it just something that happens?

P: yeah, I think it's become a habit, sort of, so I try to do everything right and get the good stuff...

I: okay, so do you, do you, is it just become a natural part of your approach? And you don't say to yourself in the morning, "Right, okay I'm going to approach like this or that." It just sort of tends to happen in that way?

P: yeah.

I: yeah, okay so natural way, that tends to happen, yeah? How do you think, erm, your approach being a multiple goal approach, how do you think it helps with your learning?

P: erm, makes me focus more, so that I can learn more than if I concentrated on something else, then I can get distracted.

I: okay, so having the sort of approach gives you, er, more focus?

P: yeah.

I: yeah? And how would that happen? How would that be? Because, erm, if it's just a natural way of approaching your learning and you don't actually think about, "Right, I'm gonna enjoy this, and I'm just gonna have fun, and I don't care how I do, but I also want to make sure I am doing well and I get good grades" how does that give you more focus?

P: erm, just that sometimes in class, how people are talking and stuff, sometimes I don't know how but it just like, kinda, blocks them out.

I: okay, okay. That's wonderful. And what, what are the main reasons you attend school?

P: to learn and go to university and get a good job.

I: okay, so to learn, so really to learn for your future?

P: yeah.

I: yeah? Okay. (Writes notes). Okay, that's great, thank you for that _____. And, at school, what is, most important for you?

P: erm to have fun.

I: and what do you mean by, have fun?

P: like not to get too stressed about something and just enjoy the time with friends and other stuff.

I: okay, (writes notes) and erm, what do you want to get out of your time at secondary school? So when you leave, say when you leave in Year 13, what, what do you want to have got out of being here?

P: I don't really know what it means (slight laugh).

I: okay, erm, so if you had to say, “When I leave secondary school I will want to have...” what do you want to walk away from the school with? So, would it be, I’ve got to be careful I don’t put words into your mouth, but could it be things like, for example, you want, really good grades, erm, you know at Level 3? Would it be, erm I want to have learnt skills that I didn’t know before I came...you see what I mean? What sort of things do you want to have got out of your time here?

P: I think probably skills and better grades than when I came here with.

I: okay, so improve your grades, yeah? And, erm, what do you mean by better skills?

P: like the, how you get to choose the technology, erm, studies and, you can learn different things from them.

I: oh, right, so maybe these skills you didn’t have before you come to secondary school, yeah? Okay. Okay, that’s wonderful, thank you very much for that _____. Erm what helps you learn best at school?

P: erm...

I: I mean there could be any number of possible things, if I give you some examples and see if any of these make sense to you: is it, erm, is it being with friends helps you learn best? Is it the support, of say, family or brothers or sisters, you know maybe at school, family at home? Is it the teachers and the way they teach? Is it the resources, the equipment you get to use at the school? What what really, if you think helps you learn best? What would it be?

P: erm, I think it’s friends and the extra homework I get at home.

I: okay, so friends, why would friends help you in, help you learn best, in what ways?

P: erm so that if I’m feeling down and don’t want to learn, I can talk to them.

I: okay, so and what does, erm, what does talking to them do...to help you learn?

P: just, erm, forget about the worries I have and to make some jokes and be happy.

I: okay, okay so just being happy is a good way to help you learn, yeah?

P: hmm.

I: yeah? And you said, homework, extra homework, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: and where's that extra homework, how does that help with your learning, that extra homework?

P: it's, erm, it's like, giving me an extra step from everyone else, like, it extends myself.

I: okay, thank you, thank you. Yep. So is that, this is just a question, it's not on here (points to interview structure sheet), would that be homework that's got nothing to do with the school or would it be stuff, homework that you got extra homework that you got from school?

P: it's actually from my parents.

I: oh right, okay. And they're, and they're sort of giving you that, erm, extra challenge by giving you more, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: okay, thank you. Erm, the next question is linked to how others see you at school, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: erm, how are you and your study habits viewed by others at school? So, what I mean by this is do others students or teachers see you, or think of you in a certain way regarding your learning?

P: erm, most of the boys in my class thinks that I'm a learning robot, (laughs).

I: (laughs too), okay, yeah, okay. I haven't heard that one before. Would you take that as a compliment?

P: no.

I: no? Why not?

P: I just ignore them.

I: yeah? Okay. And how do you think others see you? I mean I've got some ideas here – see if any these fit; they may not but see if any of them do fit. Are you considered, for example, as being a student who gets on with the task? Or are you, seen as a student who is really

competitive, who wants to be the best at everything? Do you think others see you as someone who gets worried about not being the best and therefore backs out and avoids learning? Or do you think others see you as a student who likes to have a bit of fun with their friends, even if it means their works not always completed? What do you think others see you, you know, students and teachers?

P: I think, like, works very hard and completes the work before I can do anything else.

I: okay, okay. So is that where that “learning robot” comes from?

P: yeah.

I: you shouldn't be, er, you should, I shouldn't say this but you should be pleased if people see you like that because it shows how hard you work. Yeah, yeah? (Writes notes). That's wonderful; thank you for that. And, who or what, do you think has the most influence on you doing, on you when it comes to you doing well on a task or in a subject? So in other words, who or what makes the difference to you doing well?

P: my mum.

I: okay, and why do you think that is?

P: because, erm, back in China, she is always the top 3 or top 5 student in the class...

I: uh huh.

P: and, always gets, probably full points for the test and stuff.

I: uh huh. And how does that influence you?

P: erm, I think she wants me to achieve, at least, she wants me to achieve the same goals.

I: oh right, okay, so she's sort of set the bar for you? yep, okay. And are there any other influences that erm, come to you that er. Sorry, let me try that again. Are there any other influences that help you do well? I mean, for example, does the type of subject have any influence on you doing well? Or, whether you enjoy the task or the subject, or even whether you're really good at the task of the subject; do any of those sort of things have a difference?

P: yeah, when I like one subject I just do it.

I: okay, so you think enjoying the subject or liking the subject makes a difference, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: and why would that be do you think?

P: because when you don't enjoy a subject, you don't, erm, you don't like learn as much.

I: okay, and why do you think you don't learn as much? I know I'm pushing it a little bit...

P: (laughs).

I: but why do you think that might be?

P: because when you don't like it, you muck around with the teacher (inaudible) they're a good teacher or not, and you refuse to do work.

I: okay. So liking the subject makes a difference to you doing well, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: okay. Thank you very much for that. And how, how would you define doing well in a subject? So, in other words, how would doing well in a subject look like to you?

P: erm, getting a higher mark than the normal standard.

I: okay, so achieving the highest grades, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: highest grades, okay. So, if you do do well in a subject, say, any subject yeah, say for example you do well in a subject or in a task or an assessment, do you know you've done well before you get the results back?

P: erm I'll know I've tried my best.

I: okay but trying your best doesn't necessarily mean you've done well. So, if you, say for example, you've just given me this test (holds up paper) and I said, "Thank you ____, I'll take that away," is there any way, any indication that you know you've done well? What would they be if there were any?

P: not sure if they were cos, erm, normally if we had a test then the teacher will have to still mark it and give us marks.

I: yeah, so is there any way in which you know when you've handed that in that you think you've done well?

P: erm, I don't think so.

I: okay, I mean if you did well on a subject, you know, what would you put it down to? Would it be just the way you study, your study habits or your attitude? Would it be, you know, other things like, maybe your parents help, or the way the teacher's teaching, you know, and how effective that teacher is? What would you put down to you doing well?

P: erm, I think...

I: I mean it could be a number of things, couldn't it, yeah?

P: completing the task and...erm, maybe if you're not sure of some of the questions you can go over it at home or something?

I: okay, okay and are there certain subjects you do really well in?

P: erm, maths.

I: maths? And what, what do you put that down to?

P: all the maths homework I do at home.

I: oh right, so it's just the amount of work, you working hard on, yeah? Okay, (writes notes). Thank you. If you don't do so well on a task, yeah, who or what makes the difference to you not doing so well?

P: erm, (long pause)

I: so you've said, when you do well on a task, it's, you know you've done well because you've got good grades and it's normally cos, for example, in maths cos you've worked really hard at home as well. So that extra work you do, yeah? So if you didn't do so well, you don't do so well on a task, erm who or what, or in a subject, who or what makes the difference to you not doing so well? In other words, what are the reasons, perhaps, why you haven't done so well?

P: Erm, most of the times, when you get a question wrong, it's probably because I didn't check it and just left it there; not taking care of the answer.

I: okay, so just not checking and making sure – okay. So it's down to, so would you say it's down to, not carelessness but, it's down to you rather than to anything else?

P: yeah.

I: okay. (Writes notes) okay, erm, and I've got a few questions here on social goals. Social goals are goals about the other things that influence your learning, rather than you and your studies, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: so what do you think are the good things, er, the positive things, that come from working with classmates on activities in class?

P: erm, you can discuss with your good friends and not, not thinking about if you're saying something will be too stupid or something.

I: oh right okay so you can discuss, now is it, is this with general classmates though? Would you do that with general classmates?

P: er, friends.

I: okay. So what's the positive things about working with general classmates, rather than friends?

P: you get to work with more people that you normally don't work with.

I: all right, so you get that sort of variety, yeah, yeah? And why is that a good thing?

P: so maybe, erm, you're not taking up all the tasks, and maybe someone else do some as well.

I: okay, so it's that sharing of the tasks and activities, yeah? Thanks for that _____. And are there, in your view, any bad, you know, or less positive things that come from working with classmates on activities in class?

P: maybe you can get an argument over different answers?

I: okay, so sort of disagreement on answers, yeah?

P: yep.

I: are there any other, less or bad, less positive or bad things, do you think, working with classmates?

P: maybe you hate that person but you have to work with them because you have to?

(Laughs).

I: yeah, sure, not liking, and why does not liking, er, someone, a less positive thing, yeah? So what's the effects of the way of that? Not liking someone or hating someone?

P: you're just thinking that, erm, that person, it's like...(struggling to answer).

I: let me put it another way for you. How do you think that affects your learning, you know, working with classmates you don't get on with?

P: mmm, you get distracted when they talk with their other friends.

I: okay, so there's distraction, yeah? Okay, yeah. Cos, you said that, you share activities and you work with a variety of students is a good thing, erm, distraction, distraction's absolutely fine. Yeah? And, does it, erm, does it make a difference to your learning if you work with friends rather than general classmates?

P: yep.

I: and, and why would that be so? (Long pause). Think of the things that, you know, you think are good and help you learn, working with your friends, what would they be do you think?

P: erm, you can talk with them during the class and you can put a lot more effort because you're enjoying yourself?

I: okay, so, erm, so you put more effort because you're enjoying yourself, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: so, would you say, and again, I've got to be careful not to put words into your mouth here but, so would you say enjoying yourself while you work is helping, you know because you're with your friends, helps your learning?

P: yep.

I: yeah, okay – that would make sense, wouldn't it really? Yeah? and, in what subjects, do you prefer to work with others?

P: erm...

I: I mean there may not be one particular subject, you know. I mean...

P: I think the PE and the technology subjects.

I: yeah, and why would, why would that be?

P: erm...

I: why would working with others in those subjects, do you prefer?

P: so they're, erm, because sometimes you might like one subject and you can, erm, maybe share your ideas on how to do things. (Not sounding too convincing).

I: okay, so if I put all your subjects on little cards in front of you and then said, right, which of those subjects do you prefer working with others, and you grabbed them, you know, which ones would you pick? You said your PE and tech,

P: yeah.

I: so, cos you can help each other, erm, is that, would that be the reasons why you'd prefer to work in those particular subjects, yeah?

P: yeah, and sometimes, they're the subjects that most people enjoy, so you can just fit in.

I: oh right, so if you're all working together and you're enjoying them then it's much more relaxing and it's easier to fit in together, yeah? Okay. Thank you for that. And in what subjects, if there are any, or activities or tasks, do you prefer to work alone?

P: erm, (long pause) languages.

I: languages, okay, and why would that be so?

P: erm, because when you learn languages, sometimes you might make a mistake and people might just say, erm, mean things about it.

I: oh right, so it's avoiding that, you know, ridicule from people, taking the mickey and things like that, yeah?

P: yeah.

I: okay. (Writes notes) That's wonderful, thank you very much for those so far. I've just got one or two other questions to do with your questionnaire, if that's okay, yeah? Erm, thank you very much so far. That's great. You said, or you responded by saying, "I believe making mistakes is part of learning" and you "Mostly agree" but you "Don't like to make mistakes in your work", can you can you expand on that a little bit?

P: erm, because sometimes when you make mistakes you learn from mistakes but most of the time if you can get a question right, you try to get it right.

I: okay, so you, you, yeah, you understand that you learn from getting it right, wrong but you don't necessarily want to get it wrong.

P: yeah.

I: yeah, okay that would make a lot of sense, wouldn't it, yeah? And, er, this one is about, you know we said our multiple goals, er, you said, "When attempting tasks, I don't care about the grade I get as long as I learn" but then you said, "Getting a good grade is more important than learning new skills" now it might be just the way the questionnaire is set out, so would it be one or the other or would it be a balance of the both for you?

P: erm, both.

I: yeah, okay which would is like we said on our response, yeah? (Makes notes on questionnaire – both are equally important, yeah?) That's great and I've got just one more question if that's okay? (Writes notes). And, you disagreed with, "Getting a low grade or score is because I don't try my best" yeah?

P: yeah.

I: so, what do you think it is, if it's not you not trying your best?

P: erm, some people they just don't care about the tests and maybe some of the others, maybe they don't um, they didn't learn as much, and there's girls that at the moment, they haven't mastered it...

I: okay, so if you don't, if you get a low grade or score, it isn't because you haven't tried your best, what is it then, they may have meant you got a low score?

P: erm, maybe the lack of skills and maybe the notes?

I: okay, so lack of whose skills?

P: mine.

I: okay, so what do you mean by skills?

P: the way of thinking, how to solve the question?

I: okay, so sort of like your strategies?

P: yeah.

I: your lack of, your learning strategies, perhaps, okay? And, erm, okay, so it's not purely effort, it's learning strategies, and you said something else, you said about your notes and things?

P: yeah.

I: so is that your study habits? It's the same thing in a way, do you think?

P: sometimes I miss out on a day or two and miss out on the notes, so you don't get those.

I: oh right, so even sometimes absenteeism? So sometimes just absenteeism is a point?

P: yeah. Okay, and one last question, you say, "You like to work with your friends, whether I learn or complete my work or not" is that true?

P: sometimes.

I: okay, so what do you mean by sometimes?

P: like maybe sometimes I really hate that subject so we just chat.

I: okay, so it depends whether the subject's important to you or not?

P: yeah.

I: okay.

Interviewer thanks participant for contributing and cooperating and runs back over notes to make sure participant is happy with the responses noted and the interpretations by the interviewer.

APPENDIX N

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations

The coding system used when analysing the interview responses used thematic categories taken from the initial questions presented to participants. Each question was given a heading. After analysing data the results were separated, when necessary, into different thematic groups. These were as follows:

The way in which students approach their learning – wal

How the specific approach helps with learning – hwl

The reasons students attend school –ras

- Friends
- Education
- Future, e.g., job, university etc.

The most important at school - mias

- Learning
- Grades
- Friends

What students want to achieve at school - aas

- Learning
- Job/career
- Qualifications
- University

Influences on learning/difference to learning positive - socpos

- Friends
- Family
- Teachers
- Attitude/approach
- Grades

Influences on learning/difference to learning negative - socneg

- Friends
- Own approach to learning
- Distractions/disruptions
- Teachers

Perception on learning - pol

Social aspects general positive - socpos

- Cooperation with others
- Sharing ideas
- Mixture of abilities

Social aspects general negative - socneg

- Distractions
- Own approach
- Lack of cooperation

Social aspects friend positive - socpos

- Familiarity
- Enjoy learning
- Work better

Social aspects friends negative - socneg

- Distractions
- Talking

Prefer to work with others - pwwo

- Always
- Get help when needed
- New subjects and new people

Prefer to work alone - pwoo

- Subjects good at
- Distractions

Influence of subject positive – iospos

- Enjoy
- Work harder

Influence of subject negative – iosneg

- Don't enjoy
- Don't try
- Don't learn

Knowing when done well

- Complete work
- Grades
- Tried hard
- Not sure

APPENDIX P

An ethnographic case study: Analysing students' learning goal orientations

Orientation of goal setting				
Type of goal orientation	Mastery-goal orientation	Performance-approach orientation	Performance-avoidance orientation	Multiple-goal approach
Number of students	4	2	2	18
Students interview number	F:16, F:07, F:12, F:05,	F:09, F:06,	F:08, F:13,	M:05, F:01, M:04, M:01, M:03, F:19, M:02, F:03, M:07, F:18, F:15, F:14, F:04, F:11, F:10, F:02, M:06, F:17
Number of male students	Nil	Nil	Nil	7
Number of female students	4	2	2	11