Career development for marginalised youth: Study of the practices within a Flexible Learning Program in South West Queensland

A Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

In Australia many young people are completing their secondary education through Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs). These programs are provided for students who have been marginalised from mainstream education due to a variety of reasons. Currently, there is a distinct gap in the literature in terms of the extent to which theory-based career development interventions are currently being used within the flexible learning sector in Australia. This research explores the impact of participation in a FLP on students' career goals, career adaptability competencies, and post-school transitions. It further explores the impact of flexible learning experiences on students' social and emotional wellbeing and self-efficacy.

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research and an interpretive constructionist paradigm was utilised. The research was underpinned by the overarching Systems Theory Framework of Career Development, and informed by Career Construction Theory, to gain an understanding of students' career adaptability resources. The Psychology of Working Theory was also utilised to explore how contextual factors such as marginalisation influence the career development of the youth attending a FLP in regional Queensland, Australia.

Interviews were conducted with 27 participants, consisting of current Year 10 (4), Year 11 (4), Year 12 (5), and past Year 12 (3) students, along with a range of teaching staff (11), including the Principal, Head of Department, Guidance Officer, Industry Liaison Officer, class Teachers (3), Teacher Aides, Social Worker and Office Manager. Field observations were also carried out on subject classes, pastoral care group sessions, mentoring sessions and general activities. The data from interviews and observations were thematically analysed with key themes identified to answer the research questions.

The thematic analysis identified three key themes. Firstly, supportive relationships emerged as a substantial, positive influence on students' social and emotional wellbeing.

Secondly, preparation for work appeared to be an important factor in improving student self-efficacy. Finally, the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) was identified as having an important impact on students' career outcomes with both positive and negative implications. For example, there was a specific focus on students successfully completing the Queensland Certificate of Education, gaining work experience, and completing TAFE or VET qualifications. This was deemed important by essentially all teaching staff. However, while there were career development gains for some students, these were typically short-term. The majority of students generally lacked the career development resources to translate those qualifications into career goals or successful graduate outcomes in the longer term. Furthermore, outcomes in terms of enhanced student wellbeing and self-efficacy were generally restricted to the short-term due to various contextual barriers that most likely contributed to their initial enrolment in the FLP.

A number of recommendations are provided to enhance the delivery of career education in a FLP and to ensure the students are gaining the necessary career development competencies required for successful post-school transitioning. These recommendations include embedding career development activities across the curriculum; widening access to career counselling appointments; developing career development interventions that build self-reflective and goal-setting opportunities for students; widening exposure to occupations through the use of excursions and activities; and, embedding a whole of school strategy that combines career development and wellbeing as equally important aspects of pedagogy.

This thesis adds to theoretical knowledge and makes a unique contribution to the career development literature by applying career development theory to the specific context of young people who are marginalised and attending FLPs. The findings will inform the development of career development interventions to be utilised specifically in FLPs, which can be further evaluated through applied research. Further, this research has the potential to make a valuable

contribution to the Australian Government's agenda of developing contemporary approaches and strategies to enhance career development and student outcomes in schools.

Certification of Thesis

This Thesis is entirely the work of Naomi Ryan except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Professor Lorelle Burton

Associate Supervisor: Dr Nancey Hoare

Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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During the course of this study I witnessed my eldest sister, Elaine, lose her battle with cancer. This spurred my determination to keep striving hard and to achieve my goal of finishing

my PhD. Unfortunately, we never know when our journey on this earth will be complete. Conducting a study that has the potential to make a difference for marginalised youth and their transitions through life, became even more meaningful for me in this context.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 provides an overview and rationale for the thesis and briefly outlines the content of each of the subsequent chapters. It begins by outlining the terminology and definitions used throughout the thesis followed by the focus of the study. The research problem is then outlined and the research questions are stated. Following on, the scope of the research describes the paradigm applied and the data collection methods. The researcher's interest in the topic is detailed and following that the chapter concludes with the structure of thesis.

The following paragraphs orientate the reader as to the terminology and definitions used throughout this thesis.

I have chosen to use the terms *youth who are marginalised*, interchangeably with, *marginalised youth* to refer to the young people for whom the research is relevant. This is influenced by the research previously conducted by te Riele (2006a), highlighting the negative discourse that has been prevalent in Australian policy that uses labels, such as 'at risk', 'disadvantaged', 'delinquent', 'disengaged' and 'drop-outs'. This labelling indicates that youth already have deficits and that blame lies within the victim and not the systems in which they are affected (Comber, 1998; te Riele, 2006a). My approach to using the terms *youth who are marginalised* and *marginalised youth* is to ensure that young people are considered in the research for the value they bring to society and that their marginalisation is considered from the structural factors which have contributed to it and not the young person themselves.

The term Flexible Learning Program (FLP) is also utilised throughout the thesis to refer to flexible programs of education that are available to marginalised youth. The types of programs to which this term refers are also known as flexible learning options and alternative education. There are many types of FLPs, however, the choice to use this terminology is for consistency throughout the thesis and because it is a term used significantly throughout the wider literature.

The *Queensland Certificate of Education* (QCE) is referred to throughout the thesis. This is the senior school qualification recognising a broad range of learning options, numeracy and literacy standards for Queensland secondary school students. Qualification requires gaining 20 credit points made up from a range of areas, such as senior school subjects, vocational education and training (VET), workplace and community learning and university subjects undertaken at school (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2015).

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is also used frequently. This type of training is designed to deliver workplace-specific skills and knowledge relating to a wide range of careers and industries. A full list of acronyms and key terms related to this research is provided at Appendix A.

Focus of the study

Young people in today's society are not all educated within the 'mainstream' secondary education system. For a variety of reasons, youth can become marginalised in society, which can affect their engagement in education. Reasons contributing to this marginalisation can include a lived experience of mental illness, family violence, homelessness, experiencing bullying, low levels of numeracy and literacy, situations arising from low socio-economic circumstances or caring for a parent or guardian with an illness (te Riele, 2006b). Such difficulties can prevent students attending school which may result in them becoming excluded from the education system through non-attendance policies. There is also evidence to suggest that the mainstream systems do not suit everyone. Reasons for disengagement can be related to negative student-teacher relationships, strict school structures and/or the school culture and curriculum (te Riele, 2006b). These factors can result in some young people being re-engaged or re-enrolled into an alternative education program, such as a Flexible Learning Program (FLP). Others, who may not

re-engage in education and who consequently cannot find employment, face dire consequences of long-term unemployment and marginalisation (Lamb & Huo, 2017).

FLPs are generally aimed at reengaging youth with education, assisting them to develop positive social and emotional wellbeing and preparing them to transition to further education, training or employment (te Riele, 2014). There has been considerable research conducted in Australia on the types of FLPs and what they aim to achieve with regard to re-engagement of young people marginalised from mainstream education (Mills & McGregor, 2016b; South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, 2013; te Riele, 2012, 2014; te Riele, Wilson, Wallace, McGinty, & Lewthwaite, 2017; Thomas, McGinty, Riele, & Wilson, 2017). Most commonly, attendance at FLPs aims to ensure that students are re-engaged with education in a safe and inclusive environment, improve their wellbeing and assist them to make transitions to further learning or work (te Riele, 2014).

The literature provides significant evidence of the practices that work well within FLPs in relation to students' improvement in wellbeing, confidence and self-efficacy (Johns & Parker, 2017; te Riele, 2014; Thomas et al., 2017). There are also suggested best practices for the operation of FLPs (Mills & McGregor, 2010; Wilson, Stemp, & McGinty, 2011). However, as Mills and McGregor (2016b) suggest, "there are systemic concerns with how to measure the effectiveness of such schooling" (p. 79). For example, improving attendance and completion rates can be seen as a successful outcome, however, for some marginalised students, simply "…attending school is an achievement in and of itself" Mills and McGregor (2016b, p. 79). The students attending FLPs often come from highly marginalised backgrounds that include poverty or various other forms discrimination (Mills & McGregor, 2016b). Typically these students require assistance to improve their wellbeing. Lamb and Huo (2017, p. 15) suggest "Participation in education, training and work is often used as an indicator of the wellbeing of young people." It therefore makes sense that wellbeing should become the first and foremost priority before

learning can even begin to occur. The learning experience however, needs to include career development interventions if there is to be a long-term focus on breaking the cycle of marginalisation (Rice, 2017). These young people will require the knowledge, skills, and resources to make career decisions and to plan for career transitions. To facilitate successful career decision-making and transitions, the students will need to understand themselves, the world of work, and their options post-secondary school; (Law, 1996; McCowan, McKenzie, & Shah, 2017; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010). They will also need the skills to make effective career decisions based on their self-knowledge and their knowledge of the labour market, taking into account the numerous individual, social, and environmental influences on their career development (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Whilst a strong focus on the students' social and emotional wellbeing and building their self-confidence is important, there is little clarity in the literature about whether this has a positive impact on young people's career development and what career development learning opportunities are available for students. Given that a key focus of secondary education is to prepare young people for the next steps in their careers, whether that is further study or employment, exploring how the FLPs incorporate career development learning into their curricula may be of benefit to the wider alternative education sector. At this stage, there is a lack of graduate destination data for students who have attended FLPs due to the difficulty in gaining such data (Msapenda & Hudson, 2013; South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, 2013; te Riele, 2012). Where an FLP is part of a mainstream school the destination data for students of the FLP is included with the mainstream data. Following up with students who have left FLPs is often difficult as the students become uncontactable or the respondents are "biased toward young people who were motivated to report on their positive circumstances" (South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, 2013, p. 61). There is also an indication from previous research that pathway planning in FLPs needs

improvement (Msapenda & Hudson, 2013). A holistic view of career development considers a range of individual factors (Patton & McMahon, 2014), such as mental health, self-efficacy, interests and values that influence career outcomes. Social factors, such as family, peers and education institutions (Patton & McMahon, 2014), are also considered. In addition, environmental-societal factors, such as labour market conditions, geographic location, and the political climate, are also influencing factors that can impact career decisions and outcomes (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to understand how all of these various influences facilitate career development interventions for marginalised youth.

Career development is defined as "…the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future." (National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004, p. 2). In the current context of work, employment can often be unpredictable, precarious, and insecure, so there is a growing need for individuals to be flexible, adaptable, and able to manage their own careers (Maree, 2018; Savickas et al., 2009). The current career development literature and prevalent theories focus strongly on career self-management (Brown & Lent, 2006; Lent & Brown, 2013) and career adaptability (Savickas, 2012). Young people require the knowledge, skills and psychosocial resources, such as career-related self-efficacy and career adaptability competencies (Savickas, 2005), in order to effectively manage their careers. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1986), is a person's ability to judge their capabilities in order to take a particular course of action required for a specific performance outcome. The concepts of career–related self-efficacy and career adaptability will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 2 when the conceptual framework is discussed.

As previously mentioned, a key focus of FLPs is on the improvement of the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Whilst this is an important facet, career development of the students also requires consideration schools to effectively prepare their students for post-

secondary transitions (Myconos, 2014; Peila-Shuster, 2018). Wellbeing may affect career decision-making, choices and outcomes and vice versa (Redekopp & Huston, 2018). Effective acknowledgement and action of wellbeing as well as the added consideration of career development education in the FLP curriculum could strengthen the holistic approach to preparing young people to successfully transition through their life post-secondary school. Therefore, this study explores the experiences of young people attending a FLP in a Queensland regional city and how the FLP experience impacts on students' social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, career adaptability, career goals and destinations.

The Flexible Learning Program (FLP) that is the focus of this research is located in a regional community in South West Queensland. 'The School' was formed in 1998 by concerned citizens and caters for students in Years 10 – 12 (ages 14-18), with a minimum age of 15 in year of enrolment, and offers a variety of curriculum options based around individual student needs. 'The School' grew with the assistance of volunteers and community groups and, by 2004, had become part of Education Queensland (the state government department of education in Queensland). Consequently, it now operates as an annexe to a mainstream State High School. It currently enrols up to 75 students, aged between 14 and 18, across the senior secondary year levels, Years 10-12.

The curriculum incorporates a standard year 10 offering, including short courses in literacy and numeracy, tasters (short courses of introduction) in science in practice, social and community studies, sport and recreation and, art, hospitality practices, and manual arts classes, which are conducted at the mainstream school campus. Core (compulsory) subjects offered for Years 11 and 12 consist of English Communication, pre-vocational Mathematics, Social and Community Studies, and electives. These electives include Vocational Certificate IIs in Information, Digital, Media and Technology (IDMT), Business (with a Hospitality focus), Music, Sport and Recreation, and Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways. Additional

programs are also offered that include Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in schools courses, which are Certificate Level II and fully-funded by the Queensland Government. Additionally, there are some other TAFE in schools courses that can be completed, however these incur a significant cost to the student. There is also the opportunity for students to undertake school-based apprenticeships or traineeships with local employers. Students are encouraged to design their own learning program to match their personal strengths, thereby enabling them to achieve their aspired career pathways. No archival documents from the school were directly cited due to ethical requirements regarding anonymity. Please refer to Ethical Considerations section in Chapter 3.

Like many FLPs, the focus on student wellbeing at 'the School' is of paramount importance. There is a distinct emphasis on building trusting relationships with the students to ensure they become comfortable to learn and achieve their goals. 'The School' motto is: "Every student matters – finding the greatness within" and is demonstrated through the holistic approach to education, where due consideration is given to each student's life circumstances, abilities and aspirations.

Pastoral Care Groups (PCG) are formed at 'the School' and used as a means to encourage social, emotional and physical wellbeing. 'The School' adheres to the Queensland Department of Education's student learning and wellbeing procedures (Queensland Government Department of Education, 2016) and ensures that the pastoral care program is built around social and emotional capabilities, as outlined in this policy. The program is delivered through use of discussion, whereby issues or current topics are raised and then discussed accordingly. The students are encouraged to find approaches that might solve the issue and to further explore these.

Whilst a learning program is negotiated with the student upon enrolment, and is aimed at meeting their chosen pathway, many marginalised students attending FLPs do not possess the

social or cultural capital to assist them in making choices in relation to career pathways (Blustein et al., 2002). They require a much greater level of assistance to be able to make informed career choices. Generally, young people are influenced in their transitions from education by the social capital of their social networks, which provide them with access to contacts, ties and information (Flum, 2015). However, for many marginalised youth making the transition from school to work is more fragmented and difficult due to limited social capital as a consequence of familial circumstances (Blustein et al., 2002). It does not mean that marginalised students lack aspiration or academic capability (Bok, 2010; Galliott & Graham, 2015), or that their parents lack an altruistic desire to assist them (Blustein et al., 2002), it simply means that they often require more assistance to achieve their goals.

Research problem and research questions

There is a plethora of literature and research on career development interventions and approaches aimed at marginalised populations. However, the literature provides limited evidence of the career development interventions, based on suitable career development theory, currently being used within the flexible learning sector in Australia. Such interventions are necessary to ensure that students in FLPs are exposed to exploring their potential and learning how to manage their ongoing career journeys whilst overcoming structural barriers. Without this, it is more likely that these young people will not have the coping resources to draw on that will enable them to enact successful post-school transitions. There is also a significant shortage of destination data referring to post-school outcomes for youth who have attended FLPs. There is, however, evidence that many practices within FLPs are contributing toward increased wellbeing, self-esteem, and self-efficacy through the application of innovative pedagogical practices (Johns & Parker, 2017; Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, Wilson, et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2017).

This research aims to explore the effectiveness of the current career development strategies used at a regional FLP school in enhancing students' career development and wellbeing. The project examines the learning experiences of the young people in accordance with the following research questions:

a) What effect does the FLP experience have on student social and emotional wellbeing and career related self-efficacy?
b) What influence does the FLP experience have on the students' career goals and graduate destinations?
c) What influence does the FLP experience have on students' career adaptability competencies required for successful post-school transitions?

The findings from this research will inform career development interventions for use in alternative education programs. Whilst specifically aimed at youths enrolled in FLPs, it is expected that the research findings will also be used to influence social and education policy regarding career development interventions for marginalised youth in all education programs, including those in mainstream.

This PhD research will contribute to existing career development theories and approaches used in diverse communities and build a new body of knowledge to inform how career development interventions can be applied effectively for youth attending FLPs. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to career development and this is particularly the case for youth who are marginalised from mainstream education. This study considers a variety of aspects in relation to the context of the students' lives, their relationships, aspirations, and perceived barriers. Such interventions aim to ensure that students are well-equipped with career adaptability skills to enable them to overcome marginalisation and make successful transitions to further education and/or employment.

The significant number of FLPs in Australia, in excess of 400 programs offered in 1200 locations across Australia (Best, 2013; te Riele, 2012), indicates a large number of students who are completing their education outside of the traditional mainstream secondary schools. An exploration of the way in which these students are being exposed to the career development interventions aimed at improving their social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy and career adaptability will contribute to the body of knowledge on alternative education.

Issues such as the lack of supportive family and environments and the existence of mental illness are additional considerations. This study will look at the choices and opportunities that these students have in relation to their careers and how the individual, social and societal-environmental systems (Patton & McMahon, 2014) influence career opportunities and decisions of these young people. For example, the individual system (Patton & McMahon, 2014) includes wellbeing, which, if not positive, can significantly affect an individual's confidence to pursue a career that is of interest to them. From the social system (Patton & McMahon, 2014), young people can be affected by their family circumstances in that if these are negative and the students lack support, their career opportunities and decisions can be limited. The societal-environmental influences can include factors, such as socio-economic status; the employment market; political climate; and geographic location (Patton & McMahon, 2006)(Patton & McMahon, 2014). For example, a young person from a low socio-economic background, who has difficulty accessing transport to get to a place of education or employment, needs to consider this in their career decision-making. Students need to develop a comprehensive understanding of themselves, in terms of their beliefs, values, skills, interests, personality, abilities, self-concept, and a range of other individual influences on their careers (Patton & McMahon, 2006). They need to be able to reflect on these and link them to suitable occupations, study options, and the world of work. There has been a lack of research on the career development interventions used in FLPs in Australia, as most research has focussed on wellbeing, curriculum, and pedagogy for these types

of programs. Prior research has not examined how these students are building career development competencies or their post-school destination outcomes.

The findings of the current research will significantly enhance what has previously been known about the career development interventions within a FLP curriculum and its impact on students' career adaptability and outcomes. Exploring the career development interventions and other holistic aspects of alternative education for marginalised students at the FLP will provide insight into what effectively contributes to students' career adaptability and overall social and emotional wellbeing and self-efficacy. This knowledge can be used to inform the development of a career development curriculum suitable for alternative education settings and will fill an important gap to ensure marginalised youth are given the best possible chance to successfully manage their life transitions.

There are perceived benefits for students of the inclusion of career development theory and practices in the FLP's transformative pedagogy, which can be utilised within the alternative education sector. Without this, students who are marginalised from mainstream education may continue to accept their current reality, taking for granted their situation and they may not recognise that there are ways in which this can be transformed (McInerney, 2009; Mills, 2008). The current study will redress this imbalance by exploring the extent to which career development learning is embedded into the FLP curriculum for marginalised youth and making recommendations on the basis of any identified gaps. The recommendations can be shared across the alternative education sector, enabling effective interventions for these youth aimed at building their career adaptability, self-efficacy, and social and emotional wellbeing.

Scope of the research

The study is bounded in a social constructionist paradigm. The research questions focus on the participants' subjective experiences of the FLP and the impact this experience has on

students' social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy and career adaptability. Social constructionism is considered to be like a conversation, continuously unfolding and not restricted by a set of fixed principles (Gergen, 2011). Guiding the constructionist paradigm is the basic assumption that knowledge is socially-constructed by people in the research process through interactions and negotiations within their social groups (Young & Collin, 2004).

Ethnographic data collection methods were used for this study. Participant observation took place weekly during term time (typically 10 weeks duration) over 2 ½ years. It commenced during the term before the research data collection began, to allow the researcher to gain insight and understanding of the setting and to assist in the formulation of the research questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, past students, teachers and support staff. Interviews were conducted in two stages, with a 12-month break between them. Artefacts, such as written work, course syllabi, reflections and resources were also used to establish processes and add understandings to the activities that the students completed. Braun and Clarke's (2005) theoretical thematic analysis was used when analysing the data.

This research sought in-depth information from students and staff in order to answer the research questions. Therefore, the constructionist approach is a fitting paradigm, as it enables the uncovering of multiple truths of participants which draw out common themes (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Each current and past FLP student creates their own reality through their experiences with 'the School', the teachers, support staff, work experience placements, and interactions with other peers. There are individual realities for each participant in the study, depending on how they interpreted their experiences. This paradigm is based on a relativist ontology, positing that multiple, equally-valid social realities exist (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

Researcher's interest in the topic

My interest in this topic comes from my own life experiences combined with my occupational interests. I am a passionate career development practitioner who loves to work with young people and assist them in establishing career direction and working toward achieving their goals. My experience working with young disadvantaged youth attending a tertiary preparation program in which I teach, further inspired me to research the career development of these young people. I realised that my drive to undertake this research was also fuelled by the fact that, during my own youth, my education was disrupted.

Having attended five primary schools by the completion of Grade 5 (age 10), I was no stranger to relocation. My last two terms of Grade 5 were spent boarding with an older couple in a rural community. I was then removed from mainstream schooling and continued Years 6 – 9 (age 11-14) through distance education in a remote area of Eastern Victoria. During this time I received very little support and had no social connection with people my own age. This period contributed to a severe lack of confidence when transitioning to a rural mainstream high school in Year 10 at the age of 14. Struggling to navigate the social aspects of high school as well as understand concepts in subjects I had never heard of made the transition to a mainstream high school very difficult.

In Year 10, I was not succeeding academically and had very little idea of what careers I could pursue. My limited exposure to occupations had me thinking that farming and agriculture, or taking any job that was available in the town, whatever that may be, were my only options. I did, however, have some drive to learn and wanted to achieve more, even though I did not know what that would be. I commenced Year 11 with the thoughts of becoming a nurse. This seemed like a fairly popular choice among females in my region and so I thought that I could give that a go. I selected the necessary maths and science subjects that would enable this transition, however

I found these particularly challenging. After the first term, my maths and science knowledge was not developing and I was removed from those subjects to undertake an easier mathematics course, commerce, and legal studies. This ended my desire to pursue nursing as a career.

I began thinking about the future all over again. I did quite well academically that year, however I had significant issues dealing with my personal life at home, which resulted in me exploring ways of improving my situation. I therefore sought assistance from the Careers Advisor at the school. This was not the most enlightening experience, although, at the time, I took on board what was on offer. This particular Careers Advisor approached the task by handing out job guides and numerous pamphlets on emergency services, police, and defence force career options. I cannot remember him ever mentioning university options to me or any of my peers. At that stage, I had an interest in joining the Victorian Mounted Police, due to my love of horses and competing in equestrian events, however the Careers Advisor measured my height and then promptly told me that I was too short to the join the police force. That was the end of that career dream.

The following year, I commenced Year 12 and loved the moment when I collected all the text books and began delving into this new knowledge. This turned out to be short-lived. The select few students who had continued through to Year 12 at this rural high school made it quite clear to me that I was not from the same social class. My decision to leave was made when I was asked one day in the common room why I was studying Year 12. I did not have the confidence to mix with these people at that time, because I saw myself as less worthy. I did not come from a supportive family background and I had no role models to encourage me to seek out options.

The result of my choice to leave that term was to end up washing sheets in a motel, something I had not dreamt about, but it fulfilled my need to survive. The manager at this motel

actually saw some potential in me and engaged me in other odd jobs in the office from time to time. He subsequently presented me with a job advertisement he had cut out from the local newspaper. The advertisement was for a traineeship in local government office administration at the local shire council. With the manager's encouragement and support, I applied and was successful in gaining the traineeship. After completing the traineeship and working a further 12 months at the council, I left this position looking for adventure in another State.

My next move included enlisting in the Royal Australian Air Force, which was another successful transition. I was soon being encouraged by my supervisors to complete Year 12 through night school and work toward either a university degree or applying to become a commissioned officer. I worked toward both. There was nothing stopping me. I worked hard to complete night school and gained entry into a university degree program studying via distance education. This took me 6 years to complete and I knew that, upon completion, I would definitely like to work in the higher education sector, as it had been such a positive experience. I made this happen and this experience took me again to other places within Australia, working in different universities in the area of career development.

I had finally found something I was truly comfortable with and wanted to pursue more fully. I undertook further study and a move back to a previous university to commence a careers counselling and lecturing role within their tertiary preparation program found me working with some very vulnerable students. At the time, I also worked in another part-time role as a Careers Counsellor within a Catholic girls' high school. This also had an impact on my future direction, as I dealt with young people with several barriers to overcome whilst they were completing their secondary education. It became particularly obvious to me how important career development interventions and support were for those young people who did not have supportive home environments or who faced challenges beyond the usual requirements for a young person completing their secondary education. I had been one of those young people and struggled to

find my way to a successful career outcome. If not for the support of the influential people who I had come across in my journey, I doubt I would have achieved all that I have. In comparison to my own journey, young people today are facing a more precarious employment market and many more challenges to their situations. It is within this context that I support and firmly believe in the need for particular career development interventions for those young people who are marginalised from mainstream education.

It is obvious that my drive and passion for career development is heavily influenced by my own journey. I am proof that not all young people who are marginalised from mainstream school lack career aspiration or ability. What is required however, is a supportive environment and targeted career development interventions to assist young people with realising their goals. It was important to me and clear that there needed to be more learnt about how career development and the manner in which it was offered to young people attending FLPs. Thus, the goal for this study, originating from my past experiences, was to understand how career development is embedded in the curriculum of a FLP and outcomes this has on marginalised young peoples' social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy and career adaptability. With the growth in FLPs to cater for marginalised youth, my focus on ensuring that career development is embedded in the curriculum in an appropriate and meaningful way is timely.

Structure of thesis

The thesis is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 outlined the researcher's interest in the topic and the reason for this investigation into career development interventions in flexible learning settings. The research site and the curriculum in which the students' can partake are outlined. The research questions are stated and the context in which they have been applied is explained.

Chapter 2, the literature review, focusses on the literature that is relevant to the study. The historical perspective of secondary education in Australia is presented, along with an update on the socio-political environment within which the education sector currently operates. Career development in Australian schools is also outlined, leading to the gaps that have contributed to the formulation of the research questions. The conceptual framework in which the research is bounded is also described.

Chapter 3, the methodology, highlights my ontological and epistemological perspective to the study, explaining the paradigm within which my approach to the research was undertaken. Data collection procedures, analysis framework, data integrity and ethical considerations are presented.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the research in each of the individual themes. The overarching themes of supportive relationships, preparation for work and the pros and cons of the QCE are explained and findings from interviews and observations are presented.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis and discusses the findings and their impact on outcomes in relation to the research questions and emergent themes. Recommendations are proposed.

Chapter 2: Literature review and scope

This literature review details the key literature on flexible learning programs and career development for youth who are marginalised. It focuses on the socio-political context of secondary education, the emergence of alternative education programs, historical perspectives of social justice in career development interventions, career development in Australian schools, and wellbeing and outcomes for marginalised students. The review was conducted by searching library databases including but not limited to EBSCOHost, PsycArticles, ProQuest, Education Research Complete, for information specifically related to alternative education and career development globally and then narrowed to the Australian context. From there, the search was narrowed down to include career adaptability, wellbeing, vocational education and training and marginalised youth in the context of alternative education.

Socio-political context of Australian secondary education

Since the 1970s, educational reforms have resulted in considerable changes within the secondary schooling system in Australia. Low retention rates and reduced numbers of students completing senior education made way for policy changes that would aim to increase the number of senior school completions. Globally, there have been policy reforms, such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) in the United States (US), *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) in the United Kingdom (UK), and the *Compact with Young Australians* (Department of Education & Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2010) in Australia, that have sought to address inclusion, retention and educational success of students throughout their schooling. All of these reforms focus on raising school attainment through various interventions focussing on social inclusion and equitable education for everyone. The Council of Australian Governments' (2009) National Education Agreement (2009) aimed to increase the Australian Year 12 (or its equivalent) completion rate for 20–24 year olds to 90% by

the year 2015. Subsequently, it was further extended to the year 2020. In 2017 the completion rate for full-time students completing Year 12 reached 84.8%. Overall, between 2008 and 2017, the completion rate for all students rose from 74.6% to 84.8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The target appeared ambitious, however, there were several initiatives which have contributed to the ongoing increase in Year 12 attainments. These included changes to welfare payments to ensure that students remain at school or are in training or employment until the age of 20, increasing the minimum school leaving age, and offering new vocational qualifications to increase the job readiness of students (Council of Australian Governments', 2009; Wyn, 2009). However, data from the 2015 study on educational opportunity in Australia indicated that in 2013 there were still 26% of young Australians who had not completed Year 12 or an equivalent qualification by the age of 19, amounting to an equivalent figure of 81,199 young people (Lamb & Huo, 2017). Included in this figure are a significant number of young people who are not fully prepared to enter adulthood as productive citizens due to limited opportunity to secure employment (Lamb & Huo, 2017). This results in costs to the individual in terms of employment prospects, job satisfaction, living conditions, health and wellbeing, civic engagement and preparing for retirement (Lamb & Huo, 2017). The cost to the community is affected through the loss of taxes and productivity, and expenses incurred to the taxpayer regarding increased government expenditure relating to health, welfare and crime (Lamb & Huo, 2017).

Therefore, even with these national benchmarks, the policies aimed at increasing inclusivity and retention in education can also be attributed to further marginalising some of the most disenfranchised students and entrenching social exclusion (Peterson & Skiba, 2000; Savelsberg & Martin-Giles, 2008). For example, students reaching Year 10 who have no interest in being at school, or face barriers that prevent their participation and would rather get a job, are restrained by the policies that require them to be ‘earning or learning’. Due to their lack of qualifications and decreasing job opportunities in the blue-collar sector, where previous

generations would have traditionally gained employment, they are forced to stay in a system they do not want to, or have difficulty, remaining in, adding to their further disengagement from learning (Savelsberg & Martin-Giles, 2008). Moreover, this has the potential for the student to complete irrelevant subjects or certificate courses that do not lead to decent work or a successful career. Decent work is defined by the International Labour Organisation (2017) as work which is productive, offers a fair income, is in a secure workplace and offers social protection for families. The notion of decent work will be elaborated further on in this chapter.

Students who disengage from school at an early age become marginalised from mainstream education (Smyth & McInerney, 2012). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the reasons for marginalisation are varied and can relate to the student's relationship with the school or the student's circumstances. Students who become marginalised may want to or need to re-enter the education system at some point. This is either to meet regulatory requirements of learning or earning or to fulfil their own desires to complete their education and allow themselves to strive toward a positive future. The increase in students being marginalised from mainstream forms of education has contributed to the growth of flexible learning options and programs within Australian society, as the educational needs of youth increase through not being served well by 'mainstream' schools (Mills, McGregor, Hayes, & Te Riele, 2015).

Students who are marginalised from mainstream education

Young people become marginalised from education for a variety of reasons, but mainly through their negative relationships with mainstream schooling, rather than their personal characteristics (te Riele, 2006b). Students who are marginalised typically have not been served well by the education system, as they may have been subject to exclusionary practices or strict regulations, or required more specialised help than what could be provided (te Riele, 2006b). Common barriers relate to learning disorders, low literacy and numeracy skills, bullying, low

self-esteem, poor living conditions, difficult relationships with teachers or peers, and an inability to adapt to teaching styles, school culture and strict structures (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2015; te Riele, 2006b). Students also experience alienation and, subsequently, marginalisation through social divides, such as class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (McInerney, 2009; Mills et al., 2015).

Youth who are marginalised from education face structural barriers that limit their opportunities and ability to gain satisfactory employment or improve their living situation and wellbeing (Billett et al., 2010; Hampshire, 2015). As participation in education, training or employment is often used as an indicator of wellbeing for young people (Lamb & Huo, 2017), there is a clear link to lower wellbeing for marginalised youth. Their disadvantage increases and, as McLachlan, Gilfillan, and Gordon (2013) highlight in their report, youth who have low educational attainment are at risk of experiencing deeper and persistent disadvantage throughout their lifetime. Approaches to re-engaging marginalised youth with education include options to enrol in Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs).

Second chances through alternative education – Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs)

A second chance for youth who are marginalised may be provided through alternative or Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs). FLPs are operating in a number of different formats in Australia. Some form part of mainstream school classes, whilst some belong to the mainstream school as an annex located away from the main campus, whilst others operate independently. Whatever the format, FLPs share some common aspects. These include giving young people a chance to gain education credentials in a safe environment where they can rebuild their confidence and work toward gaining skills and knowledge required for successful transitions to work, life or further learning (te Riele, 2014). The interventions provided through FLPs are aimed at supporting students' academic, social, behavioural and emotional needs through

innovative approaches to curriculum. In addition, these approaches are delivered with an explicit focus on inclusion, which may not have been successfully supported in mainstream school settings (Mills & McGregor, 2010; Riddle, 2015; te Riele, 2007).

Research undertaken by te Riele (2014) as a follow-up to her 2012 National Learning Choices Scan, produced a summary of evidence-based good practice that exists in alternative education across the sector, analysing their diversity, presenting outcomes from good practice programs, and sharing implications and resources for enhancing successful educational provision to assist with future practice and policy. The research included data from 400 programs offered in 1200 locations across Australia. Attending these programs were a conservative estimate of 33,000 students (Best, 2013; te Riele, 2012). However, outcomes from this research suggest that FLPs need to better share insights into what works by providing more evidence for success to strengthen advocacy for further innovations and enhancements (te Riele, 2014). This was also shared in the Thomson and Pennacchia (2014) project, in conjunction with The Prince's Trust, on alternative education in the United Kingdom (UK). Their research focused on the aspects of alternative education that are different to the practices within mainstream schools, as well as the quality of alternative education in the UK and Scotland. Sharing of information through national staff networks and funding a national innovations project to develop an information sharing platform was one of their 16 recommendations made through the report, as was the need for centrally-held data on educational outcomes in alternative education. te Riele (2012) also suggested a need for further information on outcomes of the program, recommending tracking students on completion and their success in subsequent destinations, such as further learning and employment.

With such a significant number of students involved in FLPs, further exploration in terms of the programs that are being offered and how they impact on the graduate destinations and careers for these young people is warranted.

Wellbeing of marginalised youth

FLPs place a large emphasis on youth social and emotional wellbeing within the broader context of wellbeing (te Riele, 2014). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) defines social and emotional wellbeing as how people think and feel about themselves and others and how they adapt and deal with daily changes whilst living a fulfilling life. It also incorporates, not only the individual characteristics, but those of environments, such as family, school and community (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012). Evans and Prilleltensky (2007) support this with their definition of wellbeing, which indicates that a positive state of affairs is fulfilled for individuals and communities through personal, relational, and collective needs and aspirations.

The te Riele (2012) Learning Choices Scan highlighted that most alternative education programs are aimed at improving wellbeing through their case management approach. An overwhelming majority of non-academic outcomes in FLPs relate to social and emotional wellbeing and, in particular, improved confidence and self-esteem (te Riele, 2012).

In this research, wellbeing is examined through the Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006) framework of wellbeing, which focuses on sites of wellbeing, such as personal, relational, and collective, along with the signs and sources of wellbeing and strategies used to build wellbeing in each of these sites (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). For example, the youth at ‘the School’ are part of a community where they have relationships with peers, teachers, support staff and mentors and, if they experience positive personal wellbeing in that context, it would be expected that they have control over their choices, experience self-efficacy and are empowered in their decision making. Their relational wellbeing would be positive if they experience enduring friendships based on respect and affirmation and can resolve conflict, whilst their collective wellbeing would be evidenced by a good sense of belonging to community, supporting those

worse off, and fighting injustices. Prilleltensky (2003) indicated that wellbeing at a relational level relies on democratic participation and collaboration, along with respect for diversity and social inclusion, which are all goals of the FLP approach to educating marginalised youth (te Riele, 2014). Relational wellbeing can take the form of a mentoring program which has the capacity to improve collective wellbeing (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007) and the intergenerational mentoring program at the FLP school under investigation for this research is a site where this occurs.

Developing positive relationships with teachers and support staff, and with fellow students, can positively influence marginalised students' engagement and learning experiences. There is solid evidence to suggest that relationships with a significant adult, such as a mentor, is a strong protective factor that can make a considerable difference to the young person's learning and wellbeing outcomes (State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010).

It suffices then, that these signs and sites of wellbeing have aspects that contribute to career development, achieved by complementing interventions with emancipatory communitarian approaches (Blustein et al., 2005; Prilleltensky, 1997) and relational career theory (Young & Popadiuk, 2012). Applying a relational perspective of career development involves examining the connectedness students have with their teachers, parents, mentors or significant others and what this means to their career construction (Young & Popadiuk, 2012).

Whilst it is important to provide opportunities that enable marginalised youth a second chance at education through alternative education programs, these programs require considerable interventions and approaches that will build on the young person's capacity to live a life free of deep and persistent disadvantage (te Riele, 2014). Whilst improving the young person's wellbeing is a primary focus of FLPs, it is not the only thing that needs to be considered.

Employment is going to be a necessary transition for most of these young people and the ability to gain decent work will have implications for their futures. Career development interventions are required to assist young people to develop the career self-management knowledge, skills and personal resources, such as self-efficacy and career adaptability, to ensure successful career transitions.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy beliefs can play a major role in determining a person's chances of success in accomplishing goals and is typically enhanced through four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. For example, mastering a task, such as writing a resume, through sustained effort and persistence, builds a person's belief in their resume-writing capabilities. If they expect positive outcomes from performing this task (e.g., gaining a job interview), they are more likely to engage in that task in the future. Failure will undermine the person's sense of efficacy and may lead to avoidance of such tasks in the future. Seeing role models or people similar to ourselves succeed by their sustained and persistent effort also raises our self-efficacy. Significant others in a young person's life, such as parents, teachers, mentors, or coaches can strengthen their beliefs in their ability to succeed, through verbal persuasion, such as encouragement. Finally, a person's emotional and physiological state can also influence their self-efficacy beliefs. Feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed, for example, can dampen a person's confidence in their capabilities to carry out certain tasks and can affect their performance (Bandura, 1986).

Self-efficacy is domain-specific and therefore a set of beliefs are linked to a specific domain or activity (Lent, 2012). For example, a young person may have strong self-efficacy beliefs about their ability to play a musical instrument, but may be much less confident in their ability to play sport (Lent, 2012). Successful experiences in a specific domain strengthen the

individual's self-efficacy, whereas negative experiences or failures have the opposite effect, weakening the self-efficacy belief in that domain (Lent, 2012). Consequently, self-efficacy is linked to outcome expectations, whereby the individual "imagines the consequences of a particular course of action (e.g., "if I do this, what will happen?")" (Lent, 2012, p. 118). Self-efficacy and outcome expectations play a large role in determining what actions people may take and what ones they avoid (Bandura, 1986). In the case of young people, exploring their career choices and setting career goals, require a degree of domain-specific self-efficacy. This can be achieved through undertaking career exploratory activities, such as work experience, part time employment and vocational training courses (Creed, Muller, & Patton, 2003; McCowan et al., 2017).

Students at FLPs can access opportunities for work experience and undertake vocational education training (VET) courses, which can assist to increase their sense of self-efficacy. However, young people who have had little exposure to occupational and employment experiences, or career role models, have less chance to develop a range of career-related interests, achieve mastery experiences, build their self-efficacy beliefs, or form positive outcome expectations (Bennett, 2007; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). They merely have not had enough exposure to build their interests in order to imagine a successful outcome in a particular occupation. Therefore, they are unlikely to set goals and be able to execute the actions required to achieve it. They may also perceive a lack of support from their family as a barrier to setting and achieving goals. According to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) "…career interests are more likely to blossom into goals (and goals are more likely to be implemented) when people experience strong environmental supports and weak barriers in relation to their preferred career paths" (Lent, 2012, p. 119).

In the context of this study, it is therefore an important focus to examine whether self-efficacy is increased for the young people who attend FLPs and how this impacts their career development.

Career and Career Development

Career is defined as the variety of experiences that one undertakes throughout their life – the continuous process of learning and development that includes both paid and unpaid work (Education Services Australia Ltd, 2017). Careers have evolved with the changes to the world of work over the past 100 years or so, which include rapid advances in technology, globalisation and digitisation (Hooley, 2015). With this, there have been changes in the way that people do work. For example, they are no longer employed by the one company for 30 or 40 years; it is more likely they will be changing employers every 2 to 3 years (Savickas, 2012). Contracts are a common form of employment, which can create insecurity, and there are many people who are underemployed or in casual or part-time work. Often people are undertaking more than one job in order to maintain a reasonable standard of living (Foundation for Young Australians, 2018; Torii & O'Connell, 2017). With all this in mind, what the young people of today are expected to navigate post school requires skills far and above what were required 50 years ago. Students are required to be well-equipped to manage their careers in the globalised world, which means that they need to obtain the skills to succeed in the workplace and further education, and be active and involved citizens (Department of Education and Training, 2016b).

Career development

Career development is “the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move towards a personally determined and evolving future” (National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards, 2004, p. 2). While the terms ‘career’ and ‘career development’ have changed over time to include leisure, transitions

and unpaid work, career development interventions have a long history in social justice and educational reform and have evolved over the years. Frank Parsons (1854 – 1908) played a significant role in vocational guidance in America with his introduction of vocational guidance services to those affected by the changes affecting the agrarian society and the move toward a more industrialised one in the late 1800s and early 1900s, which resulted in insecurities and instability of workers (Baker, 2009; Pope, 2015). His work grew to establishing the trait-and-factor or person-environment approach to career interventions, which introduced psychological assessments. From his work in this area, the vocational guidance movement continued to develop and became recognised widely in schools, government and community (Pope, 2015).

In Australia, vocational guidance became important in the mid to late 1920s when courses of study were broadened and more students began staying on at school (Morgan & Hart, 1977). Over time, the vocational guidance paradigm changed to a more humanistic perspective as the 1950s bought about changes to society and, hence, the career development paradigm evolved with the introduction of developmental psychology and constructivist approaches (Savickas, 2015).

Careers in the 21st century require individuals to be able to adapt to a changing landscape (Savickas, 2012). The theory of career construction is based on social constructionism, whereby reality is co-constructed through social process and interpersonal relationships (Savickas, 2012). This is a relevant lens through which to view the career development requirements of marginalised youth attending FLPs. This will be covered more fully in the conceptual framework section further on in this chapter.

Career development in Australian secondary schools

Over time, the provision of career development curricula in Australia has been sporadic. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OECD) conducted an international review of some 33 countries, including Australia, to examine how career guidance was organised, managed and delivered, in order to assist countries to advance key public policy goals related to lifelong learning and active employment (OECD, 2004). The findings included the need to provide further support for school students to gain the opportunity to explore the world of work, outside of the school; training for career guidance practitioners needed to be increased; and the accountability of school career guidance programmes needed to be improved through a system of performance indicators (OECD, 2017). The review also informed a handbook for policy makers on Career Guidance. Further to this, in 2006 Patton and McMahon highlighted the variances that existed in the nature, extent, and type of career education across schools and States (Patton & McMahon, 2006). A review of career counselling services in some Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australian schools in 2003 by Walker, Alloway, Dalley-Trim, and Patterson (2006) focussed on what the Year 10 and Year 12 students' perceptions were of the career counselling services available to them. Career counsellors were also included in the research to provide their views of their roles. The findings suggested that there were two models of career development operating, one being the information-centred model and the other a student-centred model. The student-centred model was more popular among the students, as they described this as a way they received useful assistance, because time was taken to consider their individual needs and help them to work toward pathways they may not have considered (Walker et al., 2006).

On the other hand, the information-centred model is based on providing students with a *book* containing course and employment information (Walker et al., 2006). Students responded negatively to this model, indicating their need for assistance in making sense of such a vast array of information (Walker et al., 2006). In some cases, students reported this as a barrier to their career development efforts, because the information went over their heads, which led them to giving up on further exploration (Walker et al., 2006). The counsellors who took part in the

research displayed differences in their philosophies of practice which were highlighted in the types of service delivery models. Those who were more aligned with the student-centred approach made themselves available to students, sought out opportunities to present in classrooms, and provided individual support to students by assisting them with self-reflection, exploring career and pathway options and decision making. Counsellors, however, who were more likely on the information-centred continuum, were not as visible to students, but were seen as someone students may access to find resources that they were required to navigate themselves. This group also saw their role as meeting system requirements involving administration aspects, such as organising work experience placements, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, and associated paperwork and reporting. They were also involved with circulating information regarding study options and post-school employment to students (Walker et al., 2006).

In 2011, research conducted by Urbis, which informed the compilation of the National Career Development Strategy, further supported the idea of a student-centred approach being more useful to students. Their discussions with young people who were currently in secondary school as well as past students indicated that they desired "…personalised one on one career information and advice that takes into account their interests, values, strengths and weaknesses. They want this advice to be independent and not biased" (Urbis, 2011, p. 5). This is supported by Galliott and Graham (2015), who suggested that students who had one-on-one appointments with career advisers within their schools were more likely to be career certain than those who did receive have these interventions.

Improvements have been made in the last decade to provide frameworks for career development in schools and there has been a more positive focus in this area. The introduction of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development in 2010 provides a framework for career education in Australia (Ministerial Council for Employment Education and Youth Affairs, 2010) and is a welcome addition for professionals working in this area. Another initiative was the

formulation and implementation of professional standards for career practitioners (Australia, 2011). In addition, the long-awaited National Career Development Strategy was released in 2013, providing guiding principles for future career development approaches and outlining a vision for career development in Australia through to 2020 (Department of Education, 2013). A follow-up to this was the production of the Career Industry Council of Australia (2014) benchmarking resource for school career development, outlining a best-practice approach for career development service delivery in schools. Whilst these frameworks and standards exist, it is not compulsory for these to be used for the planning and delivery of career development curricula in Australian schools (Bowen & Kidd, 2017). In contrast to the developments in the career development field, the Robinson and Lamb (2012) report on how young people are faring raised concerns that career development skills were not being taught in schools or beyond classroom walls, suggesting the need for a new approach to enable youth to develop the skills required in navigating new labour markets. Consequently, there are still variances across the schools and Australian States and Territories as to how career development is delivered.

Whilst one-size-fits-all approaches are not the answer, it is important to note the differences across Australian States and Territories in regards to approaches toward career development for secondary students. There are significant differences in the approaches from some state governments and the federal government. For example, in the State of Victoria, schools use the Managed Individual Pathways (MIP) program, which receives specified funding to support careers and transition programs (State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2017). This model ensures that students over 15 years of age attending public schools develop a career action plan and receive the associated support for making successful transitions through their senior secondary years of education and on to further education, training or full-time employment (Polvere & Lim, 2015; State Government of

Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2017). Additional support is also provided to students who:

> …are at risk of disengaging or not making a successful transition to further education, training or secure employment. The program includes a follow-up with students who do not complete Year 12 at the time of leaving and again within six months. MIPs support is also available to people 15 to 19 years old who have not completed Year 12 and who are not in full-time employment through TAFE institutes and Learn Local programs. (State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Training, 2017)

In contrast to this, in the State of Queensland, students in Year 10 are required to take part in formulating their Senior Education and Training (SET) plan in collaboration with teaching staff and parents/carers. The focus here is more about choosing the subjects they will study in their senior schooling that will gain them the ability to reach their goals and attain a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2013).

Some schools have career development staff who are able to assist students with planning their futures. However, others rely on teaching staff to coordinate with the students, based on their interests and academic results, despite evidence of the benefits on students' career certainty when they receive input from a career development practitioner. As Galliott and Graham (2015) reported, students who had meetings with a careers adviser at school were 2.12 times more career certain than those who did not. Their study was conducted on 706 secondary school students from years 9 to 12 who completed an online survey exploring the influence of students' educational experiences on their level of certainty about their future career plans. Students were categorised into "career certain" or "career uncertain" on the basis of their responses to being asked what they would like to do when they finished school. The results indicated that career certainty was 1.17, 2.12, 2.40, and 2.54 times higher for students who had completed school-

organised work experience, met with a career advisor, chose work experience that they were interested in, and had received career education, respectively, than those who had not received those career interventions (Galliott & Graham, 2015).

It is therefore evident that career development in schools is not consistent across the country and depends on the individual school and person offering the career development services as to how successful it is. It is also apparent that, whilst some schools embrace the delivery of good career development programs and offer specialised career counselling to senior students, there are others that offer very little in the way of evidence-based interventions for the most marginalised groups. With this being the case in mainstream schools, the need to investigate how career development is implemented in FLPs is of significant importance, as marginalised youth attending these programs typically require more assistance to overcome structural barriers and make successful post-school transitions.

Post school transitions

There is an expectation in society that youth will transition directly from school to work or further education and training, which takes an extremely linear view to transitions. This view is similar to that of the traditional world view of career development and its reliance on the person-fit matching approaches used in the industrial era (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Transitions today, however, are often very complex and chaotic for marginalised youth (Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Stokes & Wyn, 2007; Torii & O'Connell, 2017; White & Wyn, 2008), which challenges this assumption of a linear movement from school to work. An absence of career development interventions for marginalised youth further complicates the transitional process for young people, as does a lack of social and cultural capital (Billett et al., 2010), which is missing for many of these youth.

The Department of Education and Training commissioned research in 2016 into how school-to-work transitions take place and what sort of skills are required for successful transitions of school graduates. The report was completed in 2016 with the main emphasis on using the frameworks that already exist, however, just as career development is inconsistent across schools, there is also a lack of consistency in how students are prepared for school-to-work transitions. Much of the report points towards having structural elements in place that marginalised students often do not have (Department of Education and Training, 2016a). For example, the report claims that it is important to have family support, which is something that marginalised students are often lacking. It also suggests that students take responsibility and ownership of their development of tools for transitions (Department of Education and Training, 2016a). This however, places an unreasonable expectation on marginalised students, who may not have developed basic career competencies to assist them to do this.

Research suggests that students with higher levels of cultural and social capital and who come from Higher Social Economic Status (HSES) backgrounds are less likely than students from Low Social Economic Status (LSES) backgrounds, and who are particularly marginalised in society, to have difficulty in making choices that ensure they achieve their aspirational goals (Polvere & Lim, 2015; Semo & Karmel, 2011). Higher rates of participation in education and training are likely for those with social capital, and this has been proven to be more important than influences of family background, school type and location. Student connectedness with school, student-teacher relations, and the influence of networks when thinking about the future (Semo & Karmel, 2011), are important factors that can assist with the school-to-work transition and building of social capital. Social economic status also has an impact on the school-to-work transition, as evidenced in the Blustein et al. (2002) research. They found that participants from a HSES group were more likely to be working in a job where they could apply their interests and goals, whereas their counterparts in a LSES group did not have jobs congruent with their

interests and values. Research conducted by Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, and White (2002) suggested that young people are not only reliant on the support of relevant adults for them to make an adaptive transition to the workplace, but also on the skills gained through work experience.

The research questions are specifically aimed at investigating the types of interventions that impact on the students' social capital that will assist with their career development, such as building relationships through their mentors, teachers, work experience placements and community, and the influence this has on their post-school transition.

The 2016 Department of Education's Quality Schools Quality Outcomes report highlights their intention to improve on current career and post-school advice by developing a new and contemporary National Career Education Strategy in conjunction with industry, States and Territories and the non-government sector. The strategy is to ensure that career and post-school advice is meaningful and that young people are fully aware of and have a greater understanding of their options regarding further education, training and employment, and what they need to do to achieve their goals (Department of Education and Training, 2016b). However in May 2017, The Hon Simon Birmingham, the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, commissioned an inquiry into how students are supported from school to work (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2018). This was partly due to the challenges that are still evident in the transition from school to work even though retention and attainment rates of secondary students had increased (Dandolo Partners, 2014). However, in 2018, the results from the inquiry are again highlighting the need for improved career development interventions in schools. Some of the recommendations include:

- An increased delivery of career guidance activities in order to assist students in recognising their career goals and their areas of strength;

- An increase in the availability of career advisory programs and that counselling emphasises VET, apprenticeships and alternative post-school pathways to the same extent as higher education;
- All high schools should have access to trained career advisors on staff; and
- Labour market information is integrated into professional development for careers advisor and that schools are adequately funded to ensure career advisors have access to this training (and that it be a mandatory professional development program for career advisors). (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2018, p. xix).

It appears that the struggle to include evidence-based career development interventions in mainstream schools is an ongoing battle. It is, however, an important one. Whilst there is some evidence that pathway planning exists in FLPs (Johns & Parker, 2017; te Riele, 2014), more needs to be done to ensure that marginalised students are gaining the skills to be able to manage their transitions into the future. The career development approach is not just about giving students information on the labour market and helping them with job search. It must include building students' career adaptability. These students are embarking on an employment market that will require them to be adaptable. The market is not as stable and students may enter precarious roles and change jobs every few months. The transition from education to employment, whilst the focus of government policy, must not be so short-sighted that the students are not equipped with the skills to successfully make lifelong career transitions.

FLP student career outcomes

In addition to the benefits that FLPs provide to young people there has also been criticism around whether the outcomes for youth attending FLPs in Australia relate to graduate destinations (Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, 2012). The traditional graduate outcomes for

secondary students include employment, further education or training. The My Schools website (www.myschool.edu.au) provides information on graduate outcomes for the school leaver cohort of all individual schools in Australia, whether public, independent or Catholic. These destination data are broken down into percentages across three categories: students attending university; students at TAFE or vocational training; and students in employment. The other outcome for young people who are not transitioning to one of these three categories is, of course, unemployment. The Foundation for Young Australians (2015) reported that it takes an average of 4.7 years for young people to find full-time work after completing full-time education and 2.7 years to find any type of work. These statistics are not encouraging and particularly for young people who have experienced disruption in their education, the barriers to employment will be even greater.

It is difficult to glean a clear picture of the outcomes for students attending FLPs, particularly if they are operating as an annexe of a mainstream school, as the data are combined with the overall main school data. Independent FLPs do have their data available, however they tend to have difficulties gathering those data. Reliable destination data, which could show how attendance at FLPs impacts on student progression to employment or further education, is difficult to collect when it involves young people with complex personal circumstances. Data that have been collected, whilst positive, are from a very small group of respondents and could be biased toward youth who are keen to report their positive outcomes (South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, 2013). This was also highlighted in the Thomson and Pennacchia (2014) report, whereby the findings pointed to an inadequate amount of information regarding student outcomes across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for students who attended alternative education programs.

Successful graduate destinations rely heavily on young people receiving sufficient career development interventions and preparation for post-school transitions. In the Wyn, Stokes, and

Tyler (2004) report, based on outcomes of the TAFE and ACE program development for early school leavers, a concern was raised about the care that needs to be taken to make sure that students are gaining access to the right pathways to further their education. It cautioned that students should not simply be channelled into preliminary courses that do not lead to further certification or qualifications. It was further noted that some students were not well-advised about using enabling courses as a pathway to further education, but were often just moved from one enabling course to another. Msapenda and Hudson (2013) also suggested that there are limitations to FLPs and room for improvement. In their research regarding FLPs in South Australia, they found evidence that an aspect of the curriculum that needed to be improved upon was preparing the students for life after the program by including better transition and career planning. They also mentioned that the structure and flexibility within the FLPs may cause further disadvantage for some young people who find the environment distracting, not challenging, or not stimulating enough, which can prevent them from reaching their full potential in the program (Msapenda & Hudson, 2013).

In addition to numeracy and literacy subjects, discipline-focused subjects and VET courses, FLPs offer a vast range of other activities. These are focussed on life skills, with the next most common (in about 60% of the surveyed programs) being computer/IT skills, mentoring and job-seeking (te Riele, 2012). Whilst job seeking is important, it appears there is a lack of theoretically-based career interventions that holistically focus on the goals and aspirations relevant to individual youth and building their capacities to realise these.

Successful graduate outcomes, such as transition to further education or employment, also rely heavily on the wellbeing of the young person. Students with low self-esteem and complex wellbeing needs have difficulties with transitions, which are often non-linear, characterised by u-turns and false starts (Myconos, 2014). Considering that individual factors, such as mental ill-health, can impact on a young person taking action to pursue career goals, it is important that

wellbeing is a focus in the FLP. As research conducted by Muir and Powell (2012) suggested, if young people are not partaking in education or employment, they are at a high risk of experiencing continuing social and health problems.

Bearing in mind the structural barriers that youth who are marginalised face, there are considerable steps to be taken to improve upon wellbeing that will also contribute to students developing positive post-school outcomes. This however, needs to be done with consideration to self-efficacy and career adaptability. One way in which career self-efficacy can be enhanced is the exposure to work-based learning.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) for marginalised youth

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a popular option for students not academically inclined and who are focussing on gaining employability skills before leaving secondary education (Barnett & Ryan, 2005). It is offered in both mainstream schools and alternative education sites as an option for those students to pursue an area of interest and to assist them to gain employment. It can also assist students to not only find out what jobs they like, but also what jobs they least prefer. In FLPs, whilst there is a strong emphasis on engaging and keeping students in education, there is also a focus on getting them job-ready as they prepare to transition from their secondary education. This emphasis on job readiness, however, often channels students into Vocational Education Training (VET) courses or pathways that are not necessarily in the area that the student enjoys, or that will lead to sustained employment in the long term (Down, Smyth, & Robinson, 2017; Polesel, 2010). As Smyth, McInerney, and Fish (2013) found through their extensive research in this area, the students often complete low level VET courses and experience low level forms of preparation or training for a vocation, reducing their potential for labour market success. Although strong VET qualifications are important for gaining employment, Polesel (2010) argued that Certificate Levels I and IIs, which are the

typical qualifications offered to FLP students, are at such basic levels that they do not provide specific competencies for gaining employment in trades or in areas that require licences.

For many students, particularly those without the social capital to assist them in decision making, choosing a VET course becomes extremely complex. The VET system consists of five levels of qualifications, thousands of registered training providers, and complex rules about eligibility and entitlement to government subsidies and VET FEE HELP loans, which can contribute significantly to the decision-making difficulties. To further complicate matters, there are also rogue registered training providers willing to entice students to undertake their qualifications without any consideration regarding the student's own abilities, hopes, dreams and importantly their employment prospects (Leahy, 2015).

On the contrary, there is potential for students to build self-efficacy through experiencing workplaces and new environments beyond school. Findings from research completed at a Brotherhood of St Laurance FLP (Myconos, 2012) supported this approach, but the students involved were still very dependent on their teaching and support staff for guidance in relation to making choices regarding VET courses. They found that the students' indecisiveness regarding choosing a vocation and VET courses or pathways also flowed through to what they thought was a good outcome (Myconos, 2012).

Whilst there may be some issues with the outcomes of VET, in relation to the future employment of students who have attended an FLP, softer outcomes may exist. Further investigation is required to determine the effects of vocational learning on career self-efficacy and career goals. For example, increase in self-efficacy gained through opportunities to undertake work experience can impact positively on career confidence (Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & White, 2002). As the student works through these experiences, they are adapting to changes and experiencing further learning and development which contributes to their increasing

agency and ability to manage adaptation tasks related to career transition (Savickas, 2012). The current research addresses this area by focussing on the lived experience of the students and gaining an understanding of how the career interventions they receive at the school impact on their career self-efficacy, career adaptability and career goals respectively.

It is a positive outcome for marginalised students to achieve schooling success however, they still require a considerable amount of life and career transition skills combined with relational support to ensure they can navigate their options successfully in the current world of work (Gatsby, 2018; Torii & O'Connell, 2017). Addressing the varied concerns that resulted in their enrolment in the FLP in the first place is important, and the push to have these students job-ready can overlook the comprehensive career development required to build their general wellbeing, self-efficacy, and career adaptability (Torii & O'Connell, 2017). Job readiness of students attending FLPs is addressed through the provision of the Vocational and Educational Training (VET) pathways that are offered in such programs, however, the research suggests that is it sometimes questionable how valuable these are in relation to job outcomes (Smyth et al.; Torii & O'Connell, 2017). This may particularly be the case if these pathways do not enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs or they cannot see the connection to their career goals.

How widening participation policy impacts on marginalised youth?

The Australian Government's approach to youth transition and education policies has been reflective of the push to increase productivity and contribute to the knowledge economy (Gale, 2015). In doing so, there have been interventions and initiatives that have overshadowed the underpinning requirement to build career development skills for the people who need it most. The introduction of the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Programs (HEPPP) provided funding for education institutions to implement innovative projects aimed at raising aspirations of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds with the intention of them

transitioning to higher education (Gale, 2015). Whilst this is a positive, in that it provides the funding for innovative programs, it speaks of young people from LSES backgrounds from a deficit approach, indicating they do not have aspiration to begin with (Bok, 2010; Sellar & Gale, 2011). There has been much debate as to the way in which the HEPPP initiatives situate the problem, making it more about the individual's lack of aspiration, and then countering this with measures to increase university targets, such as introducing access schemes and making it easier for students to gain entry to courses if they identify as an equity group (Sellar & Gale, 2011).

An increase in university marketing campaigns targeting equity groups has been noticeable, advertising special access schemes and pathway courses. In addition to the introduction of special access schemes, there are information sessions offered in secondary schools to entice young people to 'aspire' to attend university, and a variety of experiences aimed at getting school children on to campuses in order to 'raise aspirations'. Sellar and Gale (2011) indicate that these strategies are aimed at instilling desire for a particular outcome without addressing and engaging with the young people as to what would really matter for them. A survey conducted with students of Melbourne City Mission's flexible learning program, Melbourne Academy, highlights how students prioritised their imagined futures and that they indeed had aspirations for their futures. The dominant response from students was to be able to gain satisfying work and have a job that was interesting. The second highest priority was social connection and support, and the third, being able to live in a good community (te Riele, Davies, & Baker, 2015). The contextual lives of marginalised youth contain significant structural barriers and therefore there is a lot of work required to identify and build on their aspirations (Gatsby, 2018; te Riele et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, policy initiatives appear to overlook the gap for marginalised students, whereby more focus is required on providing embedded career development interventions that assist the young people to realise their aspirations, whatever they may be. An example of a

recent policy brief compiled by the Institute of Social Science Research titled, Schools and Career Guidance Key to Widening University Participation, again situates the student from LSES backgrounds as containing deficits. The brief indicates that "…good teachers and supportive school environments have the capacity to compensate for some deficits that are felt more strongly by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (such as a lack of Higher Education aspirations, information about university, and role models)" (Institute of Social Science Research, 2017, p. 1). It goes on to state that policy initiatives that aim to improve on these factors will result in an increase in university enrolments, which will decrease the gap between young people from advantaged and disadvantaged economic circumstances enrolling. The institute implies that these factors are easily addressable due to their ability to be regulated by the government through schools. The strategies are referred to as being preventative rather than remedial, as they present fewer costs and greater returns than trying to compensate for social disadvantage resulting from poor education (Institute of Social Science Research, 2017). The basis of the policy has some positive elements, however, there is danger in its presentation indicating deficits on both the part of students from Low Socio-Economic Status (LSES) backgrounds, along with teachers and education in general. The potential message here is rather short-sighted and makes career guidance in schools sound more like it is about ensuring young people are swayed toward university enrolment without the consideration of contextual factors that need to be addressed and considered through holistic processes.

Career development should not be about a marketing exercise to benefit the government's strategy to prepare more people for jobs in the knowledge economy. It should however, be a strategic approach to supply quality career development interventions in all schools and FLPs to meet the specific requirements of young people to ensure their successful participation in society (Gatsby, 2018). This would be a more appropriate preventative strategy on a number of levels.

In addition to this policy push for more LSES young people to attend university, there has also been renewed interest in the school-to-work transition process and the requirement for a new and contemporary career development strategy (Department of Education and Training, 2016b). It is timely then that further research into career development interventions for marginalised students is conducted. The findings may contribute to the development of a contemporary career development strategy. The school-to-work transition process needs to take into consideration the importance of interventions being focussed on the young person obtaining 'decent work'.

Decent work

The notion of decent work is not often well considered by the general population. It is mostly expected and people believe it to be a basic human right. What is 'decent' work though? The International Labour Organisation (ILO) define decent work as productive work, delivering a fair income and a secure workplace offering social protection for families. It has better prospects for personal development and social integration and people feel free to express concerns and contribute to decisions that affect their lives. It offers equality and opportunity for everyone regardless of gender (International Labour Organisation, 2017). Further to this Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, and Autin (2016) have determined decent work to consist of the following:

(a) physical and interpersonally safe working conditions (e.g., absent of physical, mental, or emotional abuse),

(b) hours that allow for free time and adequate rest,

(c) organisational values that complement family and social values,

(d) adequate compensation, and

(e) access to adequate health care.

Being able to access decent work is largely dependent on the economic performance of the country and the employment options available. It is, however, also dependent on the individual's skills and career adaptability and how these are used to assist in overcoming structural barriers. The changes that the knowledge economy has brought to the world of work have resulted in a highly casualised workforce, one where jobs are often completed as short-term contracts offering little security (Torii & O'Connell, 2017). Unfortunately, marginalised youth who leave secondary education without gaining employment-related skills or the confidence and self-efficacy to make positive school to work transitions, have diminished opportunities to gain decent work (Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2003).

Acknowledging the external factors, such as decent work, and how this may impact on marginalised youth requires further consideration when developing career development interventions. One such theory that assists with the understanding of decent work is the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) developed by Duffy et al. (2016). This will be further discussed in the conceptual framework section following.

Conceptual Framework

This study focuses on determining the effectiveness of career development strategies currently employed in the context of a regional FLP and examining how these impact on the students' career development and wellbeing. The findings from the thematic analysis of data will inform recommendations to enhance career development strategies for marginalised youth. The theories that are drawn upon are based on social constructionism. The constructionist perspective of career development "contends that knowledge is sustained by social processes and that knowledge and social action go together" Young and Collin (2004, p. 376).

Savickas' (2005) theory of career construction places self-construction as central and provides an explanation of the interpretive and interpersonal processes that individuals go

through when constructing themselves and directing their vocational behaviour. The theory includes the processes of adaptivity (flexibility, willingness to change), adaptability (self-regulation, psychosocial resources), adapting (orientation, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement), and adaptation (satisfaction, success, and development). This study focusses on the second process entitled adaptability. It is assumed that the young people enrolled in FLPs already possess the initial process of adaptivity. They have demonstrated a willingness to change their circumstances and committed to continuing their education in a flexible alternative mode. Savickas (2012, p. 157) suggested however, that "…adaptiveness by itself is insufficient to support adaptive behaviours. Individuals willing to adapt must bring self-regulation resources to bear on changing the situation". These self-regulation resources are known as adaptabilities. The CCT (Savickas, 2012) emphasises the importance of the meta-competency of adaptability to ensure that individuals are able to cope with the requirements of their career development in the 21st century (Savickas, 2012). Figure 1 visually depicts the processes within the CCT.

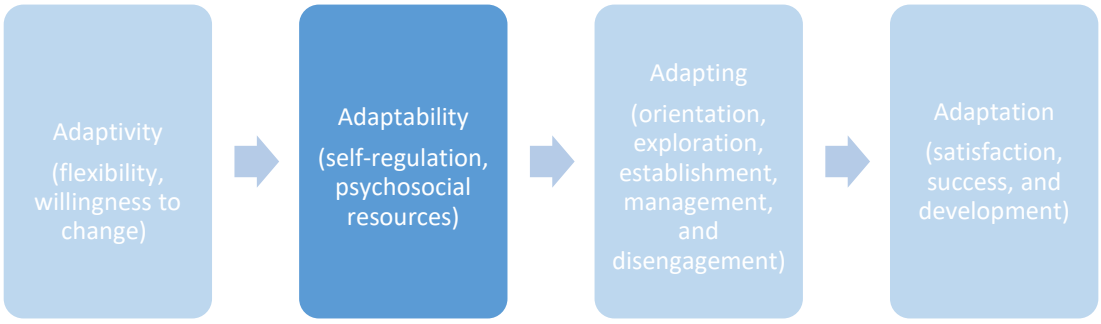

Figure 1. Processes within the CCT

Within the concept of career adaptability, there are four dimensions: career concern, control, curiosity and confidence. Following are explanations of these four dimensions, drawing on the explanations by Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2008). Career concern focuses on looking to the future and feeling optimistic or hopeful about it. A lack of career concern in adolescence can contribute to pessimistic thoughts about the future and a lack of hope which can

cause troublesome behaviours. Career control involves taking responsibility for the future and making decisions in relation to careers. A young person lacking in career control can find it difficult to make decisions and become uncertain about their future. Career curiosity is the ability to inquire about and explore career options, which allows the adolescent to approach the future realistically (Blustein, 1992; Flum & Blustein, 2000; Patton & Porfeli, 2007, as cited in Hartung et al., 2008). Career confidence focusses on building problem-solving abilities and self-efficacy. Youth who lack career confidence may find it difficult to approach the future due to inhibition and low self-consciousness (Savickas, 2012). Adaptability is higher in adolescents who have fewer barriers, a broader range of interests and higher quality of life (Soresi, Nota, & Ferrari, 2012), which supports the requirement to raise career adaptability in marginalised youth through their engagement with school. The research conducted by Soresi et al. (2012) included 762 adolescents aged between 15-19 years of age who completed the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-Italian Form (CAAS) to measure their adaptability resources of concern, control, curiosity and confidence. The results of their research indicated that only 17% of students showed higher adaptability and had lower barriers, broader interests and a higher quality of life (Soresi et al., 2012). The students who showed lower adaptability had more internal and external barriers. Soresi et al. (2012) suggested that early identification of vulnerable and at risk students is required and specific career interventions are then necessary to foster the career development of these young people. Therefore, this study uses the meta-competency of adaptability to identify the impact of the career development interventions used within ‘the School’ targeting the students’ career concern, control, curiosity and confidence.

Further to the process of career adaptability, additional focus is also placed on the concept of social inclusion and emancipatory communitarian approaches utilised within the FLP (Blustein et al., 2005; Prilleltensky, 1997). Career interventions in FLPs consider the contextual situation of youth who are marginalised. Prilleltensky (1997) proposed the use of emancipatory

communitarian approaches in psychological discourse and action which drew on communitarian philosophies and liberation theories. The approaches target both individual problems as well as those that exist in social systems (Blustein et al., 2005). The use of emancipatory communitarian approaches can supplement other career development theories through change orientation (Schultheiss & Davis, 2015). Utilising these approaches within the context of career development interventions in FLPs could mean practitioners engaging in consultations with parents, local industry, and volunteer organisations to increase vocational opportunities for marginalised youth. It could also mean working to educate parents of the students about career development perspectives in order to assist their child. These approaches take into account the individual within their social context and, not only aim to assist the young person overcome contextual barriers, but improve upon the systems that create barriers. As Diemer and Hsieh (2008) found in their research on socio-political development among lower socioeconomic status adolescents of colour, there is further potential to identify resources that will assist other members of oppressed groups in overcoming socio-political barriers. Diemer and Ortega (2010) advocate for supporting socially excluded youth to negotiate structural constraints to their career development by changing social structures that facilitate and create social exclusion.

Psychology of Working Theory (PWT)

A useful way of understanding why decent work is going to be necessary for marginalised youth to improve their chances of fulfilling lives is to use the PWT, as depicted in Figure 2. The PWT posits that economic constraints and marginalisation impact on a persons' ability to gain decent work. However through moderators such as: proactive personality; critical consciousness; social support; and economic conditions, there is an impact on work volition and career adaptability. The result being the achievement of decent work. The PWT is a development on the Blustein, Kenna, Gill, and Devoy (2008) psychology of working perspective, which was further developed into the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF). The PWF was borne out of the need to

address the forgotten half, those people for whom work served as a means of survival and not a way in which to express their talents and personality (Blustein et al., 2002). Many career and vocational psychology theories of the middle 20th century were directed at the white middle-class male and therefore did not cater for the needs of the working class. Blustein et al. (2008) intended the psychology of working perspective to be used in conjunction with traditional career theories. More recently, however, Duffy et al. (2016) developed the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT). The PWT can be used to understand the elements that are required in the process of gaining decent work and how this work then fulfils need satisfaction, work fulfilment, and well-being (Duffy et al., 2016).

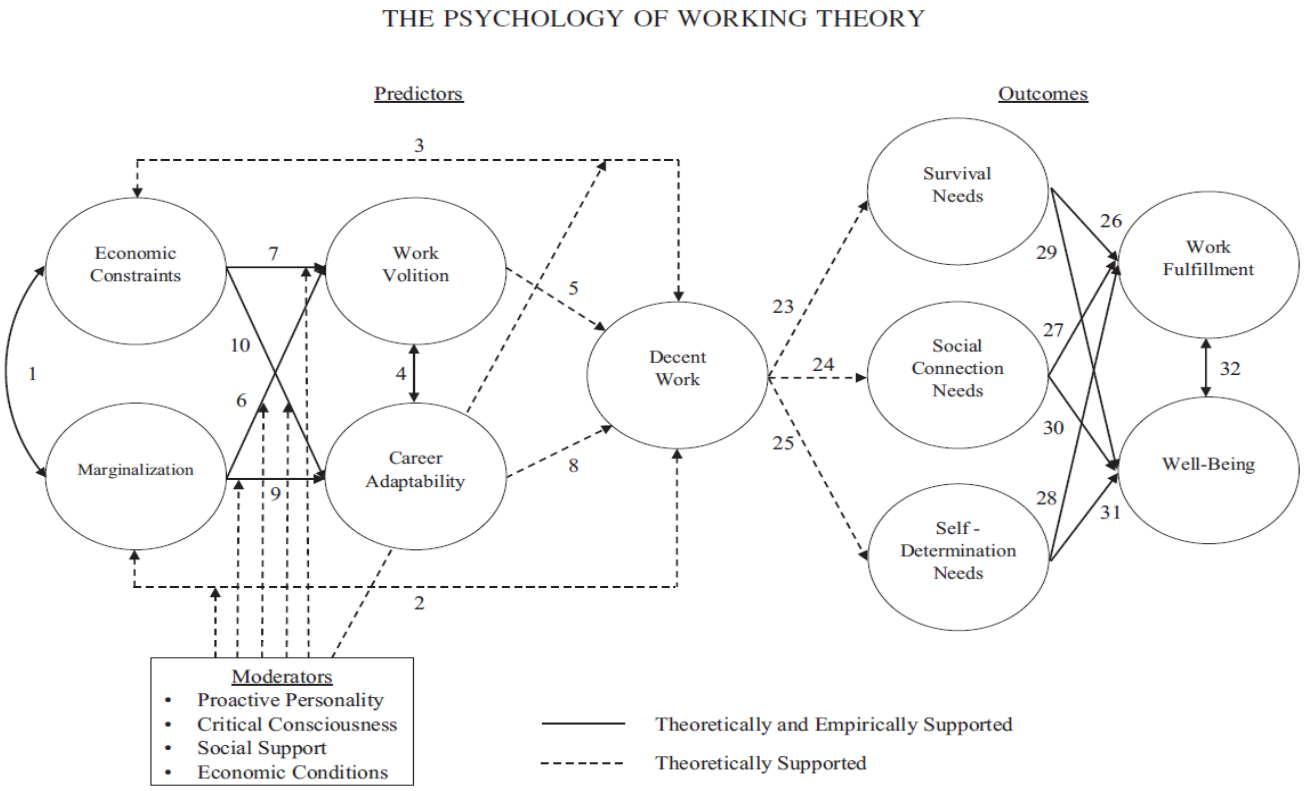

Figure 2. Theoretical Model. Proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support, and economic conditions are proposed to moderate the paths from economic constraints and marginalisation to work volition, career adaptability, and decent work, respectively: proactive personality (Propositions 11-13), critical consciousness (Propositions 14-16), social support (Propositions 17-19) and economic conditions (Propositions 20-22). Reprinted from "The Psychology of Working Theory," by R.D. Duffy, D.L. Blustein, M.A. Deimer & K.L. Autin, 2016, Journal of Counseling Psychology, 63 (2), 129. Copyright (2016) by American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

The PWT integrates contextual and psychological variables that contribute to gaining decent work and those that moderate the relations and the variables that then become the outcomes of performing decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). For example, a marginalised young person attending a FLP may not have the same equal access to resources, such as social capital, to assist their transition to decent work. They may face economic constraints that preclude them from accessing resources and they may also lack volition, or freedom to choose, their type of employment. Work volition refers to an individual's "…perceived capacity to make occupational choices despite constraints." (Autin, Douglass, Duffy, England, & Allan, 2017, p. 3). Volition can be impacted on by the life experiences and circumstances of the young person (Duffy & Dik, 2009) and, in the case of marginalised youth attending FLPs, they may have little volition due to their need to survive. Employment may be their only option to supporting themselves and they see any job as a way of easing their difficulties. Alternatively, their own perception of what they can achieve may limit their volition.

According to the PWT, economic constraints and marginalisation are considered predictors that can impact on an individual's work volition and career adaptability. Economic constraints refer to factors that limit access to opportunities in the world of work, such as social class and social and cultural capital (Duffy et al., 2016). The students attending FLPs have already experienced marginalisation from mainstream school systems. Combining this with economic constraints make it highly likely that FLP students will encounter challenges that impact on their work volition and career adaptability (Duffy et al., 2016). There are, however, factors that the PWT suggests are moderators in the path from economic constraints and marginalisation through to work volition, career adaptability and decent work (Duffy et al., 2016).

The moderators suggested in the PWT include proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support and economic conditions. Proactive personality involves having a predisposition to enact change by initiating action to influence one's environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Tolentino et al., 2014). The alternative to a proactive personality is accepting things the way they are. If FLP students do not possess a proactive personality, the teachers may be able to exert some influence by teaching students how to apply for work experience placements. This would be one way to encourage action and proactivity to help students to manage career transitions.

Critical consciousness is another moderating factor that can help students to take action directed at enhancing their work volition. Critical consciousness relates to perceiving social, political and economic contradictions and then taking action to prevent oppression (Freire, 1996; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer, and Rapa (2015) suggested that students who have developed their critical consciousness are more likely to create and develop their agency and gain wider access to opportunities.

Social support can positively affect career decision-making and the career development process (Duffy et al., 2016; Lent et al., 1994) and is another moderating factor in the PWT. In the context of the PWT, social support relates to how much individuals are supported by family, friends, peers, and significant others, as well as the broader community, and how this may impact on their ability to cope with the stress associated with their marginalisation and economic constraints (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Duffy et al., 2016).

The final moderating factor in the PWT is economic conditions. Economic conditions, including unemployment rates, access to reasonable wages, career progression opportunities, and access to training, have an impact on how people develop meaningful work lives and obtain decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). Understanding these labour market conditions is necessary for making informed career decisions. Whist some of these elements are not

controllable, the knowledge that one can gain about these, will assist with making choices about career pathways.

Considering these moderating factors will assist in answering the research questions in this study. To understand the influence that the FLP experience has on student career goals and graduate destinations, it is necessary to establish if any of these moderators are influenced by teaching practices and curriculum. Students who are less proactive, have a lower level of critical consciousness, have limited social support, and are constrained by economic conditions would be more likely to feel less capable of making effective career choices and have fewer career adaptability resources. Therefore, resulting in being employed in low-skilled, low-paid work, with limited opportunity to progress, or unemployed.

The PWT also posits that the outcomes that can be realised through the acquisition of decent work are survival needs, social connection needs, and self-determination needs, which lead to overall work fulfilment and well-being. Survival needs relate to having adequate access to resources, such as food, shelter, social capital, a reliable income, safety and security (Duffy et al., 2016). Social connection needs are fulfilled through interpersonal relationships that form through the workplace with co-workers, peers, supervisors and clients and help to confirm a sense of meaning. They can also be met through workplaces, whereby the worker has the opportunity to contribute to larger economic, political and social worlds (Blustein, 2011; Duffy et al., 2016). Self-determination needs relate to the way in which an individual is motivated in their work. For self-determination needs to be met, one would be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated in their work (Duffy et al., 2016). External motivation may come from the need for an income and this may be the only motivation one has in a job that they do not enjoy. To develop intrinsic motivation for their work, it would mean integrating activities that are associated with their values to enhance their self-determination in work (Duffy et al., 2016). Therefore, the PWT posits that decent work is

"…instrumental in promoting the experience of self-determination" (Duffy et al., 2016, p. 139).

For students in FLPs to overcome marginalisation and have work volition which results in decent work, the moderating factors should be considered in the process of building career adaptability. To establish how this is considered in the context of FLP students, the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development will also be drawn upon.

Systems Theory Framework (STF) of Career Development

The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development (STF; Patton & McMahon, 2006) is an overarching framework (see Figure 3) which can be used in conjunction with other career theories. The STF identified the important influences on career development (Patton & McMahon, 2006). It places the individual at the centre of the system and their career development is influenced by a range of individual factors, such as self-esteem, confidence, age, religious beliefs, skills, interests, and gender. They also operate within wider systems of influences, such as the social and environmental-societal systems. The social system includes influences such as family, peers, and educational institutions, whilst the environmental-societal influences includes factors such as political decisions, socioeconomic status, historical trends, labour market, and globalisation. Figure 3 illustrates how these systems interact with one another and the various influencing factors.

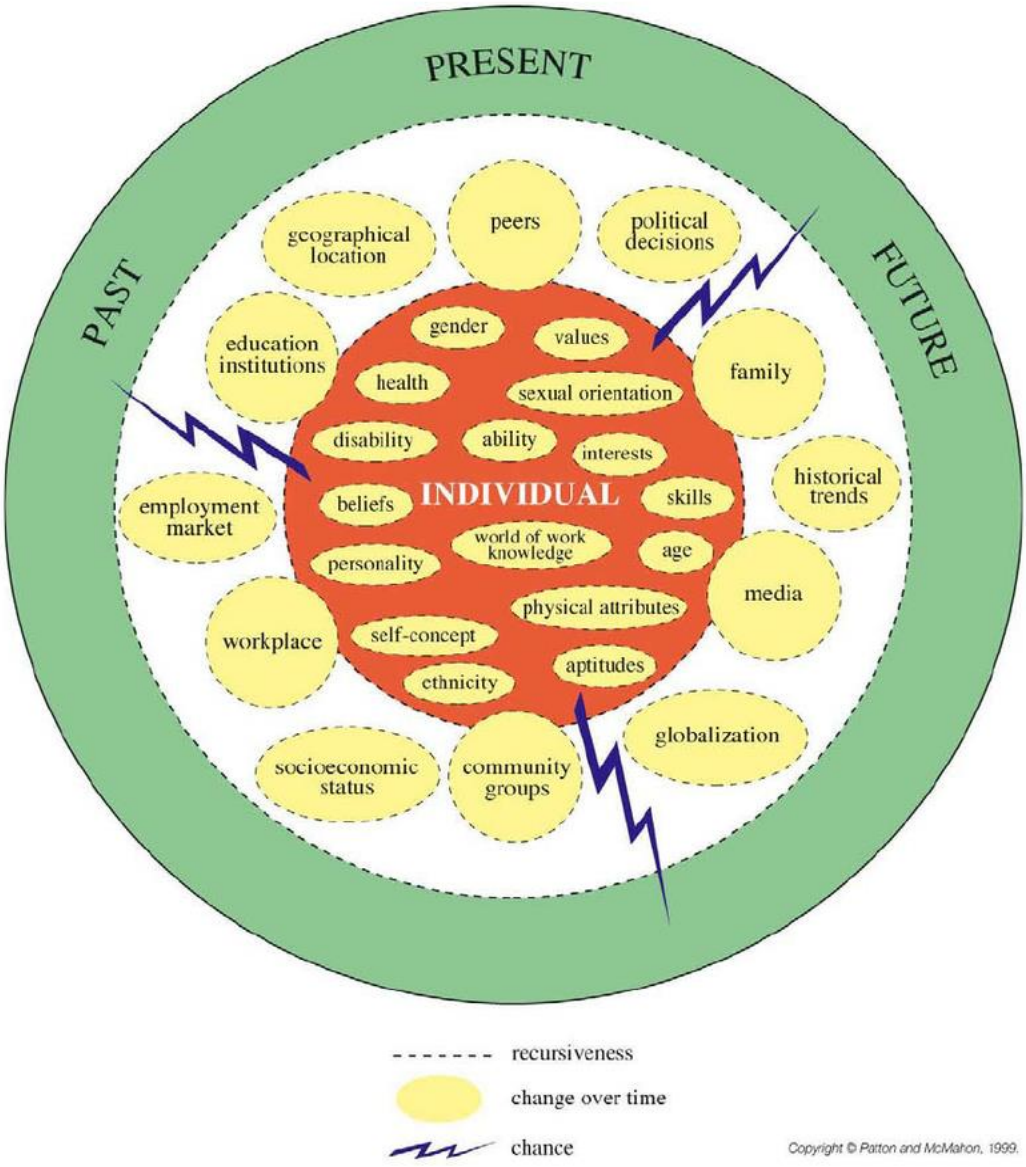

Figure 3. Influencing factors within the individual, social and environmental-societal systems of the STF. Reprinted from "Career Development and Systems Theory", by W. Patton and M. McMahon, 2006, Rotterdam The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, p.208. Copyright 1999 by Patton and McMahon. Reprinted with permission.

This study specifically investigates the individual system influences that focus on self-efficacy and wellbeing, and the social system influences which impact on the students, such as teachers, support staff, mentors, education institutions and workplaces. The environmental-societal factors that are a focus of the research relate to the structural inequities that influence the students and that provide a base from which to investigate the emancipatory approaches

applied to overcome them. For example a young person with a mental-illness may have difficulty attending class or taking part in a work experience placement. These factors need to be considered when facilitating career development activities for them. The individual influences may have an impact on the type of work experience they can participate in. In addition, there may be some moderating factors from the PWT, such as social support, that could assist to overcome these influences. The same can be applied in relation to the young person's social system of influences. Where there is a lack of family or social support to encourage career development behaviours, the knowledge of this could help teaching staff to draw on moderating factors from the PWT. This could mean teaching the young person how to build their self-knowledge to inform career exploration. Further to these, the societal-environmental factors can influence the young persons' career choice depending on their geographic location and corresponding labour market opportunities. Understanding these influences will also assist with career decision making and can be combined with the moderating factor of economic conditions from the PWT.

Therefore, in conjunction with the STF, the PWT will be referred to as a way of investigating the themes that act as mediators and moderators of securing decent work. The influencing factors on the young person's career choice may come from individual, social and/or societal-environmental systems in terms of the STF, however the PWT provides an additional consideration of a range of other predictors focused on gaining decent work. To answer the research questions the STF will be used to draw out the influencing factors that impact on the students' social and emotional wellbeing and career self-efficacy. Investigating how the FLP experience influences students' career goals and graduate destinations will require consideration of both the STF and PWT. Drawing from both theoretical frameworks will assist with identifying important influencing factors and developing interventions for marginalised youth that give them the best possible chance of gaining decent work that meets

their survival, social connection and self-determination needs, along with work fulfilment and well-being (Duffy et al., 2016).

The research will draw out the themes that are relevant for marginalised youth in determining career adaptability by drawing on the PWT, STF and CCT mentioned above combined with emancipatory communitarian and critical consciousness-raising approaches. The STF will act as an overarching framework whereby the individual, or student in this case, is central to the study. The individual, social and societal-environmental influences will be contextualised in relation to FLP students. From this the PWT will be used as a way to determine moderating factors that could assist with developing career adaptability in students in FLPs. This is where the CCT plays a large role as it will be referred to when establishing an understanding of the FLP experience on career adaptability and career goals of students. This combination will make a unique contribution to the career development literature, as it applies career development theory to the specific context of marginalised young people attending FLPs. It is also intended that the findings will inform the development and implementation of a career development practice model to be utilised specifically in FLPs, which can be further evaluated through applied research. Additionally, this model will be useful to mainstream school career development practitioners working with marginalised youth. This research is timely as a way of contributing to the Government's requirement to work on developing contemporary approaches and strategies to career development in schools.

Chapter summary

This chapter has presented an initial literature review outlining the historical perspective of secondary education in Australia and an overview of the socio-political environment the education sector currently operates within. Career development in Australian schools was also outlined, highlighting inconsistencies and gaps that have contributed to the

formulation of the research questions. The conceptual framework in which the research is bounded was described.

The purpose of this initial review is to give the contextual or background information from which the study has been developed and provide an overview of the conceptual framework. Information regarding career development approaches across secondary education in Australia and the situation regarding marginalised youth attending FLPs was provided. Chapter 3, which follows, details the research design and approaches used within this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter Introduction

Chapter 2 presented the justification for the requirement of the research into the impact on social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, career goals and career adaptability for marginalised youth attending FLPs. This chapter details the research paradigm, including ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher. Alignment with the reasoning behind the method used for collection of suitable data required for answering the research questions is presented.

Research design

An effective research design is imperative to ensure the data collected provides evidence of the characteristics of the experience being studied (Polkinghorne, 2005). It is the guidelines by which the researcher adheres when keeping a clear focus on the research question and the overall purpose of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It incorporates the theoretical foundations on which the research was based, the methods used in the study and the ethical considerations required. For this investigation the research design chosen is a qualitative approach using a constructionist paradigm. Ethnographic data collection methods including participant observation and semi-structured interviews were utilised whilst thematic analysis was applied to interpret the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following sections provide further detail of this design.

Theoretical and conceptual foundations

The focus of the research is to understand the experience of the young people attending a FLP and how this has impacted on their social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, career adaptability and career goals. To address these concerns, a qualitative research approach was implemented in order to collect data and make meaning of the human

experience. When choosing a paradigm, the researcher must establish their focus and what will be in and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Three questions must firstly be addressed in order to describe the researcher's paradigm. These are the ontological question, the epistemological question and the methodological question.

The ontological question: "What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108).

In the context of this study the reality is based on the young peoples' experiences in relation to their enrolment in an FLP and the impact this has on their self-efficacy, social and emotional wellbeing, career adaptability and career goals. The perceptions of their experience are entirely their own. They create their own realities based on their worldview and therefore a relativist ontology is most appropriate in this study. A relativist ontology posits that multiple, equally valid social realities exist (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

The epistemological question: "What is the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108).

The researcher is seeking knowledge from the young people about their experiences and therefore will need to build a positive relationship with the participants in order to seek out and understand their viewpoints (Creswell, 2013). This rules out taking an objective stance whereby the knower is detached from the participants in order to find out how things really are or work (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Rather, a subjectivist stance is taken as the knower works with the participants in the field to gather evidence and assemble it based on their individual views (Creswell, 2013).

The methodological question: "How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108)

This question is answered by considering the ontological and epistemological standpoints presented above. As a relativist ontology is applied in this case, and the researcher will be taking a subjective stance when making meaning of the students' experiences, the researcher is required to get close to the participants to understand and interpret their experiences. A qualitative methodology is therefore appropriate to the study as it is suited to understanding and interpreting the human experience.

The answers to the three questions posed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) above resulted in the researcher being positioned within an interpretivist research paradigm, more specifically, a social constructionist paradigm. Guiding the social constructionist paradigm is the basic assumption that knowledge is socially constructed by people in the research process through their interactions and negotations within their social groups (Young & Collin, 2004). Interactions lead to meaning arising through interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Schwandt, 1994). This paradigm is applied as it is suited to human inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and specifically relates to the study of students within a FLP.

The research questions focus on the participants' subjective experience of the FLP and the impact this experience has had on their social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, their career goals and career adaptability. Therefore it reflects a social constructionist paradigm (Young & Collin, 2004). This research sought in depth information from students and staff in order to answer the research questions, therefore the constructionist approach was a fitting paradigm as it enabled the uncovering of multiple truths of participants which uncovered common themes. Each student attending or who had attended the FLP created their own reality through their experiences with 'the School', the teachers, support staff, work experience placements and interactions with other peers. There are individual realities for each participant in the study depending upon their experiential interpretations.

Method

Methods used in qualitative research will vary depending on the researcher's paradigm. In the case of applying a social constructionist paradigm, the method chosen is based upon a hermeneutical/dialectical methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This allows the inquiry to focus initially on the concerns or issues of participants and "unfolds through a "dialectic" of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and so on" (Schwandt, 1994, pp. 128-129) that leads to the joint construction of the case. To achieve this the researcher has chosen ethnographic methods as the qualitative method of inquiry.

Ethnography emerges from the interest in cultures and civilisations and their origins (Howell, 2013). Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, and Tindall (1994, p. 34) described ethnography as "perhaps the most quintessential qualitative research method". It involves studying the lived experience of a group over a period of time, describing and interpreting the patterns and reporting the outcomes (Creswell, 2013; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Creswell (2013) summarised the defining features of ethnography as:

- Focussed on developing complex, complete descriptions of the culture of a group.
- The researcher looks for patterns in the group's mental activities (e.g., rituals, social behaviours, and regularities).
- The group has been interacting long enough to have developed discernible working patterns.
- Theory plays an important role in focussing the researcher's attention.
- Theory is used to look for patterns in the group, which involves collecting data via extensive fieldwork.

- Participants' views are relied on for their insider perspective. The researcher transcribes the data verbatim, then synthesises it by filtering through the researcher's etic (outsider's) perspective to develop the overall cultural interpretation. This interpretation then becomes the themes related to the theoretical concepts explored in the study.
- The analysis results in understanding how the culture-sharing group works, the basis of how it functions, and the group's way of life.

The definition of the term ethnography, however, has not been without controversy. In fields, such as anthropology, the terms *fieldwork* or *ethnography* are used synonymously (Morrow, 2007). Whilst, for some, it takes on the meaning of a philosophical paradigm, to which the researcher makes a total commitment, for others, it is a method that is used when deemed appropriate (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Wolcott (1999) explained ethnography as either something the researcher is "doing" or they are "borrowing ethnographic techniques" (pp. 41-42) and that this should be clarified. Borrowing ethnographic techniques is considered appropriate and adequate when ethnography is being linked to methodology (Wolcott, 1999). For this study, I deemed it an appropriate method to gather data to answer the research questions. I did however, borrow ethnographic techniques, rather than conduct a full ethnography of the culture of the group. Ethnographic methods centred on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and physical data, such as documents and artefacts were applied (Morrow, 2007).

The researcher and the research participants

This section outlines the position of the researcher in the study, the procedures applied to the selection of participants in the study and the way in which recruitment of participants occurred.

Researcher reflexivity

As the researcher is the instrument for data collection in qualitative research, there is a particular interest in what the researcher values, their assumptions, background, gender, history, culture, their beliefs and potential biases they bring to the study (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 1998). Researcher values are assumed as having an influence on the research process and understanding ones' own position as researcher is important (Haverkamp & Young, 2007) as knowledge is constructed through the interaction of participants and researcher. As a researcher using ethnographic methods of data collection, it is important to be aware of how my social identity could impact on the process of inquiry (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005). Making the researcher stance known to the reader also assists in addressing subjectivity in the research whilst the honesty of this contributes to the trustworthiness of the study (Morrow, 2007).

Within Chapter 1, my reasons for partaking in this study and interest in the topic were detailed. Doing so allowed me to summarise my personal history, which was useful in examining my researcher subjectivities. I am a white middle-class female undertaking research on marginalised youth studying within an alternative education setting. I am also a lecturer and careers counsellor at the local university. This may indicate a position of power in relation to the young people, however, as I described in Chapter 1, I have come from a relatively disadvantaged educational background, and have had to strive incredibly hard to reach my current position. Providing this knowledge will assist the reader to understand my worldview and the way in which I view the participants and the phenomenon of interest (Morrow, 2007). The examples of writing a personal history statement provided by Cole and Adra (2001, as cited in Roulston, 2010) advises that it provides the researcher with a deeper understanding of herself along with becoming more comfortable with the research writing (Roulston, 2010). My prior experience as a marginalised student combined with my

profession of career practitioner, could have potentially biased my interpretations of the data. However undertaking reflexive practices and understanding my subjectivity has ensured the research is as objective as possible.

As a researcher immersed in 'the School', observing and talking with participants, interviewing them and, at times, assisting them with tasks, I was situated as an outsider to the group. I did not belong to this group, although, at times through my observations and interviews, I shared commonalities of experience with the participants. I preferred to situate myself as a "peripheral member researcher", as defined by P.A. Adler and P. Adler (1994, p. 380). They define the peripheral member researcher role as one of observing and interacting closely with the participants to establish an identity of insider without participating in the activities that are at the core of the group. The other categories they refer to are the active member and complete member researchers (Adler & Adler, 1994). The active member is not fully committed to the group but they become involved with the central activities. On the other hand the complete member researcher are already members of the group being studied and or they become fully affiliated with the group during the research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). My days spent at 'the School' involved observing classes; talking with staff members; and, observing and participating in mentoring sessions. In this way I was interacting closely but not participating in the core activities such as teaching and classroom activities.

Subjectivity was addressed by undertaking reflexive practices to ensure the minimisation of bias. A self-reflective journal was kept throughout the project to record experiences, reactions to particular situations and emergence of biases or assumptions as they arose (Morrow, 2005). Handwritten notes were made as field notes and then transferred into NVivo 11 (QSR International) as soon as possible after the interaction for storing and referring to throughout the analysis phase. Additional reflexive strategies included consulting with research supervisors and experienced researchers to discuss field notes where the

researcher required an outsider's view to assist with avoiding bias (Sowden & Keeves, 1998). This was required at times as evidenced by the journal entry made in October 2016 demonstrated in Figure 4:

> On reflection when the interviews had finished for this first round and they had been transcribed I felt that I needed to withdraw myself from attending 'the School' too much as I was analysing the data. I wanted to ensure I wasn't becoming too biased as when I spent time at 'the School' it was part of being immersed in a chaotic environment that I would come away feeling quite stressed and in some ways annoyed at what was happening. I didn't want this feeling to inform my analysis. I discussed this with my supervisors and they both agreed that it was a good idea to pull back whilst in the analysis stage.

Figure 4. Self-reflective journal entry

Figure 4 identifies the issues that I encountered regarding my own feelings that emerged as I became immersed in a particularly chaotic time for 'the School'. I acknowledged that this experience was not a usual encounter, rather it occurred at a time when 'the School' was in a state of flux and unforeseen occurrences such as a staff member being on unexpected leave. I needed, however, to discuss this situation and clarify my own feelings with my research supervisors to ensure that I did not inadvertently bias the data. After discussion with supervisors, we agreed that it would be beneficial to cease my visits to 'the School' for a period of time whilst I was analysing the first round of interview data.

Recruitment of participants

The study focussed on gaining insight into the impact the FLP experience had on the young peoples' social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, career adaptability and career goals. Therefore, the research site chosen was a FLP within the researcher's local area and in which there was a pre-existing relationship between the researcher's university and the site. The university has a memorandum of understanding with 'the School', in which there is provision for research to be conducted as a way of contributing to the ongoing development of this community. This made access to the site relatively easy, as the stakeholders are appreciative of the relationship with the university and the opportunity for research to be

conducted. Due to established pre-existing relationships with the stakeholders and the university, the process of gaining approval to conduct the research was not arduous. Rather, the experience met by the researcher was that the stakeholders were very forthcoming in assisting with the research and taking part as participants. As part of the ethical approval process, the Principle of the mainstream school, gave approval for the research to proceed.

'The School' selected is an information-rich case, which was of central importance to the research. A great deal could be learned to answer the research questions, hence, it met the conditions of a purposeful sample (Patton, 1990). As Patton (1990, p. 169) stated, "…the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for study in depth". Selecting the site was easy and relative to answering the research questions. In addition there was some convenience sampling, which can have an impact on diversity and credibility (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). This convenience sampling occurred due to how the teaching staff assisted with recruitment of students for interviews. For example, after the teaching staff had advised the students about the project and encouraged their participation, only a few students followed up and completed the necessary consent forms to participate. On my visits to the FLP to collect the consent forms and conduct or arrange interviews, I observed one of the teaching staff asking particular students, on the spot, if they would like to be interviewed for the project. Even though I briefed the students about the project and asked them to provide signed consent forms before scheduling interviews, I was left wondering if this was an equitable approach to recruiting the students however, I do not believe that this impacted on the diversity or credibility of the sample. Further detail regarding the consent process is offered below in the section on 'ethical considerations'.

Participants were also offered an incentive to participate in the research by the way of entering a prize draw for 2 X $50 or 1 X $100 pre-paid Visa gift cards run through the USQ

School of Psychology and Counselling. Participants were able to opt in or out of the draw. If the participants chose to enter the prize draw they were provided with a form upon which they could enter their name and contact details. This form was kept separate from the research data.

The research participants were interviewed at 'the School' or, for some past students, via phone, or, in the case of one past student, at an office at the University. It was important to interview the current students at the school as this was considered a safe environment for students and the researcher. Interviews were all recorded using a digital audio device.

Using a case such as the FLP enabled research to be conducted at a single site, which yielded information that is likely to be relevant to other FLPs, because, as Patton (1990, p. 174) suggested, "…if it happens there, it will happen anywhere". Students, teachers, support staff, and past students of 'the School' were invited to participate in the study. From a purposive perspective, it was intended that the participants would be a cross-section of the student population across year levels, some past students, and teaching and support staff. The intention was that the sample would be representative of the students' ages and maturity and, since they would be interviewed a second time 12 months after the first interview, it was expected that there would be observable changes in their experiences. This approach aimed at achieving a maximum variation sample, as described by Seidman (1998), because the participants were chosen from all year levels.

The Head of 'the School' invited students and staff to participate in the research by providing a group invitation, including an explanation of the project, during their Pastoral Care Group (PCG) sessions and staff meetings, respectively. At this point, all students and staff received the participant information sheet and consent form. Past students were contacted by the Head of 'the School' and were informed of the research project and, if they agreed to participate, their contact details were provided to the researcher for further follow

up. From the contact details provided to the researcher there were three past students who participated in the study.

Contacting past students was problematic. I had asked the Head of Department at the FLP if they could contact some previous students to see if they would be interested in participating. If they were interested, they were required to agree to allow their contact details to be passed on to me for follow-up. The few participants who came forward were actually past students who still had some connection with the FLP and were relatively easy to connect with. This was a narrow sample of the past students. It would have been beneficial to recruit a larger cross-section of the past students to gain a better understanding of the experiences from a wider perspective. For example, students who may have left the program early, could have been invited to participate. Those students may have left the program for a variety of reasons. Students who are unemployed, suffering from mental ill-health or substance abuse may find it too difficult to share their experiences with a researcher, which would again limit the type of experiences reported.

Teaching and support staff who participated in the study consisted of the Principal, Head of Department, subject Teachers, Teacher Aides, Social Worker, Guidance Counsellor, Industry Liaison Officer and Pastoral Care Group leaders. Student participants consisted of 13 current Year 10 – 12 students (age 15-18) and 3 past Year 12 students (age 18-19). Further demographic information was collected through the knowledge gained from being introduced to the staff and students and this was recorded in the researcher's journal. For example whether the participants were male or female, age, year levels and teacher or staff specialisation was recorded in the researcher's notes. However, due to the small size of the sample and the school itself, reporting of demographic information was a consideration. It was not appropriate to break down the demographics into multicultural aspects, due to the small number of students at 'the School'. This eliminated the risk of them being easily

identified as a participant, due to disclosure of such specific characteristics. Instead, a coding system was applied throughout this research to identify participants. This is elaborated upon in the section on ethical considerations further on in this chapter.

Data collection

Sources of data used in this study consisted of qualitative measures alone. Taking into account the ethnographic methods used in the research, the data collected consisted of field notes from observations, semi-structured interviews, and documents pertaining to the curriculum and student reflections. The following section provides a description of these methods, the decisions made by the researcher in relation to their application, and the manner in which they were used.

Classroom observations

Participant observation was employed to gain first-hand involvement of the social world of the FLP students and to hear, see, and experience their reality (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It was advantageous to observe participants in the natural setting and identify aspects of behaviours that are not obvious from interviewing alone (Suzuki et al., 2007). It was also an important component to assist in understanding participant constructions of meaning (Morrow, 2005), as being immersed in the experiences developed a deeper understanding of the context and culture of ‘the school’. Classes in which career development interventions were taught include PCG sessions, intergenerational mentoring sessions and curriculum and VET course classes. These classes were observed to gain an understanding of the approaches used by the teachers, support staff, and mentors when delivering the interventions, and how the students responded to these. I spent at least one day per week during the school term time, over a period of two years observing various classes which gave me a deeper understanding of the content and structure of classes. Being present in the field allowed the researcher to

check the data and compare with interview and observational data to gain a deeper understanding of the emerging themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Prior to undertaking the research, I began visiting 'the School' regularly for a period of 6 months to build rapport with 'the School' staff and students and to observe classes and regular activities conducted within 'the School' context. This time allowed me to develop relationships of trust, both with students and staff, and ensure credibility of outcomes through the extent to which trust was established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Part of this process included getting to know the routines of the informants, helping them when required, displaying an interest in their lives, identifying common interests and immersing myself into the environment (Mertens, 1998). Entering into natural conversations with participants enabled the gradual progression of the topic and being able to ask more specific questions in relation to the research (Suzuki et al., 2005). This interaction proved invaluable, as students and staff alike were comfortable with sharing information and discussing things they had been doing.

Semi-structured interviews

Observation was an integral part of the research and particularly valuable for establishing the issues requiring further clarification. In order to gain this clarification, it was essential to conduct interviews with the participants. This enabled me to discover elements that are not easily observed (Patton, 1990). In order to fit with the social constructionist paradigm and partake in dialogic discourse with the participants, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a suitable data collection technique. The semi-structured interview allows for predetermined questions to be asked (Given, 2008) which is deemed useful for directing the conversation in order to answer the research questions. It was imperative that participants' views or 'voices' were heard rather than imposing the researcher's views on the situation, therefore, a semi-structured interviewing approach was deemed appropriate.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual students, teachers, and support staff, and consisted mainly of open questions. Semi-structured interviews require the researcher to compile an interview guide consisting of a number of questions (Roulston, 2010), usually open-ended, and from which further probing can be used to elicit more detail from the participant. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to build rapport with the participants and develop a connection with them. It also enabled the researcher a means to provide a structure for the number of issues to be covered and encourage the flow of communication with the participants.

The questions designed for the semi-structured interviews were closely related to the research questions in order to gain the information required for answering them. For example, to gain an understanding of the wellbeing of the FLP students within this study, the interview commenced with a series of questions aimed at establishing how the students felt about their experience at the FLP since enrolment. Questions included information about the impact of the experience and whether it had changed the way they saw themselves as a person; their future goals and, how they thought the FLP would help them in relation to their overall wellbeing. A copy of the interview guides are included in Appendices D and F.

The Systems Theory Framework (STF) of Career Development (Patton & McMahon, 2006) was also used to formulate some of the questions for the interview guide. The students' lives are impacted upon by the systems within the STF, such as the Individual, Social and Environmental-Societal systems, and the influencing factors that exist within them. Questions relating to who the students refer to for help regarding career choices and what their perceived barriers were in achieving their goals assisted in gaining information regarding influencing factors.

A further theory that was used to inform the research is Savickas' Career Construction Theory (2005, 2012). The constructs within this theory relate to career adaptability and the

elements that make this up which include career concern, career curiosity, career confidence, and career control. The design of the questions took into consideration these constructs and were focussed on eliciting information around these to determine if the students possessed these career adaptability resources. Two examples of questions included in the interview guide relating to CCT are:

1. How confident do you feel in being able to pursue your career goals or aspirations?
2. How much responsibility do you take for making career decisions/choosing a career path/managing your future career?

The interviews ranged in duration from 10 – 90 minutes. The interview guide suggested a range of 30 – 50 minutes. In practice, however, the vulnerability of the participants was considered therefore there was a variance in range of duration of interviews. In one particular instance, for example, the young person being interviewed was showing signs of anxiety and a lack of confidence in answering questions in detail. The student's body language included keeping their head down, not engaging in eye contact, speaking very quietly with limited explanation of answers. It was appropriate to keep this interview short to prevent stressing the participant unnecessarily.

In the first phase of the research, interviews were conducted with the current students from Years 10 to 12 and previous Year 12 students to gain insight into what their experience in 'the School' had been like and whether it was contributing to their social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, career adaptability, and career goals. Teaching and support staff were also interviewed at this stage. The answers from this round of questions helped to inform the semi-structured questions used in the second round to gain clarification of concepts and further elaboration of the constructs being researched.

The second round of interviews were conducted approximately 12 months after the first round to capture the same Year 10 and Year 11 research participants' experiences after they

had transitioned through their next year levels. This meant that the past Year 12 participants were also interviewed again within the following 12 months post their completion of school. Some teaching and support staff were also interviewed a second time at this stage. It was decided that not all teaching or support staff required a second interview due to information gained from them in the first interview being unlikely to have changed, that there would be no further benefit of an additional interview. Table 1 details the schedule of interviews of all participants in the study. It also depicts the assigned code for each participant. A total of 27 participants were interviewed, with 14 of those interviewed twice. Some participants could not be interviewed a second time as they had left the school and became uncontactable.

Table 1

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Category	No	1st interview	2nd interview	Code
Past Y 12	1	Nov 2016	Not required	P12 S1
Past Y 12	2	Nov 2016	Not required	P12 S2
Past Y 12	3	Nov 2016	Not required	P12 S3
Staff	1	Nov 2016	Left 2016	TS1
Staff	2	Nov 2016	Nov 2017	TS2
Staff	3	Dec 2016	Sep 2017	TS3
Staff	4	Nov 2016	Not required	TS4
Staff	5	Dec 2016	Not required	TS5
Staff	6	Nov 2016	Sep 2017	TS6
Staff	7	Dec 2016	Sep 2017	TS7
Staff	8	Jul 2017	Not required	TS8
Staff	9	Jul 2017	Not required	TS9
Staff	10	Jul 2017	Not required	TS10
Staff	11	Aug 2017	Not required	TS11
Yr10	1	Oct 2016	Aug 2017	Y10 S1
Yr10	2	Oct 2016	Left School	Y10 S2
Yr10	3	Oct 2016	Aug 2017	Y10 S3
Yr10	4	Nov 2016	Aug 2017	Y10 S4
Yr11	1	Oct 2016	Aug 2017	Y11 S1
Yr11	2	Oct 2016	Sep 2017	Y11 S2

Category	No	1st interview	2nd interview	Code
Yr11	3	Nov 2016	Aug 2017	Y11 S3
Yr11	4	Nov 2016	Aug 2017	Y11 S4
Yr12	1	Oct 2016	Sep 2017	Y12 S1
Yr12	2	Oct 2016	Uncontactable	Y12 S2
Yr12	3	Oct 2016	Uncontactable	Y12 S3
Yr12	4	Oct 2016	Oct 2017	Y12 S4
Yr12	5	Oct 2016	Oct 2017	Y12 S5

A reflective journal entry I added on 18 September, 2016, demonstrated an admission that the interviewing process did not start off smoothly. I had been allocated to the Head of Department's office to conduct interviews on this particular day, as space is an issue within 'the School'. What I did not expect was that, even though the door was shut, there would be a lack of privacy whilst conducting the interviews. Staff and students continued to open the door to the office, come in and out to get things, and consequently interrupting the interviews. There was quite a lot of noise outside the office, as the students were gathered around having cups of tea and a chat. This was very distracting for me and the phone also kept ringing. On reflection and discussion with one of my research supervisors, I accepted that this was the way 'the School' operates and, to get anything done, like interviewing, you had to go with the flow and do it where you could. I was satisfied that the students were not affected by the situation as they continued to talk openly and freely with me. It was as if they were used to the noise and were certainly not showing signs of not wanting to continue the discussion or being worried about privacy. On the contrary, I felt the students were not affected by the situation, it was more me who it had an impact on. To have suggested another place and time for these interviews to be conducted may have resulted in requiring more resources to secure a suitable spot and add a considerable inconvenience to the participants. This would also have been problematic in terms of the students having to get themselves to a different interview location.

Another issue also arose during the interview process. After spending the first part of the session explaining more about the research to participants and ensuring that they were willing to participate, they were mostly very forthcoming with their responses. There were, however, quite a few participants who continued to expand a lot more on their answers once the recording was stopped. I was disappointed about this, because I was unable to use these data, which were very enlightening. I did, however, respect that these participants did not want these issues recorded for their own personal reasons. Nevertheless, the information helped to build a full picture in terms of context of the FLP and its operational structures.

Transcription of interviews

The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device to provide a record of the interview and assist with the analysis. Most of the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcribing service, merely because of the volume of the content and time it would take for me to produce the transcribed documents. I did, however, transcribe a small number of interviews to enable further immersion in the data. Whilst I did not transcribe all interviews, I listened to them all post-completion, and removed any identifiable data. This enabled further recording of notes in relation to the context of the interview, participants' reactions and responses, and the general themes that were emerging (Banister et al., 1994). When the transcription was completed, the de-identified transcripts were returned to participants for checking although no changes were requested.

The type of transcription was considered in line with what Hammersley (2007) suggests in terms of how detailed the transcription needed to be. There was no requirement for including details, such as pauses, overlaps, and interruptions within the transcription, because it was not intended for conversational or discourse analysis. Verbatim transcription was used and this removed the risk of any relevant material being omitted (Hammersley, 2007). Field

notes were used to strengthen meaning, and, where necessary, I re-listened to the recordings to gain further exposure to the content and for clarity of the concepts discussed.

Field notes

Field notes which consist of data from interviews and daily observations are considered as the bricks and mortar of ethnographic studies (Fetterman, 1989). The process of recording field notes followed Creswell (2013) system of an observational protocol. This protocol is a table containing two columns, one for descriptive notes and one for reflective notes. The descriptive notes column provided a space to record the activities being observed in a chronological fashion. The reflective notes provided a space to record personal thoughts and reflections about the processes being observed. Field notes were taken at every interaction and transcribed further into the field note journal in NVivo 11 (QSR International) where they were stored and used for the analysis.

A similar process took place when interviewing participants. Whilst I used an interview guide containing the questions, I also recorded particular aspects of the participant interactions throughout and immediately after the interview. This captured detail on the participants' presentation, confidence, willingness to participate, and general approach to the research questions. The field notes were essential to assist in clarifying and further analysing data from the participant interviews and observations, increasing the validity of the data.

Written documents

Written documents were also used in the data collection. These documents consisted of orientation activities that were completed by students at the beginning of their enrolment. These type of documents included the students' interests, aspirations and goals. Other documents included career-related activities, such as self-reflective presentations that the students had completed in mentoring sessions. The documents were provided to me by the

Head of School and were copies of the students completed work. The documents were entered into NVivo (QSR International) and analysed to further understand the career activities in which the students took part and how they approached those activities. These objects also clarified some of the detail gained through the interviews and provided evidence of what tasks were useful to the students in relation to building their career adaptability competencies. Other relevant documents, such as course modules, student career worksheets and newsletters were also viewed to gain further information about inclusions in the curriculum to gain an in-depth understanding of how career development interventions were incorporated.

Data management

NVivo 11 (QSR International) data management software was used to store all data related to the research. The choice was based on the ability of the software to contain a number of different types of files; provide a suitable system for assistance with coding and sorting data; its compatibility with EndNote (endnote.com) software to import literature relevant to the research; and, its ability to produce a range of diagrams for explanation of concepts.

Thematic analysis of the data

Adequacy of interpretation was covered throughout the analysis by ensuring immersion in the data and application of an analytical framework to systematically make meaning of and interpret the data (Morrow, 2005; Sowden & Keeves, 1998). Field notes, written documents and interview transcripts, the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006), were entered into NVivo (QSR International) and analysed using a thematic approach to identify recurring regularities in the sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Thematic analysis is traditionally an approach used with ethnographic work as a way of organising material in relation to the research questions

(Banister et al., 1994), and identifying, analysing and reporting themes from the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, the approach used by the researcher for the thematic analysis was based on a constructionist method. This enabled the researcher to view and examine reality, meaning, events and experiences of the participants from the effects of their discourses within their communities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was important as the experiences of the students attending the FLP were integral for answering the research questions.

Applying the Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, the first phase involved data familiarisation. The majority of interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriber. The transcripts were all added to NVivo 11 (QSR International) as files for analysing. Extensive reading and re-reading of these transcripts was carried out to familiarise myself with the data. Whilst doing so, notes were taken to ensure the recording of ideas and patterns ready for further analyses. In addition, the field notes that I had recorded through observations were added to a journal within NVivo 11 (QSR International), as were my notes and descriptions of written documents (samples of student's work), for analysis and coding. Again, reading and re-reading of these files enabled familiarisation of the data and allowed for searching for meanings and patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An initial list of ideas was formulated in relation to what the data was revealing and what was interesting about it.

The second phase of analysis involved generating initial codes from the ideas that had started to formulate. The coding was done based on the participant answers where broad categories were initially suggested. For example, where a number of answers related to how the students were feeling about themselves, a broad category code of *student perception of self* was initially set up and all answers relating to this were initially coded to this category. This made way for all data that related to the category of *student perception of self* to be

further analysed and higher level themes identified in the third phase of analysis. There were 29 codes established at this stage to cover the extent of the responses across the data set.

The third phase involved grouping together the initial codes and organising them into higher level themes. For example where the code of friendships and supportive relationships had been set up in phase two, these were then combined into a more specific code titled *Informal Relationships*. In addition the initial codes of Pastoral Care Groups and Intergenerational Mentoring were categorised to the theme *Formal Relationships*. Creating a thematic map, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), assisted with the identification of themes as the codes were linked and grouped to the overall emerging themes. More specifically, the approach used was based on "theoretical" thematic analysis, which requires a less rich description of data, but a more detailed analysis of aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Phase four involved reviewing the themes and refining them. Further reading of all the collated data was conducted to consider if there was a coherent pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and if it was answering the research questions. This process included refining some of the codes as there were some initial codes being shared across more than one theme. Several codes were merged into themes at this stage and new themes were developed.

The fifth stage, defining and naming, included refining the themes by identifying what each theme was actually about and determining what aspects of the coded data were captured in each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Defining the themes included writing a detailed analysis and focus of the theme. The refinement of the themes meant developing sub-themes to provide a structure for large or complex themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the theme of 'student perception of self' was initially applied as an overarching theme, however, this required the further creation of sub-themes to ensure structure and meaning of the data, and clarity in answering the research questions. The process is iterative and was conducted

again with the data from the second round of semi-structured interviews. The final construction of themes produced the three key themes of supportive relationships, preparation for work and the pros and cons of the QCE. Figure 5 provides a thematic map as a depiction of the development of these themes.

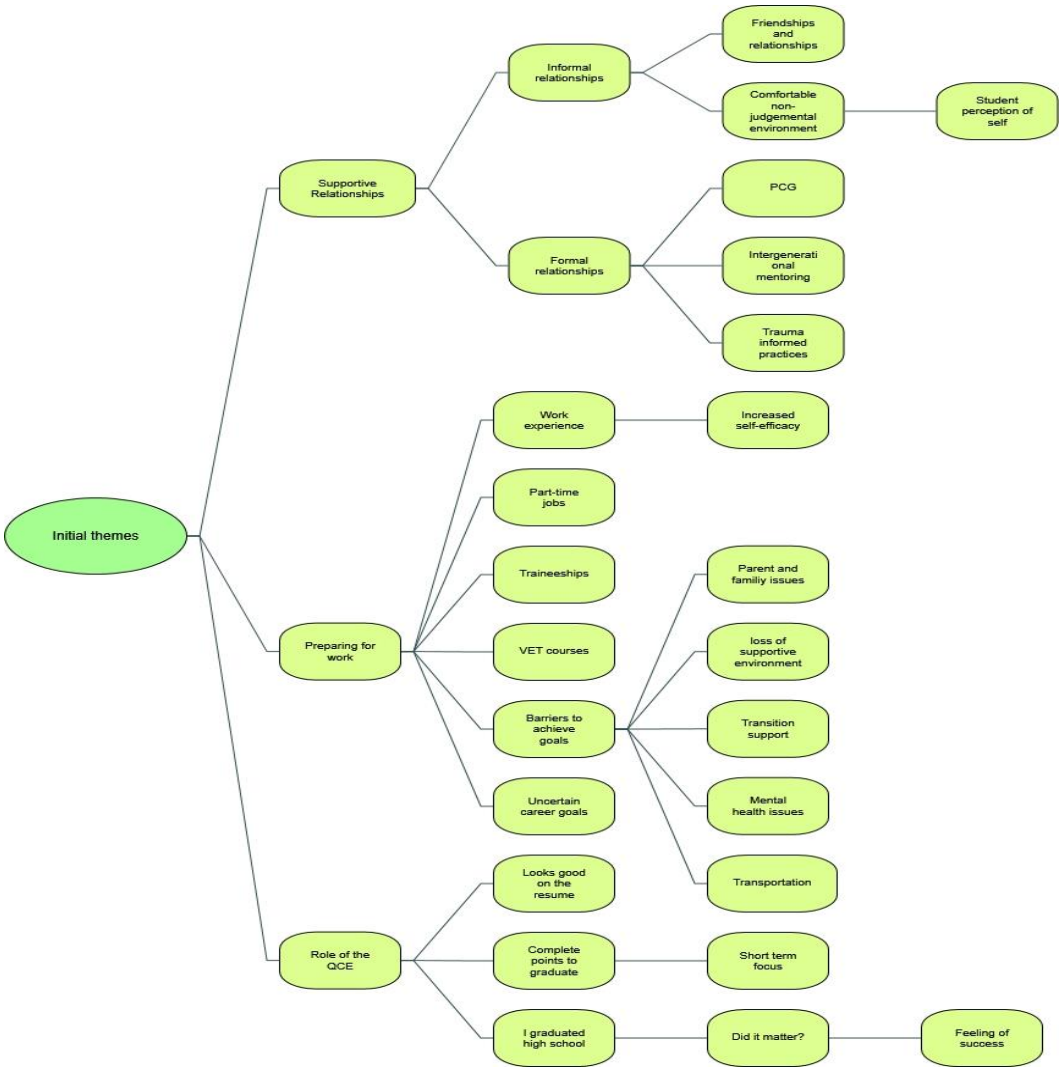

Figure 5. Thematic map of initial themes

The sixth and final phase of the thematic analysis is producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A selection of quotes from the interview transcripts were used to represent the research data themes, and weaved through the narrative in Chapter 4 to ensure the argument in relation to the research questions was clear. It is within Chapter 5 that the findings are discussed in more detail in context of the data from the literature review.

Data integrity

Using a qualitative methodology for the study requires applying particular measures to ensure the integrity of the data. There is a requirement for qualitative research to be rigorous and to demonstrate validity, reliability, and objectivity. It should also be trustworthy, credible, transferrable, dependable, and confirmable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 1998; Morrow, 2005). Whilst Morrow (2005) used the term trustworthiness and Creswell and Miller (2000) used the term validity, both require a choice of procedures that are determined by the researcher's paradigmatic assumptions. Trustworthiness of the data in qualitative research depends largely upon integrity and honesty (Polkinghorne, 2005). Williams and Morrow (2009, p. 577) suggest there are three categories that should be attended to which include "…integrity of the data, balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and clear communication of findings". Within this study, I have drawn on all of these aspects to ensure that the data are trustworthy, that the findings are clearly communicated, and that the findings will facilitate change within the FLP sector, where such a need for change is identified. The following subsection explains how this was achieved.

Trustworthiness

As this study is bounded in a social constructionist paradigm, I have referred to Morrow's (2005) criteria for trustworthiness in constructivist research as it can be applied to the constructionist paradigm. This includes authenticity criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), which, according to Morrow (2005, p. 252), includes "…fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity." Fairness relates to different constructions being sought and honored in the analysis (Morrow, 2005). For this study, fairness is evident through the way in which the data were collected across the population. Teachers, current students, and past students were included in the study to gain the opinions of each group. Throughout the interview data collection stage, there were many

elements that required further follow-up in order to confirm meaning and add to the fairness of the construction. This was done by checking in with participants during the transcription process to clarify meaning of any areas where I required further detail to understand particular aspects of the data. I attempted to collaborate with participants to conduct credibility or member checks to confirm that their perspectives were correctly interpreted by giving them the de-identified transcripts for checking. This contributed to the trustworthiness of data, as outlined by Morrow (2005), because the thick descriptions from participants related to their experiences embedded within multiple layers of culture and context.

The ontological authenticity relates to the constructions of the individuals being improved, elaborated, and expanded (Morrow, 2005). This was achieved by checking with participants to ensure that the meaning was interpreted correctly, elaborated upon, and improved or adjusted, where required. Educative authenticity requires that the participants' constructions are understood and appreciated by others (Morrow, 2005). This was achieved during the study and is addressed throughout the writing of this thesis. For example, discussions with teaching staff took place throughout the data collection stage to advise them of the initial themes. It was throughout this practice that I was able to offer ideas that were taken on board by teaching staff within the FLP. These were suggestions made on the basis of me acting in the role of career practitioner and not researcher. Common questions involved asking about how to include more career development learning into their practice. For example, one teacher asked how excursions could be used as a career intervention, what type of activities could the students undertake that would get them exploring occupations? This could be viewed as an example of catalytic authenticity, because action was stimulated (Morrow, 2005) through these discussions.

Credibility

In addition to the trustworthiness of data, the credibility of data was established through the various methods of data collection. Credibility refers to how the researcher has portrayed the viewpoints of the participants and how this meets with the participants' own constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Mertens, 1998). Methods used to improve credibility include prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, progressive subjectivity, member checks, and triangulation (Mertens, 1998). My prolonged engagement in the field took place prior to commencing the research by entering the FLP on a weekly period for up to 6 months to build rapport and find out about 'the School'. In total, a period of 2½ years was spent visiting the FLP, ensuring that a deep understanding of 'the School' was gained and that there was an opportunity to observe changes and improvement over that time. Peer debriefing took place regularly with my research supervisor, which allowed the opportunity to discuss findings, the analysis, and conclusions. In line with what Mertens (1998) suggested, this was a good opportunity to confront my own values, as my supervisor was able to pose searching questions and guide further steps taken in the study. Progressive subjectivity was addressed and is detailed fully in a previous section of this chapter. Managing subjectivity also assists in producing fairness, as participants' viewpoints are represented equitably, thereby avoiding bias on behalf of the researcher (Morrow, 2005). As previously explained, member checking was conducted throughout the research. There were, however, some issues, whereby participants did not want to read over transcribed interviews, that presented a challenge, and these are addressed in the limitations section of the discussion chapter. Triangulation involves the checking of data collected from various sources and verifying evidence from all of these sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Mertens, 1998). This can also be referred to as "adequacy of data", which Morrow (2005, p. 255) prefers over the term "triangulation". Methods, such as interviews,

participant observation, and document reviews, can be used to confirm evidence of a phenomenon. Importantly, however, is the researcher's immersion in the site to assist with gaining truth from the participants, as they perceive it (Morrow, 2005). This was enabled throughout the study, as a combination of prolonged engagement, building of relationships, trust and rapport, and observation of various activities strengthened the truth value of the data.

Transferability

Transferability relates to how the reader can determine similarity between the study and their own context (Mertens, 1998). To do this adequately requires a thick description of the case, including time, place, and context. Morrow (2005) also suggested that this is achieved by adding sufficient information about oneself as researcher, along with the processes, participants, and relationships between the researcher and participants. To ensure transferability in this study, I was cognizant of the thick description required and attended to this throughout the writing. It is important that the findings are relevant, not only to the field of career development, but that the recommendations can be utilised by the FLP sector and the wider mainstream secondary education sector as a whole. Using an ethnographic approach assists in discovering and representing the social phenomena, allowing the researcher to get close to the participants (Hammersley, 1992). It is also useful for informing educational policy relating to alternative education settings, because it gathers the perspectives of those who are most affected by such policies (i.e., the students) (Smyth, 2006; Smyth & McInerney, 2012).

Dependability

Consistency and stability across time, researchers, and analysis techniques is required to ensure the dependability of the data (Mertens, 1998; Morrow, 2005). Every stage of this

study was recorded by detailing chronological notes of each observation, interview, and interaction within the site and with the participants. NVivo 11 (QSR International) was used to record field notes within a journal (for analysis), which were transferred from the original handwritten notes, and to keep a self-reflective journal for researcher reflexivity (not for analysis). In addition themes and thoughts were recorded, thematic diagrams were constructed and relevant literature was added to NVivo 11 (QSR International). This contributes to an audit trail of the research process and confirms dependability.

Confirmability

Following on from dependability, the construct of confirmability also requires the research to be objective and the data to have been adequately tied together with the analytic procedures and findings to confirm its adequacy (Mertens, 1998). The researcher's judgement should also be minimised (Mertens, 1998), and this is addressed through researcher reflexivity, which is applied in this study. Confirmability also largely relies on the audit trail and this has been addressed in the research as described in the previous section.

Communicating the findings

The findings within this thesis are communicated within Chapter 4 and further elaborated upon in Chapter 5, where recommendations are also made. In communicating these findings, a thick description was applied. In keeping with the constructionist paradigm in which the research is bound, I have presented the relevant quotes that lead to the identified themes (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007), ensuring interpretations are easily understood (Williams & Morrow, 2009). The rich descriptions that were gained through robust qualitative research provide a strong evidence base that will contribute to a greater understanding of the social and emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, career adaptability and career goals for marginalised youth attending FLPs.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are of a high priority, particularly because of the vulnerable nature of the participant group, and these were covered in detail in the Human Ethics application (H16REA114). The application was approved by the University of Southern Queensland's Human Research Ethics Committee on 16th July 2016. In addition, and as part of the application, research approval was also gained in writing from the Principal of the high school in which the FLP was situated.

The research participants were interviewed at 'the School' or, for some past students, via phone, or, in the case of one past student, at an office at the University. Interviews were all recorded using a digital audio device. Transcription was completed via a professional transcribing service whereby confidentiality processes were followed. All names were removed from the transcribed documents.

Prior to conducting interviews, the participants were provided with a participant information sheet and consent form, and asked to return the consent form before the interview took place (see Appendices B and C). As many of the participants were under the age of 18, parental consent was also required. This was problematic for some students and could have potentially limited the number of participants in the study. Some students' living arrangements meant they stayed with friends or lived independently. For a variety of reasons, such as parent's lack of understanding of, or interest in, the research, or the parent's unreliability in terms of returning documents, some students found it difficult to obtain or submit a signed consent form. To overcome some of these issues, a discussion took place with my research supervisors. Students under 18, who were living independently and who demonstrated the capacity to consent, as per the Australian Psychological Society's (APS; 2009) Guidelines for Working with Young People, were permitted to sign the consent form. The researcher ensured that the young person had "…a sufficient understanding and

intelligence to enable him or her to understand fully what is proposed" (APS, 2009, p.180), by asking them questions about the study. These questions included what the study was about, what was required of the student and how the data would be used. In all cases, at the beginning of the interview and for the purposes of the recording, I again checked that the participant understood the research and was aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. For a student under 16 years of age, who was willing to participate but did not have a reliable parent to sign the consent form, a more detailed check-in of their understanding of the study and right to withdraw took place prior to commencing their interview.

Once the interviews had been transcribed, I presented each participant with the opportunity to read the transcript to validate its content and meaning. The students, however, were generally disinterested in reading their transcript. Although the students had the capacity to read their transcripts, they chose not to. I offered each student a printed copy however they were not keen to take a copy. Despite their reluctance to read the transcript and to ensure that the participants understood and agreed with their transcript I summarised the content and, on the next interview asked them if they agreed that the summary was valid. I also went over some of their detailed responses with them to elaborate on some of their answers. A similar occurrence arose for teaching staff. The lengthy document of transcribed data was presented to each of them as a copy, but they did not wish to read the document and each of them agreed that they 'trusted' it to be accurate. I used the same technique as with the students and summarised the responses in the next interview in order to gain validation and elaborate to gain clarification of particular points. The transcripts of the second interviews were again presented to each participant for checking. None of the participants requested any changes to their transcripts.

I was very mindful of how the students, in particular, would react to me in the interview stages. I had spent considerable time at 'the School' and with the students and teaching staff

prior to commencing the interviews and this assisted greatly in building rapport and trust with both students and staff. I had initially immersed myself within 'the School' by contributing to the mentoring sessions and taking an observer role although contributing to discussions, where appropriate. I was included in the staff briefings, which also made me feel welcomed to 'the School' and a part of the fabric, so to speak. I took care to dress appropriately for the context, taking my cues from the teaching staff and not wearing clothes that were too formal. I felt that I blended in well to the environment, because most students would communicate with me in passing and were quite friendly and willing to talk to me about everyday things. These interactions provided a good starting point in which to progress to the interviews. I was able to contextualise the interview questions, as I had learned a great deal about the participants' backgrounds and the terminology and language used, and this helped with rapport-building and the gathering of rich responses to the interviews.

To maintain anonymity of the participant data, any quotes from interviewees used in the thesis are non-identifiable. The reporting of demographic information was also a consideration. It was not appropriate to break down the demographics into multicultural aspects, due to the small number of students at 'the School'. This eliminated the risk of them being easily identified as a participant, due to disclosure of such specific characteristics. Instead, a coding system was applied throughout this research to identify participants. The codes reflect whether the participant was teaching or support staff, a current student, or a past student. The year level of the student was also included in their individual code. For example, TS1 relates to the first member of the Teaching Staff to be interviewed. Y10 S1 relates to a Year 10 Student who was the first to be interviewed in that group. P12 S1 refers to a Past year 12 Student who was first to be interviewed.

Chapter summary

This chapter has covered the research design in detail, by discussing the theoretical foundations upon which the study is based, the methods used, researcher reflexivity, recruitment of participants, data collection, management and analysis and integrity of the data, and ethical considerations.

The research questions sought to draw upon participants' experiences, considering that their individual and contextual situation and meaning was made out of these through interpretive thematic analysis and co-constructing meaning with the participants.

Chapter 4 explores the development of these themes and sub-themes in detail and presents the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Qualitative Findings

Chapter Introduction

This chapter documents the themes developed through the thematic analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews conducted with current students, past students, teaching staff and support staff as well as classroom observations and written documents. Where direct quotes from staff members are included, no reference is made to the staff role or gender of the individual. The interview schedule with assigned codes is provided in Chapter 3. The direct quotes of participants have been indented and italicised to ensure the participants' '*voices'* are prominent and identifiable throughout the findings.

The chapter begins with an overview of the three main themes: supportive relationships, preparing for work and role of the QCE. These themes emerged through the thematic analysis of the interviews, observations and written artefacts in context with answers provided to the research questions. Within each of the main themes there are several sub-themes which were identified through the induction of the data. Figure 5 depicts these themes and their relative sub-themes.

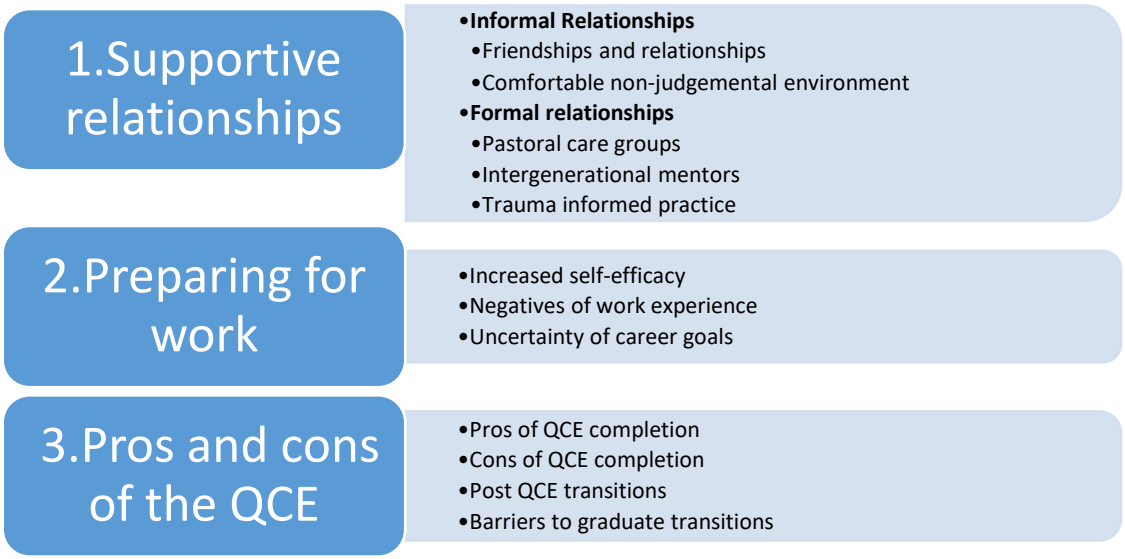

Figure 6. Themes and sub-themes

Each section presents the findings based on student and staff interviews and field observations. Participant quotes are highlighted in relation to themes and the reporting of field observations is weaved throughout this narrative. This demonstrates credibility and triangulation of the data. Discussion of the themes and answers to the research questions are presented in Chapter 5.

Theme 1: Supportive relationships

This study aimed to explore the impact of the FLP enrolment on students' social and emotional wellbeing. Supportive relationships emerged as a prominent theme across the data. This theme makes an important contribution to comprehending the wellbeing of the students and leads to answering research question 1 which was: What impact does the FLP experience have on student social and emotional wellbeing and career related self-efficacy? The following findings from the semi-structured interviews highlight the impact of social support on the participant students' wellbeing.

Almost all of the research participants responded that they had experienced positive changes in themselves and that their enrolment at the FLP had improved their wellbeing. Responses were consistent across all year levels, indicating that at least in the first year of enrolment there was a positive change to their wellbeing. Many students commented that they had become more confident and saw themselves more positively to when they first began at 'the School'. One student indicated that she had a more optimistic outlook on life and stated that it was

> *…because it's helped me so much, that I think that it's helped bring up my confidence a lot. Yes, basically it's just helped me with everything in life, the way to look at life and everything* (Y12 S2).

Several students expressed major improvement to their wellbeing in that it literally meant the difference to them between life and death. For example, one student reported being

> *…a completely different person to who I was in Year 10. If it wasn't for (the school) I don't think I would be alive to be honest* (PY12 S1).

Another student reflected on his change in confidence by telling me that,

> *I know since I came to (the school), I've got a lot more confidence and I'm more out there. I'm not as shy any more* (Y11 S1).

There was a noticeable emphasis that improvement in wellbeing impacted on some of the students' sense of self. The increase in their confidence meant that they had begun to form an identity and gain some direction in their life, as evidenced by the following quotes:

> *…I didn't know really who I was before coming to (this school) and I didn't know where I wanted to be or even how far I would get. Two years ago I didn't see myself even being here still. I think now that I'm being confident, even being able to come to school and walk in the school gates and have everyone look pleased to see me, yes, it's a blessing.* (Y11 S2)

> *…like you walk in there with, I don't know, mental issues, God knows. You pretty much leave with higher confidence, more self-respect than what you came with, and it's - I don't know how to describe it. You just feel like a different person, depending on your social ability as it is when you come in. It's really up to you to open up and to feel comfortable and that's what the environment is like, it's comfortable enough for you to open yourself up and really change yourself when you leave.* (Y12 S5)

Bullying was a contributing factor in the attendance of some of the students. One young person summed up their experience of how their self-esteem had improved since attending the FLP by stating,

> *…well, last year I got bullied and obviously when you get bullied it puts your mood down and your self-esteem down. Being around good people like builds you up and yeah, I just feel a lot happier and everything* (Y11 S3).

For other students, this sense of self-confidence meant that the wearing of makeup had decreased. One student said how proud she was that she had not worn fake eyelashes for a month. She reported that she had worn fake eyelashes every single day since year 10. She stated that

> *… I feel so much better and I'm confident. I'm so surprised…I haven't cared. I haven't freaked out about it…I can wear no make-up in front of certain people now and never, ever could I do that in the past. So I think being here and just having people just be like 'whatever, she's wearing make-up here', and then the days that I come with none of it people are like 'whatever'* (Y12 S4).

Another young person indicated her ability to be aware of what was going on and to apply self-help strategies. She told me that

> *…there's still days where it's a bit tough and very stressful…I'm still in a pretty good place, mentally, and I'm aware of what's going on and how to put things in place to not be in a bad place* (Y11 S2).

This level of self-confidence was also noticed in field observations. I had observed students commence at the FLP in year 10 who had expressed themselves through their appearance. Some examples included the wearing of body piercings, heavy makeup and coloured hairstyles. By year 12, my observations were that several students had begun wearing less piercings, much less makeup and more conservative hairstyles. It appeared that throughout their time attending the FLP they had become more comfortable and confident presenting their more natural selves.

When I asked teaching staff about whether they could see a change in the students' confidence as they progressed through the FLP, the response was a unanimous "yes". The teachers indicated that the students had become more assertive, were able to think more critically about situations, and could express their opinions without being disrespectful of others' opinions. Their sense of belonging was more developed, and they were able to look out for others and support each other. The teachers indicated that the students had developed hope about their futures, as the students started to believe in themselves and their capabilities.

Further questioning, to find out the reasons for such an impact on their wellbeing, elicited other themes that have been grouped under the categories of informal relationships and formal relationships. The informal relationships consisted of the sub-themes *friendships and relationships* and *comfortable non-judgemental environment*. Formal relationships consisted of sub-themes *Pastoral Care Groups (PCG), Intergenerational Mentoring* and *Trauma Informed Practices*.

Informal relationships

The supportive environment of the FLP meant that relationships were formed both on an informal and formal basis. The informal relationships were created through the development of friendships and the comfortable non-judgmental environment.

Friendships and relationships

Friendship and belonging were highlighted in many of the student interviews as being a reason for the change in wellbeing. One particular student (Y11 S3) had encountered two previous secondary schools before attending the FLP. He saw himself as *"very"* socially awkward prior to his experience at the FLP. He believed that the confidence he had gained was because he had made friends. He said he was happy and now able to deal with a larger number of people on a more regular basis (Y11 S3). Another student indicated that he was

very lonely before attending the FLP and that once he had enrolled, he had made friends and it was *"very good"* (PY12 S3).

Another student (Y10 S4) explained that he did not go out with friends when he attended a previous school, but since attending the FLP, he has started going outside, making friends and going to the park with them (Y10 S4). The new friendships that students mentioned appear to contribute to their enjoyment of 'the School'. As one student stated,

> *I'm enjoying school a lot more now than I did at the other one…It's gotten me a bunch of new friends and everything* (Y11 S1).

The ability to form friendships are crafted through small class sizes and a supportive atmosphere. A year 10 student commented that, due to the small class sizes, he was friends with nearly everyone and that everyone was nice. He went on to say that

> *…there's no bullying and stuff like that, so it's really good and you just roll through it. We all support each other in any way, whatever they (students) want. Whatever they tell us, whatever they do, we love them for who they are. No matter what*. (Y10 S2).

Wider relationships emerged as another key factor for the increase in students' wellbeing. It was often commented throughout the interviews and observations that 'the School' is like family. These relationships not only refer to the student-teacher relationship, but also how relationships are modelled by the teachers with their colleagues. One teacher, TS3, informed me, that the most important part of wellbeing within 'the School' is the relationships on every level. TS3 stated that

> *…it starts with peers, it starts with staff and even staff and staff. It's important for us to role model to students that we like each other and we get on and we listen to each other and that's happening all day long.* (TS3).

Another teacher, TS7, refers to this as a way of caring for the student and noted that was an important aspect of forming relationships. TS7 stated that all the teaching staff try to arrive by 7.30am so they are there for when the students arrive. The students are greeted by the teachers upon their arrival and this gives the teachers an indication of the students' current state, which might relate to the experiences they had the previous night. TS7 remarked that

> *Monday's can be tricky because they might have had a bad weekend and you put all the different things in place* (TS7).

TS3 believed that these initial conversations are important for the young person's wellbeing, because the students are being asked about themselves by someone who cares about them and is interested in them. TS3 stated:

> *Moreover, the students learn to articulate their answers and take part in conversations with the people around them, learning to value themselves, and to allow others value them. Part of this process facilitates the student's learning that people do care about them and that they are worthy of being cared about. This overflows into their studies, because they invest more time in them, and they also make more effort with conversations within their own relationships. Relationship skills are further built upon, because the students learn how to effectively communicate with others. They are taught ways to not offend people, how not to walk away from difficult conversations instead, being able to consider feedback and constructive criticism, and that they can be heard and respected. They also learn that it is okay for them to have a different opinion to their peers and that they can still work with them and respect and care for them. This flows in to the classroom, whereby it is expected that each of the students will respect each other's opinions, their rights to learn and to be a learner, and to ask for and receive help when needed.* (TS3).

The supportive relationships were observed as being modelled throughout the daily activities at the FLP. For example it was evident that teachers ate breakfast and lunch with the students. General conversations took place during these times. In one instance, I witnessed the teachers and students discussing their previous weekend, plans for the upcoming weekend, or having general conversations to do with siblings, similar to those that may typically occur within mainstream families.

From my own visits to the site, it was evident that the students were respectful of visitors, because they always greeted me positively and made conversation. I observed how students reacted to visitors who also attended the site including mentors, specialised teachers, program specific presenters and guest speakers. They quickly assessed the visitors, greeted them, answered questions and engaged in conversations when appropriate. These observations highlighted that a nurturing and supportive environment existed.

I further observed the students arriving at school before their classes started and congregating on the front verandah or outside. I witnessed them chatting with each other, having a laugh, welcoming others as they arrive. The teaching staff cheerily greeted the students and chat with them about how they are. I was informed by TS3 that the students

> *…love the banter of a morning, that laughing and that welcoming environment that every student in the school helps create* (TS3).

TS3 confirmed that students are encouraged to respect their peers for who they are as individuals and that students' identities are respected.

This approach to building relationships is considered by TS10 as being different to how it is approached in a mainstream school. TS10 explained that

> *…the students are different at the FLP, because they do not have a degree of resilience that perhaps students in the mainstream settings would have… the staff members'*

> *approaches to students tend to be gentler… the setting facilitates this relationship building, because there is more time and there are no bells, sirens, or sounds controlling time or signalling the end of classes each day…to a well-adjusted student, these sounds may not be that stressful, however, for the type of students attending the FLP, they can be particularly stressful and sometimes enough to drive them away from school. Whilst boundaries and expectations are set at the FLP around behaviour and work ethic, it is the way they go about it that is different from mainstream schools. They firstly remove the stressors that are a part of a normal secondary school, such as bells and sirens, so they can work on building relationships* (TS10).

This was confirmed by another member of the teaching staff, TS4, who explained that the smaller environment is key to making a difference in student wellbeing. Their observations are that some students have not been able to cope in larger secondary schools and that the key factor in the FLP is that the staff are willing to talk to the students (TS4). The students, TS4 says,

> *…are always welcoming, but can be a bit closed-off until they become comfortable…if they are not comfortable, they will put up a barrier and this could manifest as aggressive non-respondent behaviour* (TS4).

The role modelling of respectful relationships to the students is also enacted through 'the School's' interaction with the wider community. There are many community members who visit 'the School' for a number of reasons. The teaching staff make this a part of what naturally happens in the environment, rather than making it unusual or appearing as somewhat of an add-on (TS3).

Overall, the relationships are considered by all staff to be the most valuable aspect of engaging the students in education. TS3 makes this a priority and there is a range of relationships existing throughout ‘the School’. TS3 noted that it is the

> *…relationships with their peers, relationships with the people who are delivering the curriculum, relationships with the person who is supporting them to get work, the relationship with the admin officer, the relationship with our mentors, our volunteers* (TS3).

TS3 told me that all of these people are seen to provide students with opportunities to create alternative relationships and added that

> *They're learning that lots of people care but also they're learning how to have different conversations to get what they need* (TS3).

Their belief was that the students are learning life skills that involve identifying your particular needs; investigating how to achieve them; and, developing the aptitude that enables an individual to conduct diverse conversations with others. TS3 stated:

> *So, with peers, they need friendship and acceptance. With teachers, they need knowledge and skills and direction. With our Industry Liaison Officer, they need understanding, they need career advice* (TS3).

Not all relationships in the students’ pasts have been positive. TS3 commented that they place importance on teaching students to identify the elements of a healthy relationship as opposed to one that is not. TS3 explained that this is achieved by teaching the students to have relationships with a range of different people, because it gives them opportunities to practice that skill over and over again. TS3 added

> *So they're practising, practising, practising and the more you practise it, well as we say, the better you get at it and the more powerful that becomes and the more strength and self-advocacy you develop* (TS3).

This is also highlighted by another teacher, TS9, who told me they

> *…cannot bang on about the importance of relationships enough. It is about building relationships, consistency, being in a safe place...overall it is about being a really great listener. My job is not that complex. It is truly about listening and giving them the time. A lot of these young people just haven't had that. It's pretty basic stuff really* (TS9).

The importance of rapport-building was noted by some teachers. For example, one teacher, TS6, believed that the rapport they build with students is key to good relationships. They stated that the students know TS6 cares about them and that TS6 will listen to them if they have an issue. TS6 noted, however, that they follow this up with strong boundaries and draw the line with enacting bad behaviour. TS6 stated that

> *I won't let them get away with nonsense or excuses and again I suppose it's almost a parent role sometimes where I treat these kids like I would treat my own kids in that sort of balance* (TS6).

This teacher added that rapport is also built through using humour:

> *…I never understood teachers who, when kids said something funny, did not laugh, or did not actually banter with the kids, because it engages the entire class (*TS6).

Further, TS6 approach to this is to respond to what the students are interested in and then "*bounce off them*" or use their ideas to engage them in learning activities. TS6 additionally noted the importance of not seeing oneself as the authority figure on knowledge when students walk into a classroom, explaining that

> *…kids often have a lot more knowledge in certain areas than I do…quite happy to use them as resources…if they come back at me with something that everyone seems interested in…go with it and incorporate that into the lesson* (TS6).

This teacher also considered the concept of care as important for student wellbeing. TS6 told me that the students feel cared for, important, valued and safe. It is an environment in which the students can connect with a non-threatening adult and that can actually be fun. TS6 stated that

> *…they do recognise, I think, not only that you care, you actually see them. You see them, not just the student which I think in mainstream you have got 200 kids a day basically* (TS6).

The notion of care is supported by another teacher, TS7, who mentioned how the staff care about the students, build relationships with them, and follow them up. TS7 explained that this caring and building of relationships fills a gap for marginalised students and that there is an opportunity in the FLP setting to do that. TS7 stated that

> *It's a privilege to be welcomed into their lives. I find it a real privilege* (TS7).

TS7 explained further the holistic nature of their relationships

> *…see different elements that you would not normally see outside of this really small environment…I think that is probably it, is that we have the ability to care and the ability to be a lot more closely involved and holistic…in our approach to everything* (TS7).

TS11 also commented that relationships are an extremely important factor in the wellbeing of students. Although TS11 does not refer to the teachers as case workers, TS11 admits that they have a special relationship and connection with the students in that the teachers all have an

> *…amazing capacity to connect with students, to care, their compassion… empathy is really… plays a big part in connecting and they just care. They really care about the students and they show that every day on lots of different levels* (TS11).

Although TS11 confessed that they have seen students do and say

> *…some pretty horrible things to teachers here that could really disrupt a relationship* (TS11).

TS11 said that they have also seen those relationships repaired, because the teachers do not give up on the students.

Comfortable non-judgemental environment

The teachers and support staff were interviewed to gain an understanding of the types of roles they had within 'the School' and what actions they perceived impacted on the wellbeing and self-efficacy of the students. From the interviews, it was obvious how passionate all staff were about the students' growth and development. It became evident that the most important thing in the setting was the care of the students and consequent relationship-building with them. The initial phases of the student attending 'the School' were about helping them to feel safe and part of a larger family, facilitating a sense of belonging, and helping the student to know that they are supported and can have their say.

TS3 explained to me that the biggest impact on getting students to feel safe and accepted is the other students. TS3's belief is that students learn to be accepted for who they are and then that flows on to new students feeling immediately accepted in the group. The teachers then work to create an environment in the classroom that builds upon that. TS3 stated

> *So we're all equal, we're all acceptable, we all can express ourselves the way we want. That's how we dress, how we look is not important. It's the person you are inside* (TS3).

TS3 went on to state that how teachers direct the classroom and the language they use is important to ensure that students feel equal and form a sense of belonging. This, in turn, is also contributed to by the support team. There is an Industry Liaison Officer (ILO) who helps to build hope in the students about getting a job. Teacher Aides work one-on-one with students who are having difficulty with their studies. There is an Administration Officer who is accessible to the students. Students can explain their absences to the Administration Officer or ask about ways in which they can pay their fees. TS3 said that this support can help to break down barriers, because

> *…the personal problems do not seem as big, because it is easier for them to be able to achieve what they want to achieve* (TS3).

The personal problems that students have, may come from past traumatic experiences and this is something that needs due consideration within teaching practices. How to approach this has been a growing concern among teachers as they learn to use trauma informed practices.

Most students indicated that the small class sizes contributed to the supportive environment and some likened this to a family unit, a comfortable non-judgemental environment. The sense of family was evident in the following comment by a Year 10 participant:

> *…well since it's smaller you kind of have to get on with everybody and you bond a little bit more and it's more like a friendly family kind of thing going on. It's not just a big bunch of like hundreds of people who are strangers or you don't get along with…I just feel more supported. If I was to cry there'd be someone straight away to come and help me or give me a hug or talk with me through it. I've seen that a lot with the girls and*

> *guys here. Like some of us had bad mornings and (the teacher) comes in and she's like 'do you need to go to the nurse?'* (Year 10 S1)

This was supported by another student (Y10 S3), who remarked that the "…people are really nice", and that the teachers were

> *…really cool and kind, always there to support you…even if you're really, really rude and have a really bad attitude, they'll still try and help you and they won't scream at you…everyone in the class I think of as a friend. Everyone in the school I think of as a friend* (Y10 S3).

A past Year 12 student also referred to the teachers as being *"…really nice… that they cared…*", but also made it easy for them to do their assignments (Past Y12 S3).

A year 12 student who had been at 'the School' since Year 10 told me that their wellbeing had *"…skyrocketed since Year 10"* (Y12 S5). She went on to say that, getting to know different people and their life stories, whether they were teachers' stories or students' stories, was "…*definitely an eye-opener*" (Y12 S5). She explained that this helped her to understand the difficulties that other people also face and that she was not alone but had the support and understanding of peers and teaching staff.

The comfortable non-judgemental aspect of the environment for the students is put into context by TS10 who revealed the background of some students:

> *…It's (FLP) like a safe place. It's like that stable environment that they have not had...for some, they go home still to a very turbulent home environment, and this is the place of stability. This is the place of calm. This is the place I can escape, because I'm not attending to a very ill parent. Or I'm not attending to a parent who's really not being the parent; I'm being the parent of them…a place where they can have a meal.*

For some, they're coming out of environments where they don't have wholesome meals, nutritious meals (TS10).

To create a comfortable non –judgemental environment, the teachers also draw on their pedagogical approaches. One such approach that did emerge in the analysis is that of trauma informed practice. This will be discussed here as a sub-theme of comfortable and non-judgemental environment.

Trauma informed practice

An additional consideration that TS11 believes is necessary is for all staff to have a very good understanding of trauma. They noted that there were many students in that environment who have traumatic backgrounds and that it was important for teachers to

…understand that young people are not just displaying naughty behaviour and they should be punished (TS11).

Instead, TS11 believes that teachers need to connect and understand what is behind the young person's behaviour in order to help them to deal with it.

A teacher (TS1) discussed with me their background in trauma-informed practise and the approach they use as being inclusive, rather than exclusive, if something has gone wrong. TS1 said that they like to chat with the students, especially if they notice them having a really off day, and that it is about trying to get to the bottom of things, rather than reacting to the behaviour. TS1 insisted that they love the informal time with the students and that these moments, where there is a lack of structure, assists students to open up and communicate about what is going on for them. TS1 stated that

I've often taken the class out for a coffee and we've sat in a café, somewhere they hadn't been before…and I always have the condition no phones…we have a coffee together…talk about how we are going and it's amazing (TS1).

In another example, TS1 informed me about taking the students to an off-site farm, where they undertake some agricultural tasks away from the main campus. TS1 said that it was within this context that students open up about their personal situations and stated

> *The kids started talking about domestic violence they'd experienced and they all shared their stories and gave each other strategies. You could see that they were realising that they were not the only ones. That was just us having a coffee. There was no pre-empting. I think I love that. I really think that space to allow those conversations to happen is important. I think in our modern age we're so rushing. In schools there's so many outcomes and stuff just to take a group of young people and treat them and sit down and talk* (TS1).

In contrast, not all teachers were completely satisfied that the trauma-informed practice approaches work in every situation. Some issues that one teacher had noticed over the years was a change in the attitude of students. Whilst explaining to me that every generation appears to have increasing mental health issues, this teacher stated that these could be real or contrived and contributed to by

> *…the world's almost telling these kids to constantly focus on themselves, to constantly give in to every emotion…they don't have parental structures that are obviously teaching them resilience* (TS6).

TS6 noted that coming from a trauma-informed practice model may provide an understanding of how to approach a student who has experienced trauma, but they believe that 'the School' is still, first and foremost, an education facility, whereby they have an obligation to make the environment safe for others as well. This is a balancing act for TS6 in their teaching. TS6 explained that the behaviours of some students impinge on other students'

emotional problems and may trigger reactions for them and that they do not have the right to do that. TS6 explained that

> *Each successive year, it seems to be getting worse, and I think we are getting generations of it now, because sometimes the most belligerent kids we have also have very belligerent parents…that kind of explains your anger issues* (TS6).

TS6 considers some of these students to be "enabled" by their parents, in that they are allowed to speak badly to their parents and do whatever they want. Adding that

> *…they actually don't have any boundaries around school…work…friendships where someone actually tells them no…they don't recognise sometimes the boundaries that we put in place here actually indicate love…respect, actually indicate that we have their best interest at heart* (TS6).

TS6 believes that these students see anyone who is not permissive as being the enemy and, if they are not given what they want, they then believe that it is their right to act any way that want.

During the time spent observing classes, talking with the teaching and support staff, and attending staff briefings, it became very obvious that the notion of trauma-informed practice was becoming a hot topic. There had been some professional development sessions conducted at the mainstream school in which the teaching staff had attended. They reported back to me that these sessions were extremely useful and gave them some context around dealing with young people experiencing traumatic pasts. Some of the teaching staff had suggested they would like to learn more about this practice and were keen to implement the techniques learnt into their own practices.

During my term researching at this FLP, I attended a conference titled "Doing School Differently" which was hosted by the Berry Street Childhood Institute. Two teaching staff

members from the FLP also attended the conference. Many of the sessions were based on pedagogical practices utilising trauma informed practices in alternative education settings. The teaching staff informed me that this conference was very useful and that they had intended to implement many of the approaches into their own practice. On their return to the FLP they shared their knowledge with other teaching members and continued to implement their knowledge across 'the School'.

In my second year of data collection, a new teacher, TS9, commenced employment at the FLP. This teacher had previously worked in the alternative education sector in an independent school, and had experience working from a trauma-informed practice framework. I noticed that this teacher was a positive influence on the environment, had a very strong commitment to building on the students' strengths and was keen to introduce some new teaching approaches. Some of these approaches included building work-place skills into the curriculum activities. For example, when working with Year 10s on a project-based learning task, they were able to incorporate some kitchen and hospitality practices that would assist the students achieving their goal of raising money for a cancer fundraiser through baking and supplying a morning tea. This teacher approached me on several occasions to discuss how to raise student awareness about the types of careers that exist and how to do this through using field excursions. I was able to advise on several ideas, in my capacity as a career development practitioner and not a researcher.

Overall the friendships and relationships that are modelled and formed in the FLP are an outcome of a comfortable and non-judgemental environment. These factors appear to influence positively on students' self-confidence and wellbeing. The following section will concentrate on how the teaching and support staff have facilitated the building of supportive relationships through the formal processes of the FLP.

Formal relationships

In addition to the informal building of relationships there is the opportunity to further develop these relationships through a more formal process whereby each year level has their own group and teacher who will meet with them at the beginning of each day. This is known as the Pastoral Care Group (PCG).

Pastoral care groups

PCG emerged as a sub-theme of supportive relationships as interview data from teachers and data from observations suggested this was an avenue where relationships were also built and nurtured. TS3 noted that the idea behind PCG discussion was to strengthen the students' problem-solving strategies and give them opportunities to share their thoughts, whilst also learning to accommodate other students' opinions and views on the same issue. It is also a way of getting the students to learn more about their own beliefs and values (TS3).

Each year level within the FLP has their own PCG and PCG teacher, who the students will check in with each day. PCGs meet for 10 minutes at the beginning of each day and for 20-minute sessions on 3 days. One of the teachers (TS9) explained that the 10-minute session each day is predominantly to conduct administration and complete attendance rolls, but for them, it is really important, because it is their first contact with the students for that day. TS9 said that they try to arrive early to check the faces of their students to get an understanding of what may be happening for them. TS9 told me about a personal 1-5 check that they do with the students to get a quick assessment of how they are going by asking them a few questions. TS9 rates the students based on the answers they give and on TS9s observations of them. The 1 indicates that students are feeling "pretty rotten" through to 5, which is "good" (TS9). TS9 explained this further

> *So that is a really quick process that I like to use and quite often we don't have a lot of time in the mornings and we've only got that 10 minutes so it's kind of like if I have an indication that a young person is not themselves or something is happening for them I try and do that and then assure them that I will get back to them* (TS9).

The 20-minute sessions are conducted 3 days a week and are dependent on what the PCG teacher identifies as being necessary for their group. In my first interview with TS3, they explained that they were going to expand the PCG program in the following year. In doing so, it would take the form of having 2 care days, where the year groups met individually, and on the remaining 3 days, time would be allocated for "family" groups, consisting of Year 10, 11 and 12 students (TS9). TS9 told me that they have previously commenced this model, where they had family groups come together to create a community, almost like peer mentoring, but that it had not continued. She said that, in the 20-minute sessions, they were currently making an effort to ensure that students were aware of what was available for them regarding their social and emotional needs. TS9 had booked 'the School' Nurse to attend their PCG to discuss the topic of sexual health with the students. The Social Worker was also invited to conduct sessions on mindfulness and talk about the support services available for students. TS9 stated that they use the remaining time with the students to build relationships, which sometimes might involve playing a board game with the students, strengthening the community among themselves as they get to know each other, teaching them to be respectful of one another, and providing the opportunity for them to form solid relationships. TS9 noted that, when working with the Year 10 group, they focus on their self-belief, and TS9 is employing a growth mindset model to facilitate this.TS9 indicated that many students begin their journeys in the program with the thought that they "*can't do that*", so TS9 encourages them to reflect and find out what things they have achieved so far in their journey, turning their fixed mindset into a growth one. By going over their report cards with

them and setting learning goals, TS9 reported that they can "…*certainly tell they are feeling safe*". TS9 also asks the students to nominate and praise a fellow student for something they do well, believing that getting praise from their peers is meaningful for them, more so than receiving it from teachers (TS9).

Intergenerational mentoring program

The FLP also has a unique intergenerational mentoring program, whereby community members volunteer to mentor a Year 10 student, and this mentoring relationship can carry through to the student's graduation from the program. The student may be matched with a mentor that is able to mentor them for the duration of their enrolment at the FLP. These male and female mentors provide a sounding board for the students, someone they can talk to and trust. The relationships can form into quite strong bonds that can last beyond completion of Year 12. TS3 explained to me that these mentors

> *…play a huge role in the program, because they come into the community and demonstrate to the students that people outside the school community care about them…it gives the students someone to talk to on a regular basis, someone who actually will give them the time of day. The students start to broaden their views by discussing different topics with their mentors* (TS3).

TS11 facilitates the mentoring program, ensuring that it is a regulated and guided process. Mentors can either be retired or currently working and are matched with students based on their personal qualities and interests and, in some cases, occupational backgrounds. That is, if a student already has an interest in a particular occupation, they might be matched with a mentor who has had experience in that occupation. TS11 admitted that

…the students are not particularly mature in Year 10 and that the relationship-building may take some time, but you see the change and growth in the mentor relationship by Grade 12 (TS11).

A Year 12 student advised me that it would have been useful for them to have had a mentor in Year 12 by stating that:

I think I would really have liked to have mentoring in Year 12 because that's the time where I most think I needed somebody to talk to. We're coming to the end of the school year and we need somebody to talk to about our issues, and what we're going to do in the future. That's what I think, Year 12 is probably the grade that you need it the most. I think Year 11's would need it to because they're going into Year 12 (Y12 S1).

Another student elaborates on the way in which mentors can be useful in guiding them through relating to their own personal experience. Y12 S3 advises:

I think that since they are an older generation, they have a lot more experience than you and understand a lot, I think of what you've gone through and then can kind of show you an end goal if that makes sense. They'd be like 'Look, we know this is all crap and whatnot at the moment, but if you push you can get here', and kind of offer you an end goal and a lot of what they've experienced and gone through their lives and kind of relate in that way. I think that's probably one of the big, important things of it as well is their ability to – like the whole relationship, being able to kind of relate and show that 'It's not just you mate. It's fine. We've all gone through some stuff. Let's kind of work together and constructively get out of it and kind of make it work', if that makes sense (Y12 S3).

TS11 supports this by stating that

> *…the mentors have a wealth of experience and knowledge and come from many different walks of life. They can be anyone from an ex-magistrate, a mechanic, or someone who owned their own business… this opens up a whole new area of contacts and supports for the young person, as they get to know their mentor, share information about themselves, and come to realise that they can have connections and friendships outside of their peer group* (TS11).

Many of the students did not have extended families or grandparents nearby and it appeared that, in the eyes of the students, some of the mentors had taken on this role. TS11 explained that

> *The mentors are very good at advocating for young people, always use positive language, and share their knowledge and experiences within the mentoring space. The mentors notice and affirm the students' strengths, and continue to assist the young person build upon those strengths* (TS11).

I observed that the mentoring program is also prefaced with a stimulus typically relating to socio-emotional topics. This could be a clip from YouTube or other media. For example, a Reggie Rivers clip (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2PP3p4_4R8) on setting goals, discussing the behaviours that are required to achieve goals, was shown at the beginning of one of the sessions. These stimulus activities are provided in at least one mentoring session per fortnight. The mentors and young people view the clips or read the articles and then discuss the concepts. My observations of these sessions indicated that some of the students did not want to take part in the discussion or activities related to these topics. Instead, they preferred to talk to their mentor about anything they wanted to. TS11 stated that

> *…the stimulus video can help to get conversations started, but if the students are not comfortable talking about these topics, then casual conversation is accepted by the*

> *mentor and coordinator… It might just be something that comes up later down the track, when the young person feels more comfortable talking about it* (TS11).

I also observed some very strong relationships forming between mentors and students. Both parties appeared to gain benefit from the relationships. Some students would literally light up, by expressing smiles, when they saw that their mentor had arrived. The strength of these relationships was evident when students included their mentors in social activities, such as thankyou lunches to show appreciation for the mentors' work with the students. I witnessed a group of students writing their thankyou letters to their mentors to be given to them at the end-of-year party. These students' words were meaningful and heartfelt and included genuine expressions of gratitude. The mentors are also invited to their mentee's graduation ceremony, which marks the end of Year 12 and the completion of the student's formal secondary school studies. Inviting their mentees to celebrate such a milestone achievement with them, is a way for the students to show their appreciation to their mentors, who are often beaming with pride in their mentee's achievement.

Another example of the strength of these mentoring relationships was the change in the way one student dressed. This particular female student turned up for school one day in a dress, which was something she had not done before. When some of the teaching staff commented on how lovely she looked, the student responded that she had dressed up, because her mentor had not seen her in a dress before and she thought the mentor would be impressed. She went on to say she could not wait to see her mentor's reaction to her dressing like that. Her behaviour indicated that she felt a sense of pride and respect in herself that she wanted to convey to her mentor. This sense of pride and respect was indicative of many of the relationships that had formed between the students and their mentors.

The mentors can also be seen to be somewhat role models to the young people. The young male students, in particular, appeared to get on well with the male mentors who have

similar interests. One mentor and mentee I observed easily talk about cars or fishing together and it became evident, the genuine interest in each other, playing out in the sessions when they met.

This type of role modelling is also useful for the students to explore their vocational interests. In some cases the mentors are able to suggest particular occupational areas in which the students may want to focus their learning. This can be achieved through community connections whereby mentors can suggest businesses in which the student may approach for work experience, or even help to facilitate an introduction to a business owner.

Theme 2: Preparation for work

The next theme that emerged strongly from the research was the focus on preparing students for employment. There are several vocational learning opportunities that exist for the students enrolled at the FLP including VET courses, work experience, school based apprenticeships and traineeships and part time work that contribute towards preparing them for employment. Pathway planning at 'the school' is heavily focussed on the students being able to gain employment, which is evident through the Year 10 work experience program and vocational learning opportunities. TS12 explained the role of the Industry Liaison Officer (ILO), which is a full-time funded position, with responsibility for getting the Year 10 students into work experience. TS12 elaborated on the role and indicated that

> *…students are required to participate in a variety of work experiences once they have settled into the school, usually after the first 6 months of being enrolled at the school … work experience often leads into a school-based traineeship which is completed by the end of Year 12* (TS12).

In response to a question about how the students apply for work experience, another teaching staff member advised me that the process starts immediately after the student enrols

in the FLP. The students are required to complete a form as part of their induction/orientation in which they outline, apart from their personal details, their hopes or plans they have for the future. As part of that orientation they are also required to write a letter to the ILO and include their resume and some details about what they may like to do. A teacher explained this process as:

> *…they have to straight away do a letter and a letter of application and email that to (the ILO) to introduce themselves to them, with a little bit of a 'hi, my name is such and such. I'm actually interested in blah, blah, blah. Please find attached my resume' and that…anything that comes up then through their contacts, … can go 'there's an apprenticeship going here' or 'there's a Cert II' or 'hey, would you like a traineeship?' or 'do you want to do work experience at…' even today I actually said to one of the girls who's into animals, I said 'we often have people volunteer for work experience at the RSPCA. Do you want me to introduce you to (the ILO)?'* (TS 5).

TS5 went on to explain how the work experience program may lead on to the student completing a school-based apprenticeship or vocational certificate program. TS5 stated that

> *…we've got quite a range and we can accommodate almost anything. We can get kids work experience. Some kids have school-based apprenticeships* (TS5).

This teacher's perception of how it works is that the ILO ensures that the students get work experience first and, in their opinion, this is the best way to do it, as the student may then become employed. Once they are employed, they can complete a relevant vocational certificate. TS5 gave me an example of this experience for some students

> *…if they are employed, like one student who has been employed at McDonald's for three years. He's also now got a Cert III in Business via McDonald's. So, (ILO) will*

> *turn their job into a Cert II in Retail or a Cert II in Hospitality. Whatever they can they will actually do that* (TS5).

After enquiring if the work experience is related to what students are interested in, or would like to pursue a traineeship in, I was advised by TS3 that it is connected to the opportunities that exist. It was further explained that they advertise

> *…the jobs list and students basically look at the job list and say, 'I would like to do that' …it's what's available, it's needs driven, I suppose, in terms of whether students would like to get a part time paid job* (TS3).

The general consensus from the staff was that the students get a lot out of taking on work experience and part-time work. It did, however, become clear to me that most of the students were working in retail or hospitality jobs and that, in addition to the basic skills they learn in these fields, they also appeared to be improving their social skills and social awareness. According to TS5, the students learn about

> *…hierarchy in a workplace and respecting authority…the responsibility of being accountable, that 'no, if you don't turn up then it's your fault'…there's all the time ownership. Just developing a work ethic. Some of them it's completely new to them* (TS5).

Some other vocational qualifications also make up part of the curriculum choices and these are attractive to the students because they are delivered at 'the School'. The choices, however, are limited to vocational Certificate levels I and II. Options available include Certificate 1 and II in Foundation Skills and Knowledge, Certificate I and II in Information Technology, Certificate II in Music, Certificate I and II in Sport and Recreation, Certificate I and II in Business and the Certificate I and II in Information, Digital Media and Technology. There are also a limited number of Certificate II courses that may be studied free of charge at

the local TAFE institution. In addition, the students can choose to undertake Certificate II and III courses at TAFE, however, some of these incur a significant cost to the students as they are not government subsidised courses.

When I enquired about the type of pathways the students could access at 'the School', one of the staff stated that the focus was more on what Year 11 or 12 students could complete to obtain the QCE. They then discussed the students' eligibility to go to TAFE to complete a vocational certificate level III under the Australian Governments' Certificate III guarantee program as a desired option for students (TS5). There is a general perception among the teaching staff that quite a few students take up the Certificate III guarantee program after leaving the FLP, although the overall findings do not support this. TS5 confirmed that it was the ILO's role to

> *…line them (students) up for that Cert III* (TS5).

This relates to the students being able to continue on with study once they complete their Year 12. There are however limitations on the type of Certificate III that can be completed under the Government guarantee program and that not all students will be interested in what is on offer. It is important, therefore, that students can use their work experience and vocational learning opportunities as a way to reflect on what they have learned, what they have liked or perhaps disliked.

To establish if the students were reflective about their work experience and understood what they had gained from it, some interview questions were asked about what they believed they had learned from the experience. A number of responses indicated their increase in confidence and the sub-theme *increased self-efficacy* emerged.

Increased self-efficacy

A student reported in her interview, that she had recently succeeded in obtaining a retail traineeship at McDonald's and was due to start work there in the near future. She had previously undertaken a number of different work experience opportunities, including part-time work in hospitality and, most recently, a car wash facility. Although, previously she had indicated that she would be doing a Certificate in Childcare in Year 12 to fulfil her goal of becoming a nanny, this had not eventuated. She did, however, tell me that the most she learned about herself by completing these work experiences was that,

> *I can do the job that I get given. I try my hardest at it and try to do it really quickly* (Y11 S3).

When I asked her if she would consider working in any of these types of roles when she finished school, her response was

> *Well, I'm hoping I can just get a job that pays well, obviously, but I don't know. I would probably do hospitality again, not so much the car wash point of view* (Y11 S3).

She was also hopeful that she would gain full-time employment with McDonald's on completion of the traineeship.

Some of the students told me that they found their work experience interesting and, at times, fun. One student told me that this was how they had come to have a part-time job and that they had been working in it for just over 2 years at that time. They stated,

> *So it helped me in a lot of places as well to get out of my comfort zone* (Y12 S3).

Another student, Y12 S4, explained that their experience working at McDonald's had increased their confidence, because it forced her to communicate with people. This student said that she had previously felt very anxious having to deal with the public, but due to her

experience at McDonald's, she had become genuinely comfortable in dealing with customers. She told me that she would not change working there and that it had helped her to grow so much more as a person. Even though people had told her that working at McDonald's was "horrible" and that "almost anyone can get a job there", she held a different view of it. She disputed the latter by saying that

> *It's a lot harder than it seems…some days it's so stressful and you've got to have a lot of patience to put up with some of the people that you have to deal with* (Y12 S4).

Another student, Y11 S4, who was working toward finishing Year 12, told me that he had completed work experience for the first time that year. He had gone to the capital city to work in a distribution centre, where he undertook some manual labour tasks, such as painting shelves, and also participated in working on the company's website making small amendments and updating product prices. This was a student who, in an interview conducted whilst he was in Year 11, stated that he had no career goals. When I asked him what he had learned from his work experience, he proudly told me

> *…that I can work. I worked eight-hour days, five times a week. It was tiring but I did it* (Y11 S4).

I asked him if he would like to continue in that type of field when he finished school. He stated that he was not sure and that he still did not know what he wanted to do (Yr11 S4).

A year 10 student attending the FLP had a goal of working in the field of Information Technology (IT), as he had quite a keen interest in working on computers. He was able to undertake work experience on Wednesdays for a period of 6 to 8 weeks. He told me that what he had learned about himself was

> *…that I'm pretty good at dismantling computers* (Y10 S4).

He also told me that he was definitely still interested in pursuing his goals of working in the IT industry, however, he did not have well-formulated or realistic plans about how he was going to achieve this.

Another student, who I had interviewed twice, once whilst in Year 10 and then again whilst in Year 11, had been able to continue his work experience as well as undertake a part-time traineeship. He reported that his work experience at a motorbike shop was fulfilling his desire to work in a mechanical role and suited his hands-on nature. He got to undertake general mechanical tasks, cleaning, and product placement. He had commenced this work experience in Year 10 and it had continued through to Year 11, whereby he said he was working there once a week, sometimes twice a week, if they were really busy and he was available. He said that he enjoyed working there and, when asked what he had learnt most about himself, his reply was

> *...probably smarter than I give credit for* (Y10 S3).

He was also completing a traineeship through a part-time job at a convenience store, where he usually worked two nights per week and sometimes on a Saturday, if the shifts were available. Again, he indicated that, through this role, he believed that he was "*definitely smarter*" than he would have previously given himself credit for. I asked him if he could see himself working in either of those roles when he finished school and he responded with

> *I don't really see myself working at (convenience store), but, for now, it's great. I definitely see myself working at Yamaha* (Y10 S3).

Whilst the participants I interviewed demonstrated improved confidence and self-efficacy through preparation for work activities, the data from staff interviews indicated there were some negatives regarding the preparation of all students for work. This following sub-theme *negatives of work experience* outlines some of the issues that occur.

Negatives of work experience

During an observation in May 2017, I was involved in a conversation with a staff member who was assisting with the work experience placements for students. This staff member indicated to me that they were experiencing a lot of difficulty with getting students to approach the opportunity for work experience from a positive perspective. They indicated that the students appeared to expect to go into roles where they would not be told what to do. This staff member gave me an example of a student who believed that their work experience should not entail her sweeping the floor. This was also supported by another teaching staff member in a previous interview, whereby they also advised how some students had unusual expectations. TS7 reported a student telling her that she would not be

…doing work experience unless I'm straight on the cash register straight away (TS7).

The staff member also advised me of a situation where a student only lasted a half day at their work experience placement and left without advising the employer. This student then came back to see them and advised that he did not like the place and asked them to find him another placement. Another situation involved a student undertaking a 5-day trial at a large trucking company with the opportunity to lead in to a diesel fitter apprenticeship. This raised concern as the student was not particularly serious about the opportunity, although his parent was pushing for it to happen. The parent had advised the staff member that, if this did not work out, they expected them to find him something else. This staff member felt under considerable pressure from some students to find them jobs. A lot of this persons' time was spent advising students about the need for respect and not to have the expectation that they would get their dream job out of it, but that they needed to work from the bottom up.

This was not an isolated experience. In a subsequent interview with TS7, I was alerted to more issues that arose around getting students into work experience, due to difficulties

with negative attitudes, lack of self-confidence, and maturity. If TS7 becomes aware of such situations, they arrange for the students to do some volunteering. Unfortunately, even in the volunteering space, issues can arise with students who do not want to be there. TS7 gave me an example of two students who attended an aged-care facility to do some volunteer work with some older ladies. They returned to 'the School' telling other students how "*horrible*" it was, that is was "*creepy*", that the older ladies made them uncomfortable and that their backs were sore from folding washing. The girls were spoken to by the teaching staff about this and encouraged to take a more positive attitude and complete one more day at the facility. In all, they had completed 5 days of volunteering. TS7 hoped to find another volunteer work opportunity for the students or to work out whether they were ready to go on a work experience placement with a supportive employer. TS7 stated that

> *They've got to start somewhere…take instructions and guidance from another person, turn up on time, do the day's work and not be so worried about the work itself. It's about participating…we're trying to create the soft work skills for you* (TS7).

Some students are considered not ready to undertake work experience due to their mental health issues. There are a variety of concerns to be addressed first before sending a student on a work placement, particularly if there are mental health conditions to be taken into consideration. Speaking with one of the teaching staff, I was advised that there had been occasions where students, who they believed were clearly not ready to enter a workplace, had been pushed into completing a work experience placement. TS9 told me that they wished they had identified the issue earlier and it was clear from TS9s body language that they were very upset about the negative experience one particular student had. This student had anxiety and TS9 felt that they had set him up for failure. Other than being told he had to attend his work placement every Friday, he had not been prepared. The teacher stated that

> *It's not his fault, he is not ready for it socially, emotionally, he's not mature enough, it was too overwhelming he had anxiety I mean how can that young person succeed?* (TS9).

Explaining to me that they had not experienced this model of work experience before, TS9 indicated that, whilst it may work for some students, it needs to be negotiated, because, for some students, working a full day is beyond them. TS9 would like to see more advocating on behalf of the student to ensure that they have success in the experience. TS9 reported that their fear was that this young person would not undertake another work experience placement for some time, because this one was so "*horrific*". TS9 added that, not only had the student not attended the placement after the first day, but he was also absent from school for a number of days surrounding this (TS9).

The work experience and vocational learning opportunities can be reflected on by the students and used to assist them to formulate career goals. However, when I asked the teaching and support staff if they were aware of the students having longer-term goals for their education or employment, their responses were varied.

Uncertainty of career goals

Interviews were conducted with the students and staff to gather information relating to the second research question, which sought to find out what influence the FLP experience has on the students' career goals. In the first and second interview sessions, students were asked if their career goals had changed or become more certain, and how their education experience at the FLP impacted on their career goals. The first round of interviews collected a variety of responses in relation to goals, depending on the age and year level of the student. The Year 12 students were more concerned about earning money and finding a job. The younger students advised they had general goals, which were not specifically supported with how they

were going to achieve them, although some showed vague ideas of pathways they would need to take.

One Year 10 student indicated that he did not have any goals at this point in time, and told me that nothing had changed since he started at the FLP. He reported

I'm just trying to get through life (Y10 S2).

A similar response came from a student in Year 11, who told me that he did not have any career goals and nor was he curious about exploring career goals at the time of the interview. A year later, when I interviewed him toward the end of Year 12, he advised me that

I've still no clue what I'll do (Y11 S4).

A Year 10 student indicated how helpful the staff at the FLP had been in assisting her to find a traineeship at a fast food store. However, when I asked her had she discussed her career goals in more depth with the staff, her response was

> *Not really. We sat down to fill out a form to choose which courses and certs we wanted to take and we kind of did this really cool thing how we found out what our best attributes were. We kind of find out what type of people we are. There's like, I don't know, like if we were in another world how will we contribute. It was really cool…we just sat down and talked about all of it and then like I ended up finding two aspects that I love, like science and art. I'm like 'Art Therapy sounds really cool.'* (Y10 S1)

One Year 11 student appeared to have more of an idea about his career direction, which had been developed through the opportunities he was presented with whilst attending the FLP. His work experience had enabled him to gain part-time work with a window cleaning company and he had been so successful that they had asked him to work for them full-time when he completed his education. This was potentially going to lead to him taking over the

business, because the owners were preparing to retire. He told me in the interview in Year 11 that,

> *I didn't really have any goals for the future. I didn't really know what I was going to be doing. So yes, kind of saved me there* (Y11 S1).

He was completing a Certificate III in Cleaning and Maintenance whilst working for this company and was looking forward to moving on to learning about the management and operation aspects of the company. Subsequently, when I interviewed him a year later, his goals had not changed. He had completed his Certificate III and was looking forward to commencing his full-time work with the business on completion of Year 12.

A similar experience had arisen for a Year 10 student, who gained work experience in a motorbike shop. He wanted to commence an apprenticeship in small motor mechanics and saw this as an avenue to allow this to happen. He told me that, once he had finished, he wanted to join the army and become a diesel mechanic. When I asked him if these were his goals before joining the FLP, he stated that,

> *I didn't have them finalised but I did have them as 'it would be nice to be able to achieve that' but I didn't have them as 'yes, I'm going to do that'* (Y10 S3).

I asked him what helped him to become more certain of his goals and his reply was

> *...the fact that I got work experience in the first term and a traineeship in the same year has given me a mindset that 'hey, I could actually achieve that'* (Y10 S3).

Other students were not as certain about their goals. This appeared to be more common amongst the graduating Year 12 group. Money appeared to be an overall driver of goals for this group as their need to survive in the world was a priority. This was particularly evident for one young person who was already living independently. She told me that her most important goal was

> *…making money at the moment for me is a big issue especially living out of home…I know that sounds horrible to say that I'm just doing it for money, but right now money is such a big thing for me* (Y12 S4).

Another Year 12 student talked about her goal of becoming employed full-time. She already had a part-time job and told me that

> *I love my job at the moment but to find another job, a more permanent job… that I love obviously. That's the ultimate goal… just want to be able to support myself and live comfortably, not have to rush around* (Y12 S3).

Another Year 12 student wanted employment, but when I asked about her specific goals, I was informed that she never had goals and did not focus on the future, but rather what was happening for her now, as she believed that determined the future. She stated,

> *I'm sort of focusing on what I'm going to do now to help me get there…I can't tell you what I'd like to do because it could change in a years' time…it's pointless telling anybody that* (Y12 S5).

She had, however, enjoyed her work experience in an aged-care facility, but told me that, if she was to seek work there, she would need to do further study. Whilst she told me she would pursue that in the next year after completing Year 12, her follow up interview 12 months later identified that she had not done this. She had been trying to gain employment in any role and had only just secured some casual work at Woolworths. It was at this point that she told me that she would like to go back and do further study the following year, but would need to go back to the FLP to gain assistance from the ILO (Y12 S5).

The responses from past students who had completed Year 12 at the FLP were mixed. Despite her doubts about her ability to succeed, one student had continued on to study at university. She stated that,

> *I didn't at all think it would be possible because I had failed and dropped out of Year 10. I felt really shit about myself. I was like 'I'm a failure. I can't do anything* (P12 S1).

She then went on to say that the staff at the FLP had a big impact on her goals. She had tried a variety of different work experiences that did not appeal to her and then she kept coming back to her interest to further her education at university. She reported that the staff had supported her goals and directed her toward completing a Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) after Year 12, which enabled her to enrol in a university undergraduate program. At the time of the interview, however, she mentioned that she was struggling with university study and had failed a number of courses (P12 S1).

Another past Year 12 student told me that she did not really have any goals when she commenced at the FLP, although she had been able to further her education and had completed a Diploma in Graphic Design. She was unemployed when we spoke, but was actively seeking work in the field of graphic design. Her journey through the FLP included commencing a TPP at a local university, although she was not successful. She explained that,

> *I did that [TPP] and I couldn't do it for like many personal reasons and then I went back and did it and I still had the same issue. So I withdrew again and ended up doing my diploma* (P12 S2).

She further explained that she did not know what she was going to do whilst at the FLP and this is why she commenced the TPP. She thought that, if she could complete the TPP, then she might be able to figure out what to do next (P12 S2).

Another past student also had no goals on completion of his secondary schooling at the FLP. He had completed both Years 11 and 12 at the FLP and told me that his only goal whilst there was

> *…basically just to get through, finish Year 12 and get my QCE* (P12 S3).

This was all he had focused on and he told me that his goals had not changed whilst at school. He was consequently in his second year of unemployment and was thinking about returning to further education in order to study childcare.

The career goals of students as outlined above are mixed. Some were more certain of their goals on completing their education whilst some were still trying to find suitable employment or continue with further education. Teaching staff were mentioned as being helpful for some students in assisting them with finding a pathway post school.

Throughout the interviews and observations, I asked all of the teaching staff about whether they were aware of the students' individual career goals, how that had become aware, and what contribution they made to facilitate the students' achievement of their career goals. There were a variety of responses, but the most prominent was that the teachers focused on the goal of students completing the Senior Education Training (SET) Plan in Year 10 in order to work toward achieving the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE).

However, a teaching staff member indicated that career goals are discussed all through the students' journeys at 'the School'. TS3 stated,

> *So every year a student does a senior education training plan and we talk about career goals. It is built into our curriculum in English and also in pastoral care* (TS3).

This staff member's view was that there is a lot of discussion and talking with the students about their career goals in various forums, but this is not necessarily through formulated career sessions. TS3 viewed the work experience program as a way of getting students

> *…to rule out what they don't like…have a go. Don't rule something out until you've actually tried it…trial and error is part of our career program, discussion in the curriculum…advertising what's available…making students aware of what connections they can make* (TS3).

In addition to the ILO role, 'the School' also has a part-time Guidance Officer who works one day per week. According to TS12, the role of the Guidance Officer is to get to know the students and then to

> *…steer and engineer students into say a Tertiary Preparation Program or a Cert III program…you get to know what pathways are of interest to those students and you can then link with other professionals within the organisation* (TS12).

There was some indication from teaching staff that getting to know what interests the students happens through the initial Senior Education Training (SET) planning process that begins in Year 10. The SET planning process is where the students choose their subjects for Year 11 and 12. Whilst this process is aimed at suiting the students' interests, it also focusses on ensuring the students undertake the courses that will allow them to gain the necessary credit points to graduate with a QCE. One teacher explained that, if students

> *…name their aspirations or their career goals…we firmly try and plant them in a workplace or get them in a certificate or make sure they do well enough in their studies to be able to provide that pathway* (TS5).

TS5 admitted that there may be some barriers, in particular, students not having the freedom to undertake tertiary entrance subjects, but TS5 believed that providing opportunities for work experience was key. TS5 told me that students may think they know what they want to do, but

> *…then they go into placement for a little bit and they absolutely hate it. So then we revisit the set plan and see if they can find something that they like* (TS5).

Another teacher explained that the students' career goals are based largely around gaining employment and that not so many of them would be interested in further education. TS4 stated that,

> *They all yearn for that independence of a job…they've all wanted to get a job. Further education…not so much for very many of them…definitely apprenticeships, traineeships. There's a fair few that will go on to apprenticeships next year I think* (TS4).

TS9 approaches this by speaking with the Year 10s involved in the Certificate II in Functional Skills and Knowledge and also uses the Coaching Young People for Success (Life Business Consultancy, 2016) goal-setting model with the students. TS9 stated that,

> *I think our young people struggle to see beyond sometimes day to day or next week so that's often difficult, some you can have really clear conversations around their goals, where they see themselves* (TS9).

Whilst TS9 admitted there are pathways available through the FLP, it was an isolated process for teachers to navigate these. Part of the reasoning for this was that the Guidance Officer/Careers Counsellor only comes in once a week making it difficult to get time to discuss pathways for students in more detail (TS9).

When the staff were asked about their knowledge of the career development interventions used within the FLP, it became apparent that there was a distinct gap in their knowledge regarding what career development actually means. Only one teacher was able to draw on some of the work they had been doing to include career development into their curriculum. This, however, was very world-of-work-focussed and not so much on developing reflective competencies in students or developing the students' career adaptabilities. This teacher used the competencies from the Australian Blueprint of Career Development (ABCD) (Ministerial Council for Employment Education and Youth Affairs, 2010) to assist in developing modules for the Functional Skills and Knowledge (FSK) course that students completed if they were unable to undertake English and Maths at Year 11 and 12. However,

even though TS5 had mentioned this alignment to the ABCD, they mainly referred to career development interventions as developing resumes, completing mock interviews, and understanding the requirements of the workplace (TS5). Whilst this is valuable information and a requirement to assist young people in being job ready, there was no evidence of a deeper level connection of the career development interventions required to assist the young people to develop their career adaptability.

Although I was also told that students can access tertiary preparation programs (TPP) whilst they are at the FLP, I was advised that there has not been great success with it. One teacher indicated that it may be linked to maturity and the students not being ready for the step-up to university studies, however, this teacher also mentioned that there is a large gap between the FLPs English communication subject and the TPP requirements (TS5). TS5 went on to say that their focus is more on

> *…getting the student's mind right and their way of thinking and it (TPP) could be something that they'll maybe down the track come back to…often get students who are very keen to go to university, but sometimes it is more about getting them prepared and ready to take that next step… do not want to set the students up for failure* (TS5).

Discussion about student career goals inevitably lead on to the importance of students gaining the academic qualification of a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). This was not only highlighted in discussions with staff, but also with interviews with students. This leads to the third theme *Importance of the QCE* which will now be discussed.

Theme 3: Pros and cons of the QCE

Whilst interviewing the teaching and support staff, it became evident that ‘the School’ has a mandate to ensure that students gain a QCE upon completion of Year 12. Through observation of classes and the interview data, it became very clear that this was ‘the School’s’

primary focus. There are a variety of ways in which a QCE can be gained, however, the importance of students gaining their QCE appeared to overshadow any other career development considerations for students and it appeared through the data there were both pros and cons regarding the completion of the QCE.

The QCE is a senior school qualification recognising a broad range of learning options. To qualify for the QCE, there is a requirement to gain 20 credit points, made up from a range of areas, such as senior school subjects, vocational and educational training (VET), workplace and community learning, and university subjects undertaken at school (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2015). The certificate also requires the student to have met prescribed numeracy and literacy standards.

The participant school is an Education Queensland school and therefore follows the philosophy of ensuring that students obtain a QCE. Taking this approach with marginalised students requires a fair amount of flexibility to assist students with reaching this qualification. Whilst it appears to provide the students with a sense of success and achievement, there were some pitfalls that became apparent throughout the data collection process.

The initial codes that were used to inform the themes consisted of; *did it matter*, *I graduated high school, looks good on the resume* and *I need the points to complete QCE*. These were formulated into sub-themes of *Pros of QCE completion* and *Cons of QCE completion* and will discussed in turn as follows.

Pros of QCE completion

Interviews with students revealed that they were unaware of the advantages of their certificate qualifications, other than that they would look good on their resumes. The importance of the QCE to the students and some parents are highlighted in a variety of responses.

An interview with a student who was about to complete Year 12 at the FLP revealed his excitement over achieving his secondary education, although he only saw his qualifications as something that would look good on a resume. When I asked him what qualifications he would have on completing his secondary education he told me that the most important one would be the QCE. He stated:

> *So, at the end of this year I'll be walking away – I'm not like 'Oh my god, this is so impressive.' I just think it's really cool to have them. So I'll have a Certificate 2 in Tourism and a Certificate 1 and a bit of a Certificate 2 in IT and whatnot. So I'll have a few things there which allow me to – it obviously looks good on a resume and kind of even puts me in – like that could be something which I want to pursue further if time goes on. So I'll have a few things here and there which is cool but definitely the biggest thing for me is that Certificate of Education. That for me is 'I've finished school and I got a certificate to say that I did. That's the big important part and of all the things which I've done and whatnot, that's the thing that me and my family are like 'You've got to do that.' Mum's like 'Look, I don't mind any of this other stuff, but you need this. Make this happen. I don't care about whether or not you do that or whatnot, just get this piece of paper.' So that's been my biggest thing with this school and finishing it up* (Y12 S3).

Another student indicated he considered the points for the QCE to be the most important part of the resume. I asked this Year 11 student what qualifications or certifications he thought he would have at the end of Year 12 and his response was:

> *Right now, I am doing an IDMT (Certificate in Information Digital Media Technology), so I will probably have a III by then. I have a Cert II in Business, I am going to try and get a Cert III. I have my Cert III retail from work, because of the traineeship. I'll have*

my QCE points and like a basic certificate saying that I have graduated and that, so that might help for the resume (Y10 S1).

Another student indicates the QCE as the biggest qualification she will have when she finishes Year 12 by stating

I'll have my certificate II in hospitality, my certificates I and II in sport and recreation, and my QCE. That's the biggest one and I've forgotten it (Y11 S2).

Again, the most important qualification for her was the QCE, although she would also have some other very good qualifications that may help her with gaining employment.

Even though many students did not appear to understand the learning outcomes that were attached to their gaining of the QCE, some of the students articulated their sense of success by graduating Year 12. When I asked one student what the QCE meant to her, she responded with:

I think it's pretty important. None of my family members graduated, and I graduate a week before my sister. So, to say that you're the first one in your family to graduate is a pretty important thing, and you can hold it above everyone else in your family. You'd be like well, at least I graduated. I think it's a great thing, because you worked so hard for 12 years, and then you can just sit back and be like, I finally did it. I made it. After everything that happened in my schooling life, I got there, and I never have to look at it again (Y11 S2).

The perception of success and achievement came through in the interviews with the students however there were also some negatives that were reported about the completion of the QCE.

Cons of QCE completion

There were also some students who revealed they felt that the QCE may not have been useful to them. A student who I had interviewed 12 months following her completion of Year 12, indicated her wonder at what the QCE actually meant to her. When asked if the certificates she completed had helped her with gaining employment, her response was:

> *Not really, no. Like you do you know your music or whatever in year 10, and then you get…it depends how many QCE points you get or whatever as to what you have to really do. But the subjects don't really do it unless you actually do TAFE and go through them and sort of do it* (Y12 S5).

This student was referring to the Certificate II qualifications they completed at the FLP to gain the necessary points to graduate with a QCE. When I asked her if the QCE had been helpful to her in gaining employment, she responded with:

> *I don't know, I haven't really asked many people like do I need a QCE for this, or does it help by graduating year 12 or not? I did, but would it make it any difference if I didn't graduate year 12, that's what I'd like to know. Just to see if the QCE points really did matter or not* (Y12 S5).

I asked her if any of the employers she had approached for jobs had specified the completion of the QCE as a requirement. She stated,

> *No. Like I have got on my resume and that that I graduated year 12 of you know 2016, and all this, and all this experience, and everywhere else* (Y12 S5).

It appeared this was not a requirement for the jobs for which she had been applying and that she was beginning to question the importance of her learning. At this point, she advised me that she would have to go back to TAFE the following year to complete a Certificate III to help her to gain employment.

There was also evidence to suggest that the pressure to complete the QCE was quite stressful for students. For example, one student's stress was evident in her following comment

> *…with the workload…because the QCE points are such a huge thing. It wasn't really last year…this year it's gotten so hectic…it's all about getting in your assessments and making sure that you pass, and trying to have good time management* (Y11 S2).

It was clear from the interviews with teachers that they placed a strong importance on the students meeting the requirements to gain a QCE. One of the senior teaching staff, TS12, indicated that the percentage of students who complete a QCE in the FLP is "*increasingly high*". TS12 reported that,

> *…in 2016, there were only 2 students out of a total of 16 who did not attain the QCE…this was due to those two students both being late enrolments to the FLP, making it very difficult for them to catch up and complete the necessary requirements of the QCE…QCE attainment is tracked ad nauseam here without being ridiculous…because there are so many things you can do legitimately to assist a child to get one and not just to say they got a QCE either it is legitimate work* (TS12).

TS12 also said that they believe, through their research, that employers are increasingly valuing the QCE statement in relation to employing student's post-secondary school. TS12 went on to state:

> *So we want them to really have it in their resumes if it can be got so then it's talked up particularly throughout Year 12 from the beginning of year 12 certainly in year 11 as well and year 10 but more and more in year 12. And the fact that it is talked up at the*

FLP by the HOD and by the individual case manager of Year 12s that means that the students then come to realise it is of value so they play the game if you like (TS12).

In addition, TS12 advised me that, if the students were left to think about completing the QCE for themselves

…they probably wouldn't think about it which isn't great (TS12).

Whilst this particular approach was supported in other teacher interviews, one particular teacher, TS2, had the most to say about the way in which QCE had become a focus. I had commenced asking the teacher whether they assisted the students in achieving their career goals. The teacher advised me that, apart from discussing career goals in an initial Year 10 set planning meeting, they are not revisited again with the students. Instead TS2 told me that

…as individuals, in Year 12, we're talking to them about their QCE, I will sit them down and say, "here is your QCE points, you are on target to achieve your QCE, but you have a small margin". I will discuss with them how that's going. It's not really self-reflection, it's more me going, "look, here is the way it is". It's some sort of administrative kind of approach to it, I suppose. (TS2)

I asked the teacher to elaborate further on what would occur should a student not be achieving passes in their subjects that may impact on them graduating with a QCE, and what would be done about it. TS2's perception was that they did not know whether it really means that much to the students. TS2 stated that

We put a lot of emphasis on it so that they become quite aware of it and it becomes their problem, I suppose…I don't even know that in the community it's really an important qualification, but that's our push (TS2).

This response is in contrast to the TS12's belief that the QCE is important to employers.

This teacher then elaborated on some of the history that they heard about the QCE by stating the following

> *People hadn't worried about it too much up until the point where politicians stood up in Parliament and said something about students achieving—how come only 50% of students—or, it was even less I think, of students achieving QCE." There's been a push on ever since then to get most—some schools even get 100% of kids—we're 98% or something like that. It's a big push for our year 12s to all achieve QCE. If they are not achieving QCE, what actually happens is, if at some stage in Year 12, they are judged to be not likely to achieve it, then there is a big push for them to move to work, or possibly, basically, not finish the Year 12 course. It's not really something that's said out loud, I suppose, but that is the way I see it going* (TS2).

It was at this point that I asked the teacher what they had meant by this comment about the students not being likely to achieve a QCE and, if they would be asked to leave the FLP, if this was the case. The teacher's response below was a considered one, and they appeared deeply affected by what they were sharing.

> *I would say that they're—yeah, if they are ineligible and they are not likely to—then they will start going in the conversations about—look, I don't know if we are helping you, maybe you need to move to a similar program, or some work, or you know—you're not going to get a qualification out of this, or—you know? I mean, a student in that position is probably not attending very well. It is quite easy to make a case against and that case can be made, I suppose and they—they have to move into training, or work, under the government's rules and I guess that is what happens. They go to TAFE,*

> *or maybe a program, like a work ready program if they can find one, or full time work if they can get it, or enough work that they reduce the amount of school.* (TS2)

The teacher then moved on to give me an example of a recent case that had been upsetting to them, whereby a student had been asked to leave the FLP.

> *We had a girl who finished out just at the end of the last two weeks who—she's five weeks from graduating, she was not going to get a QCE, I guess, based on her history. I think the case was made with her around attendance. I don't know whether she's moved to training, or work… I think probably training. I think she is doing TAFE, so I think they probably must have moved her to a TAFE subject. I think that is the way that works.*

TS2 expressed disappointment, by stating that

> *…this young person was unable to graduate with the rest of her Year 12 cohort or attend the graduation formal even*t (TS2).

It appeared that, due to her not having attended the required amount of days to graduate with the QCE, her enrolment was cancelled. The non-attendance could have been related to any number of reasons including but not limited to illness, caring for a sick parent/guardian, working to earn an income and mental health issues.

Through speaking with staff it was evident that the academic qualification of the QCE is an important focus for 'the School'. Many of the year 12 and past year 12 students placed similar importance on this also. I had observed a session which was conducted for the Year 10 students on how to prepare their Senior Education Training (SET) plan whereby the importance of choosing the right amount of subjects to complete the QCE was emphasised.

However, the overall outcomes for students on completion of their secondary education will differ for a variety of reasons. These reasons need to be considered holistically to ensure students are prepared for successful graduate outcomes, not just obtaining a QCE.

Post QCE transitions

The likely transitions that students will make on completion of secondary education are to employment, further education and training, and unemployment/underemployment. The teaching staff expect that students will have something to go to after completing their education in the FLP. Employment appears to be a highly regarded outcome by the teaching staff as a successful option, as many of the students require an income to meet their survival needs or to break generational welfare in their family. For students who are not ready for employment, such as those with mental health conditions, the preferred option is for them to undertake a Certificate III program at the local TAFE in the year following completion of year 12. This program is fully funded by the Government on the Certificate III Guarantee Program for Year 12 school leavers, although the options available are quite limited.

In order to find out more about the transitions of the participants, I asked past students about their journeys post Year 12, and teaching and support staff about their views on student graduate outcomes. Some of the students had continued to work in the positions that they had secured whilst at the FLP, although for some, there had been several part-time jobs. One student was attending university, but had been struggling with the content and was considering changing programs after she had failed a number of subjects. Some students were unemployed and had not had any success in gaining suitable employment.

Some past Year 12 students thought they would be able to gain full time employment but several were employed casually in the retail or hospitality sector. They indicated that this fulfilled their need for survival, however, they did not foresee their long-term future

involving jobs in these areas. For example PY12 S4 had gained casual work in the hospitality industry, and, although getting several hours, when asked if this is what she had planned doing after leaving school her answer was

> *No, not really; that's what I would have liked to have done, but not as my forever job, if you know what I mean. Like, on the side* (PY12 S4).

Another student, PY12 S5, had been unemployed for several months after leaving the FLP. She was getting by with assistance from her parent however she said

> *when I left school, I was still working at the cafe I was working at when I was in school, but that was like once a week and three hours* (PY12 S5).

She did, however, report she had gained some casual employment with Woolworths and was hoping to commence soon after as she had recently completed the induction training.

Examples of students not gaining full-time employment also included one who had completed a Diploma, but who was still looking for employment and another who had not worked at all in 2 years, apart from a 2-week trial at a newsagency and, consequently, he was thinking of returning to study.

One of the students (Y12 S1), however, saw himself as quite successful in gaining employment. When I interviewed him just before he was about to complete Year 12, he had informed me that he had gained employment as a farm hand and would be taking that up as soon as he had completed school. In his interview 12 months later, he advised me that this had not worked out as well as expected and he had been let go after 3 months due to not getting on well with his employer. He was, however, successful in gaining employment through a labour hire company almost immediately following. This new position involved laying bitumen for roads and, at the time of his second interview, he reported that he was thoroughly enjoying this. He noted that it was something he thought he would never see

himself doing, however, it had turned out for the best. He added that he was hoping to be employed permanently by the company and enjoyed the new skills he was learning.

It is difficult to track down past students, as they often change their phone numbers or other contact details once they have left school. The number of past students who participated in this study was only small, three in total, because of the aforementioned difficulty.

Teachers, however, were able to provide me with their perspectives of graduate outcomes. For example, one teacher (TS1) told me about one young person who graduated in the previous year who had completed a certificate in business and was successful in gaining employment with a regional council and was apparently doing quite well. Another student TS1 knew of was completing an apprenticeship in butchering and was looking "*healthier than ever*". TS1 stated that

> *Some kids are just not doing anything though, but then that is probably like statistically what will happen. So at least they get some certificates that they have got stuff on a resume, but it is more than that that they need* (TS1).

This was supported by information from another teacher (TS2), who described what they knew about three of their past students who were living in a house together

> *…one of them has half a job. I asked one of the other ones how they pay the rent. She said 'Well, I do a lot of work around the house. That is how I pay my rent', and the other girl, I don't even actually know what her situation is. She's like graduated a year ago. I know the student that was here, like when she came to school would sometimes come in very tired and having stayed up all night with the other two who don't really work much, just even watching TV or gaming or talking, or maybe drinking – whatever it was that they were doing. It was not supporting a lifestyle which would lead them to more work and be able to support a job. These are really intelligent students. Every one*

of them was a great student and got really good marks. It's just that they don't come from a culture perhaps which knows how to support that. (TS2)

The aforementioned responses indicate there are some barriers that may exist for FLP students as they transition out of secondary school and their impact on students' graduate outcomes. The sub-theme of *barriers to graduate discussions* will now be discussed.

Barriers to graduate transitions

The first and second round of interviews sought information from students and teachers and support staff about what type of things may prevent students from achieving their goals when they complete Year 12. There was a solid indication that parent/family issues, lack of supportive environment, and mental health issues could hamper the students in their successful transitions post-secondary school. Other issues were concerned with public transport and getting to and from either employment or education courses, lack of motivation, confidence and substance abuse. These issues have been broken down into sub-sub-themes which will now be elaborated upon. Whilst all intentions of the researcher were made to elicit information from the students themselves, there were difficulties in gaining a number of responses from the past students as there were only three participants. This will be mentioned in the limitations section. The following sub-sub-themes are; parent and family issues, loss of supportive environment, mental health issues, transportation and other barriers.

Parent and family issues

Strong feedback from teachers indicated that parents are some of the biggest barriers the students have in relation to achieving their education and pursuing career goals. For example, TS6 told me that

…one of the biggest barriers that they have got is their parents…we are fighting against often generational welfare, generational ignorance (TS6).

This teacher explained that many of the parents were young parents who had not completed their secondary education, perceiving that it made it more difficult for them to understand the support their child needs to achieve their goals. On the other hand, some students were reported to have supportive parents and I was told by TS6 that these students' issues are then easily dealt with.

Following is an example of students' family situations that was explained to me by one of the teaching staff

> *We have had kids, the grandmothers come in to enrol them and grandma is 40 because you know what I mean, they were children of children of children. So grandma was 15, mum was then 14 when she had the next…You get another one who like a (student) has got a brother at home who is violent, who has got his own child, whose partner has had 11 children by the time she is about 25. No, it was not that many. Sorry, seven children, three of whom have been removed from her, one who has got – you know what I mean. She (student) gets on the phone and speaks to her mum and says 'did you tell them that?' That is how she speaks to her mother. Then her mother will come in and say 'You are bad teachers. How dare you do this to my child!'* (TS6).

What this teacher said they found challenging about this attitude from parents was that the students often are doing very well, but it is not recognised by their parents. TS6 told me about a student who had achieved quite well in a task and, when asked if she had shown her mother, the student replied with "*Mum did not care*". TS6 informed me that the student's mother had been known to speak disparagingly about the teachers and 'the School'. The student made comments to the teachers, such as "*Mum thought it was stupid that you did this*", referring to the mother's questioning of the way other students were disciplined, and "*Mum wanted to ring up and tell you that you're all fucking idiots*" (TS6).

TS6 reported that, in addition to this, there are parents who continue to enable "*bad behaviour*" by supporting their students' poor decisions. The teacher's concern is that the parents do not value education and therefore make it harder for the teaching staff to encourage the students to value it. For example, some parents will phone in to say that their child is sick, but other students have told the teachers that the student is not sick, but is doing something else. TS6 added that, if teachers contact a parent to ask if their child can stay an hour longer at school to finish an assessment, it is not uncommon for them to be told, *"…only if that is ok with (the student)*", and for the student to leave, because this has been supported by the parent. Another example provided by TS6 was where a first aid session had to be rescheduled and was going to go at least 30 minutes beyond the end of the school day. One of the support staff phoned all the parents to see if parents would be okay with picking up their children a little later. According to one of the teachers

> *One parent said 'if it is okay with (student) and (student) said 'no.' Then she rang back and said 'no, (student's got plans).' I could not care less what plans she has got. But you know what I mean?* (TS6).

TS6 noted that the teachers are often fighting against total indifference by some parents and that there is no support for education. TS6 stated that

> *…like in the case of (student) where it almost seems to be actively –I said 'did you show your mum that?' 'Why would I do that? She'd think I was an idiot.' You know what I mean? Just totally unpleasant* (TS6).

Further to this, other teachers talked about the lack of role models for students. For example, TS3 mentioned that

> *You cannot deny the lack of role modelling. That is a big one. They often come from backgrounds where work is not a priority and they do not see people working in their families. It is quite acceptable not to work…that is a big barrier* (TS3).

It appears to be a common belief shared among teachers that the culture of many the families is one of non-support or, disinterest in, their child's education. One teacher believed that it may even go beyond that, by telling me

> *It is more not being that interested in being a parent quite often. I don't know whether their lives are too busy or they're just not able to get it together. It could be just medical issues. We have a number of parents who've got cancer and stuff in their lives which just makes it very hard for them to be a parent. So, not necessarily blaming the parent I'm just saying that would be common to our students is that they're really struggling to find a culture to belong to that drives them into normal conforming lifestyle I suppose* (TS2).

Another family issue came to light in an interview with one of the teaching staff, who informed me that, if the students are working and earning money, but other family members are not, then this can create problems in the family. TS3 stated that

> *If they are earning money, people in the family who aren't, will often think 'what's yours is ours' and they often take the money. So the incentive is lost to work. We've seen that quite a bit. So students who have had a great job and are getting good money, they're not able to keep it and save it. It's distributed amongst the family which sadly they then start to think 'I'm the only one working' and it's just – yeah. So that's sad and a big barrier.* (TS3)

On one particular visit to the FLP I had been waiting near the office to advise that I had arrived and to sign in. It was the first period following the lunch break. I observed a female

also waiting to be attended to. She looked like she was getting quite impatient and in a hurry. When the office manager greeted her to see what it was she needed, the lady stated that she was there to pick (student) up and that they should be ready and waiting. When advised that the class had just commenced and asked if there was an arrangement for the student to leave early, the lady advised that if the student did not come now, then, they would not be able to get a lift home. She told the office manager that the mother had made arrangements for the student to be picked up by her (an aunty) at this time otherwise there was no lift home. It was evident that the lady was annoyed that the student was not ready to go and there was no consideration for interrupting the class or that the student may miss out on learning. When the student eventually came out of the class he appeared embarrassed and unaware of the situation. From the woman's behaviour it appeared that there was a distinct lack of valuing of the student's education and learning time which supported some of what the teaching staff had advised through their interviews.

Whilst parent and family issues can be mediated through the social support the students receive at the FLP, there is concern for the students that when they leave the FLP their resources are limited.

Loss of supportive environment post-graduation

Not only do some of the students face challenges with the lack of support from parents and associated family issues, but it appears that, when they leave the FLP, the loss of the supportive environment impacts greatly on their transition success. The interviews with the teaching staff revealed a number of concerns regarding when the student leaves the FLP. One teacher explained that

> *I think not having us there, not having (the ILO) there, not having an understanding adult that can help them fill out forms, for just a really obvious example* (TS1).

Another teacher supported this by telling me that

> *…it seems a shame to just go 'snip' and cut them off and let them go. It is like we need to have this tapering off or this ability to come back* (TS2).

TS2 added that the students are supported in the FLP and encouraged to undertake work experience and try new things, but once they leave this environment, they often no longer have this support and encouragement. In interviews with the past students, it became obvious that this was also a concern for many of them. They revealed that they did not know how to follow up on enrolments at TAFE and would wait up to 12 months before going back to seek help from the ILO at the FLP.

Support was not only something they required from their home environment, but it was in the workplace as well. Whilst undertaking work experience and work placements at the FLP, the ILO can check on how the students are going with the employer and work out any issues that may occur. Once the students are on their own and expected to be working, they can come across situations in the workplace that may not end favourably for them. One of the teacher's responses explained below how the employer's support for the student was essential

> *I understand that everyone has issues and they have to overcome those, but these kids, they just get hyper anxiety and all these things. So as soon as they present to a workplace they might have done great in the interview but they need that ongoing support to say 'you're actually doing a good job' or 'this is something you need to work on' but in a way that they can respond to. I guess that's a hard one because from an employer's point of view they're hiring someone to do the job but from the student's point of view they're trying to better themselves but they're also trying to overcome these barriers which is a fine line* (TS5).

This was supported in a response from another teacher who reported that

> *They need a supportive group, people who when they get work, encourage them to stay and work and to move through that work to the next work if they're not happy with that, then to have successes and when this doesn't go so well, to support them through that. Just that social support I suppose that most of us probably don't even realise we've got. And self-esteem and confidence. See, when we are here we are always encouraging. We are not building them up to burst them or anything like that. If they are not doing the right thing they get told, you know what I mean, but we encourage them all the time and that's what we've been discussing recently. So when they leave that's gone. That bubble, that security blanket is gone* (TS7).

A teacher TS2 told me that the students often say

> *…can I stay here a bit longer? Many of them say that straight, in that many words. 'I don't want to leave. Can we stay here a bit longer?'*(TS2)

Many of the teaching staff mentioned in the interviews the need for an extra year in addition to Year 12, where they could provide a transitioning program to support the young people to overcome transitioning issues such as losing the supportive environment of the FLP. One teacher stated that

> *We often feel we need a Year 13 because they get all this support and then they sort of feel a little bit lost. Some of the things we've noticed, we'll line them up in things to transition from school but sometimes when they don't get that extra support they will drop off and that's a bit of a shame. We would like more funding to have a Year 13 when it's a whole year transition, the 12 month transition and then you sort of can really focus 100% on career because whilst they're at school we still have so many curriculum demands* (TS3).

TS7 acknowledged how difficult it can be for the students in the year after graduation. TS7 had this to say about following up with students

> *I believe we should follow them a little bit more for 6 to 10 months after Grade 12 because they have gone from this secure environment out and it's not that their parents don't care. They just don't have the tools or the skills to encourage the children to keep seeking a future* (TS7).

TS11 also explained to me the discussions they, and other teachers had in relation to how to support the students once they leave

> *We were talking almost like a 13th year, but it to be almost like a space where young people can come and finish off their certs, a bit like a drop in, check in place, just that year of transition to further see them in, you know, connected into the workplace and feeling confident in what they are doing. Sometimes, at school there is a lot of distraction. Things to be excited about—like the formal and schoolies and end of year, but then, when all that is over, there is the realisation that, "Oh, I may not have finished my work. I didn't get my cert done." Or, "I want to go and do my Cert III now, but I am really unsure about how that is going to happen." Having that capacity to transition some of those students, because we often have students come back, particularly to see students that after Year 12—they don't know what to do, you know? Nothing has worked for them and I guess they may not have shown a lot of commitment when they were here at school and the realisation has hit that, "Wow, I'm out in the big wide world now and no one wants to support me like they did at Flexi." I guess there comes a—one of the issues with having such a supportive environment is that when that finishes, there is nothing after that* (TS11).

This transition phase was also mentioned by TS12. Indicating that, whilst it is part of the FLPs main underpinning work to build confidence in the students, there was still the need for support after they leave 'the School' (TS12). TS12 stated the following

> *So building confidence is crucial to their future resilience if you like and career tenacity I suppose. So interestingly what we have noticed over the years and we have talked about this as a staff and how we could address it is once students finish their (FLP) experience because they are so attached, emotionally attached, thankful, its they will use these words themselves the kids 'the family that they haven't had', then for them to leave, even though it's exciting to go into the next thing an on um we find that they still need support so we have talked about, now what have I called that, the after-care program, we have often talked about the after care, what are we offering, what does it look like, sure we can say come back and see us we love it drop in and we do but what have we really got in place for those kids that have something great to go to but don't really want to leave because there is that* (TS12).

During my observations and informal conversations with the students as they were about to graduate from the FLP, there were many comments about how sad they were to be leaving such a supportive environment. The FLP had become somewhat of another family and one from which they would feel a significant sense of loss upon graduation. This impending concern for students who are about to leave may also be related to their own awareness of mental health issues. For some their anxiety may increase as they face the transition out of school and for others it may impact them once they have left.

Mental health issues

As mentioned in the review of the literature a lot of young people who attend FLPs experience mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and trauma (te Riele, Mills,

McGregor, & Baroutsis, 2017). The following findings discuss the mental health issues as they relate to the young person's achieving successful graduate outcomes. The individual system influences that affect some young people in the FLP relate to varying mental health issues, including anxiety and depression. This was a particularly prevalent issue amongst the students, despite indications of a significant improvement in many students' social and emotional well-being over the course of their enrolment. A student who had enrolled in university, spoke of her difficulties with her mental health. She saw it as a potential barrier for her, and noted that it impacted on her ability to continue her studies at university. Her response, when I asked her what barriers she thought affected her achievements, she stated

> *...probably my mental health is a big thing because I still struggle with that quite a bit but I'm working on it and yeah, it does interfere a lot. I struggle with my subjects and stuff* (P12 S1).

This was not an uncommon perception by students of a barrier to achievement. For example, another student (Y11 S2), who had experienced mental health issues, and was also the sole carer for her father who had significant illness, reported at the time of interview that she "…*had things under control*…", with the assistance of professionals, although she still felt it was something that had the potential to prevent her from achieving her goals in the future. She stated the following

> *In all honestly I think there is probably if my mental health, if that becomes bad again, I think that that could definitely stop things. Obviously if my father's health went downhill really bad then that could also stop, like me not being motivated to do anything. But I don't really see that happening. Obviously I'm prepared for it but I don't see it happening any time soon hopefully* (Y11 S2).

However a year later, just before she completed her Year 12 studies, her father passed away. Her resilience and strength did not fail her as she graduated with her QCE and looked forward to continuing her employment with a disability support agency.

Some students also demonstrated a lack of self-confidence in their abilities, which prevented them from being able to try new things or put themselves into situations that might take them out of their comfort zones. For example, one student identified herself as the barrier, by saying

> *I have a very good habit of hindering myself a little bit, whether it be a loss of motivation, simply feeling uncomfortable and unwilling to put myself in a situation which I feel is a bit out there for me. I have a tendency to kind of back out and kind of sit in the back of the room. So I think definitely that could impact me a bit negatively as time goes on* (Y12 S3).

TS10 also agreed that the barriers for students are particularly centred on mental health issues and are not easily overcome. TS10 made the following comments

> *So the mental health barriers, whether they be around anxiety, depression, other diagnosed mental health difficulties…some of them have been quite severe and limiting to the extent that it's made it very hard for those young people to study, and to continue in a forward direction. Sometimes it's five steps forward, and four steps back. So it's still very much the mental health barriers that I think really come into play when they leave. I suppose the damage…I don't know whether that's the right word, but some of our young people have come through some pretty traumatic events in their lives, and you don't heal from them just because you come back to school for two years. Some of those traumatic events are going to stay with them for the rest of their life, you know? Some of our students have been abuse victims, for example. Some of them have been*

> *victims of domestic violence, physical violence. They've seen a lot, they've been exposed to a lot. So while we're working to try and make them as independent young people as possible, the reality is for some, it's going to take a long time for them to get their life settled. For some, it may be never at all. That's the reality* (TS10).

When I interviewed one particular student who was about to complete Year 12, she indicated that she was interested in studying creative writing at university in the future. I asked her what may prevent her from acting on this interest and pursuing further study. She replied with the following

> *Probably like myself telling myself that I couldn't do it and I'd probably believe myself, so I just wouldn't bother. Or other people telling me. I had someone tell me a few months ago that I'm never going to get into uni and I'm only going through high school because it's smart and easy and anyone could do it and you don't have to be smart to do it and stuff. I kind of took that to heart. But then I was like 'screw you. I can do it.' I'm about to graduate. My last report card was beautiful. My mum got sent the report card in the mail and she told me about it. She's like 'I think I got the wrong report card', and all that. My mum was proud of me and that was such a good like – at the moment it was like 'thanks for being proud of me mum' and then at the same time it was kind of like 'screw you mum. I knew I was smart.' On both levels it was kind of good to tell the people who called me 'stupid'. It was like I'm doing something right obviously.* (Y12 S4)

Another student (Y12 S5) also expressed some concerns when I interviewed her toward the end of her completion of Year 12. She reported that she had nothing to go to at the time, although she had mentioned an interest in further study in the aged-care field. I asked her if there was anything that may prevent her from pursuing this interest and she responded with

> *As much as you could probably say 'no' but you don't know what can happen. Anything can happen, either you just don't have the motivation anymore because you're not attending – after school you're not attending school anymore, so you don't have the motivation to go and do anything and you just sort of get lazy with your life and not do it. I think that's probably what I'm scared of is I get lazy and just not try and go into anything.* (Y12 S5)

Observing the students in the interviews I became aware that for many of them their experiences of past trauma and mental health conditions continued to play a part in their life. They expressed their concerns that whilst they were dealing with their issues there was a real potential that these things could prevent them from achieving their goals in the future. The student who felt uncomfortable for example in placing themselves outside their comfort zone, displayed a shyness that confirmed this and her actions were indicative of someone experiencing an anxiousness around being interviewed.

General observations of classroom activities, particularly mentoring sessions whereby social and emotional topics were discussed, highlighted the fragility of some of the students. For example, there were occasions when the students did not want to discuss the topics, displaying defensive techniques and removing themselves from the situations. In other examples the students were keen to open up to their mentors and discuss their personal experiences.

Transportation

Many of the students leave the FLP at an age when they are able attain a driver's licence, however the findings indicated that this is often not achieved. This could be due to the cost involved or reliance on the family having a car and the time to take the young person for driving lessons. Even for students who have gained their licence, it is unlikely that they

will have the funds to purchase their own car, let alone be able to afford to maintain one, particularly if they do not have a job. In addition, lack of transportation makes it very difficult for young people to get to job interviews or, if they are successful in gaining employment, to get to and from their place of employment. Living in a regional town can place some pressure on young people as they navigate public transport from outlying areas. They may not have the access to the public transport networks that young people have in metropolitan areas. This becomes a significant barrier for the young people to overcome should they wish to find and sustain suitable employment or attend further education and training. The following statements from two teachers support this

> *So, they don't have a way to get to work even though all their intentions are to get there. It's just impossible for them. No matter how hard they try there's always going to be that barrier and they try and overcome. So they try and get there but just from situations that you've seen that's a huge barrier* (TS5).

> *I think the other one is transport. They often don't have cars. They often leave here without their licence or a learner's permit and they often don't have cars to do their 100 hours. So that's a huge barrier*. (TS3)

It was obvious in my field observations and general conversations with staff and students that transport was a concern for many students. Since completing the data collection, I have been made aware that the FLP have been able to secure the services of a program aimed at assisting young people with gaining their driving lesson hours required to undertake the licence test. The FLP newsletter which I received in August 2018 highlights aspects of the program and that it

> *…aims to provide young people with increased employment opportunities, community connection and driver education. This is achieved via a volunteer driver mentor*

program designed to support learner drivers without access to a supervisor or registered vehicle to complete their logbook hours…(two of the intergenerational mentors) are also valued mentors for this program (Flyer, 2018).

This certainly highlights again the value of community mentors and programs that are addressing some of the social issues that affect marginalised youth. There are, however, still some other barriers that young people will face in their transition post-secondary school.

Notwithstanding that transport can be an issue in the early days of the students completing their education, there are some ways that it can be overcome. There are, however, some other more perilous barriers that the students may encounter in their transition that were alluded to through the interviews.

Other barriers to graduate transition

There are additional barriers, such as socioeconomic conditions, drug use, and numeracy and literacy problems, that teachers also mentioned when discussing their perceptions of barriers. The following are statements from two teachers (TS4 and TS1) who provide examples of these other barriers

Socio-economic barriers, transport. Like the barriers that have prevented them from succeeding in education are the same barriers that prevent them from succeeding in the workplace I think. Coming from a background of disadvantage, their literacy skills, their numeracy skills, their time management seems to be a big struggle for these kids. (TS4)

Yes and just their lives. Their lives are going to be a barrier unfortunately. Not all of them of course, but I think drug issues can be quite big for some of them, not as many as I've seen in other settings but I think there's probably a couple of kids that might go

down that path, for whatever reason. Mental health obviously is probably an issue (TS1).

The last quote also relates to mental health being an issue and supports what students had reported in their interviews, as reported in the section above.

Through informal follow-up discussions and observations with staff, I raised this concept of a transition program, or 13th year, as one teacher had suggested. At the point of discussion, it appeared to be something that still needed to be explored and that funding would be a problem, because they are a Department of Education Queensland school and are only funded for up to Year 12. This concept will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

In my observations overall, however, it did become apparent that there was a significant lack of career development learning opportunities for the students. What was in existence was implemented on an ad-hoc basis and there had not been a strategic whole school approach to delivery of career development interventions. This could be attributed to by the staff not all being fully aware of career development theory and how it can be implemented into their curriculum and practice.

Another key observation made was there was a Guidance Officer available at 'the School' one day per week. The Guidance Officer was also a careers counsellor and available to students should they wish to discuss pathways. It did appear that one day per week may not adequate, as one staff member mentioned in the interviews, as the Guidance Officer was busy attending to issues of a personal counselling nature and not specifically being utilised for careers counselling. Although available to the Year 12 students, it appeared that the students in Years 10 and 11 did not have the same access to the Guidance Officer or were unaware of the role they could play in assisting them with their career development.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the emerging themes that were produced from the research in order to answer the research questions. Three overarching themes of supportive relationships, preparing for work and pros and cons of the QCE were identified in the data and subsequently broken down into their various sub-themes. The following chapter will discuss in detail these findings in context of the theory and provide recommendations to address the issues.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter overview

… just as real bridges must fit their local landscapes and flex with the heat and cold of the seasons, so too must enduring programs find ways to engage with the real and shifting contours of students' lives in their particular families, schools, peers, and communities over time. We have much to learn about the physics and the engineering of bridges along students' pathways …

-- Cooper (2002, p. 622)

Chapter 4 provided the qualitative findings collected from semi-structured interviews, observations and written artefacts. These were presented in sections discussing the themes and sub-themes that emerged through the thematic analysis of the collected data. Three themes of supportive relationships, preparation for work and the pros and cons of the QCE were the most prominent.

This chapter begins by revisiting the research aim and questions. It will then provide answers to the research questions through discussion of the findings. Key recommendations are presented on how career development can be embedded into FLP curriculum and more broadly into mainstream education. It discusses how the findings contribute to a new body of knowledge for the alternative education sector and, specifically, the approaches used for career development for marginalised students, and the implications for policy and practice. Furthermore, an overview of the limitations of the research is provided, and ideas for further research are presented. The chapter will conclude with my own personal reflection on the research experience as a whole.

Research aims and questions revisited

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the current career development strategies used at a regional FLP in enhancing students' career development and wellbeing.

The project explored the learning experiences of the young people in accordance with the following research questions:

a) What impact does the FLP experience have on student social and emotional wellbeing and career-related self-efficacy?
b) What influence does the FLP experience have on the students' career goals and graduate destinations?
c) What influence does the FLP experience have on students' career adaptability competencies required for successful post-school transitions?

The chapter commences by presenting and addressing each research question in order. The research questions are discussed regarding how the findings contribute to answering the questions in context of the conceptual framework and career development theory used in this study.

RQ#1 – What effect does the FLP experience have on student social and emotional wellbeing and career related self-efficacy?

The findings presented a number of elements that have an impact on the students' social and emotional wellbeing and career-related self-efficacy. Supportive relationships was found to be important for establishing positive social and emotional wellbeing of the students. The specific elements that related to supportive relationships were broken into two categories, formal and informal relationships. These elements are discussed in turn in the following section. The contributing factors that appeared to have an impact on career related self-efficacy related mainly to the preparing for work initiatives with some short term impacts perhaps coming from the increase in wellbeing. These will also be discussed in the following section.

Student social and emotional wellbeing

As was discussed in the literature review, FLPs play an important part in developing and improving young people's wellbeing (te Riele, 2012). The young people who attend FLPs can have significant mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, that they are dealing with and often their wellbeing is impacted by their environments or experiences (Lamb & Huo, 2017; Mills & McGregor, 2016a). Several studies confirm that social support is a protective mediating factor, buffer of stress and causal contributor to wellbeing (Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Caserta, Punamäki, and Pirttilä-Backman (2017, p. 404) suggest that in a "buffering role, social support and psychosocial wellbeing mechanism operates as a process whereby social interaction, networks and relationships provide stability and security and promote the recognition of self-worthiness".

Supportive relationships emerged as one of the prominent themes in this study, demonstrating its positive influence on students' wellbeing. The findings from the observations and interviews demonstrated a high incidence of supportive relationships for students enrolled at the FLP.

The findings from the participant interviews are considered within the context of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) definition of social and emotional wellbeing, which is how people think and feel about themselves and others and how they adapt and deal with daily changes whilst living a fulfilling life. For example, the interview questions sought to find out from participants how they felt about themselves, if the experience at the FLP had changed the way they felt about themselves, or if they thought their wellbeing had improved. Almost all student responses indicated that wellbeing was improved through their time spent within the FLP. There were several aspects that contributed to the increase in wellbeing from the way in which the FLP is structured through to the teaching strategies and pedagogy. These are viewed more deeply through the I.

Prilleltensky and O. Prilleltensky (2006) framework of wellbeing which focuses on sites of wellbeing, such as personal, relational, and collective, along with the signs and sources of wellbeing and strategies used to build wellbeing in each of these sites (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007).

The sites of wellbeing in this context are useful for understanding how wellbeing is improved for young people attending the FLP. The sites of wellbeing, which are personal, relational and collective, are unique, but are also dependent on each other, they cannot exist in isolation (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). Some signs of personal wellbeing for youth are: "self-determination and sense of control, self-efficacy, physical and mental health, optimism, meaning and spirituality" (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007, p. 682). Many students who attend a FLP have experienced difficulties in mainstream school, and such difficulties can compromise their wellbeing. Given the strong focus on building students' social and emotional wellbeing, it was not surprising that the findings of this study suggest that, in general, the FLP students appeared to have improved wellbeing. Supportive relationships is the overall contributing theme for this improvement and will now be broken down into the two categories of this theme that produced positive change.

Informal relationships

Prilleltensky (2003) indicated that wellbeing at a relational level relies on democratic participation and collaboration, along with respect for diversity and social inclusion, which are all goals of the FLP approach to educating marginalised youth. As discussed in Chapter 4 the sub-themes that made up the theme *Informal Relationships* consisted of *Friendships and Relationships* and *Comfortable non-judgemental environment*. Both of these sub-themes contributed to facilitating relational wellbeing. These signs were evident throughout a number of students' and teaching and support staff responses. There were instances of students confirming their experience had enabled them to make friends, decrease their social anxiety,

overcome loneliness and reduce social isolation. Respect for diversity among the students was also evident. One of the teaching staff noted that students tend to feel safe and accepted by one another for who they are and there is no negative focus on differences, such as physical appearances.

The positive relationships create a supportive environment in the FLP. Research by Vadeboncoeur and Vellos (2016) also suggested that the relationships between teachers and students in FLPs and alternative education settings assist the students to co-create new social futures. This was in addition to their findings that the relationships in these smaller environments ensure students are being seen and are not invisible, that the teachers recognise the students' capacity for growth and help them to develop this, in turn, creating new social futures (Vadeboncoeur & Vellos, 2016). Myconos (2012) also supports the relational aspect of wellbeing, but suggests the programs "…not only foster relationships based on mutual respect but also help to address directly, or through the personal, family, or peer issues that hindered engagement in the first instance." (p. 8). The co-creation of new social futures remediates this, as teachers and support staff of the FLP are involved in accessing opportunities for learning outside the classroom or assessing the student's different requirements for learning, assisting with employment opportunities, addressing accommodation issues and liaising with family or community services on the student's behalf (Vadeboncoeur & Vellos, 2016). This supportive environment is contributed to by the teaching strategies that also include establishing collective wellbeing.

In addition to the *Informal Relationships* facilitating this relational wellbeing is also *Formal Relationships*.

Formal relationships

The *Formal Relationships* theme consisted of two sub-themes, *Pastoral Care Groups* and *Intergenerational Mentoring Program*. Relational well-being can also take the form of a mentoring program, which has the capacity to improve collective wellbeing (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). 'The School's' intergenerational mentoring program is a good example of relational wellbeing. Strong evidence was found that highlighted the relationships that the students developed with their mentors and how the mentors were an important part of the students' lives. The mentors assisted the students with building on their strengths and often advocated for students within the community. This is consistent with the State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2010) approach to wellbeing, in that relationships with a significant adult, such as a mentor, is a strong protective factor that can make a considerable difference to the young person's learning and wellbeing outcomes.

In addition the PCG plays a role in building relationships between the students and the PCG teacher. The teacher builds a strong understanding of each student as they meet with students each day and have a role to play in assessing their general welfare at the beginning of the day. The PCG teacher encourages relationships among the group as they form a small community that comes together regularly.

As teachers indicated, the students are encouraged to build relationships with peers, teachers, pastoral care groups, the ILO, the Administration Manager, support staff, mentors and volunteers. It is evident in this context that the students are learning what constitutes a healthy relationship and this is achieved through the students forming relationships with people in the FLP community and practicing these skills. Positive connections with teaching and support staff influence the students' ability to engage and learn. As Ciarrochi, Sahdra, Morin, Litalien, and Parker (2017) suggested, it can be very helpful for young people to have

a supportive teacher if they are lacking in supportive relationships in other domains, such as peer and family. Thus, the support the students are getting at the FLP may compensate for a lack of support in their personal lives.

Supportive environment

Collective wellbeing is evidenced by a good sense of belonging to community, supporting those worse off, and fighting injustices (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). There were elements of the curriculum and teaching approaches that contributed significantly to collective wellbeing. It was also an overarching philosophy of 'the School' to include community in the lives of the students at 'the School'. Community volunteers from organisations, such as Rotary, attend 'the School' to assist with the cooking of meals. The mentors are volunteers from community with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Other members of community are often drawn on to provide support or assistance at 'the School', whether that is providing some landscaping assistance and including the students, or presenting to the students on topics relevant to their community. Additionally, students take part in fundraising activities throughout the year and develop skills for working with the wider community and understanding the impact they can have through their contributions. These activities are often based on project-based learning concepts, whereby the students come up with an idea for a project and follow it through with the intention of being beneficial to the community.

Summary of social and emotional wellbeing

The findings indicate a positive change in the students' social and emotional wellbeing. The literature supports this as wellbeing is considered to be an aspect of FLPs that is recognised through wider research as being a significant factor in contributing to the successful outcomes of FLPs (Myconos, 2012; te Riele, 2014; te Riele, Wilson, et al., 2017).

An overwhelming majority of non-academic outcomes in flexible learning programs relate to social and emotional wellbeing and, in particular, improved confidence and self-esteem (te Riele, 2012).

Considering the Patton and McMahon (2014) STF of career development, it is clear that the individual and social system factors have an influence on the wellbeing of the young person. The social system influences are the supportive environment of the FLP, the relationships formed with teachers, peers, mentors and support staff. These factors therefore influence the individual system by improving the young persons' wellbeing.

However, whilst it is seen that students improve their wellbeing during their enrolment at the FLP, this is short-lived for many students once they graduate. The findings suggested that wellbeing could be impacted upon when the students leave the supportive environment of the FLP and have to navigate their transition without social support. These barriers, which are often from both the social and societal-environmental systems represented in the STF, can be minimised if career adaptabilities in the young people are developed. These barriers will be expanded upon in the section relating to RQ#3.

Social and emotional wellbeing, therefore, cannot be focussed on alone. It is relevant to career development and must be considered together with it. Successful career transitions also have a positive impact on wellbeing which is further indicated within the PWT as an outcome of decent work (Duffy et al., 2016)

Student self-efficacy

As the findings suggested, students discussed improvements in their wellbeing and self-efficacy. Further to this the learning experiences offered at the FLP appeared to be useful for increasing their self-efficacy. More specifically, career-related self-efficacy is improved through vocational learning, such as work experience and part-time jobs. It is also improved

through academic learning and the feeling of success (Lent, 2012). This was particularly apparent to me when many students advised me that they had been failing subjects at previous schools and were now passing them. It appeared they were experiencing an increase in their sense of success when they had completed tasks in the academic context and had gained qualifications, such as vocational certificates, or graduated with the QCE. Their sources of self-efficacy in this situation are expanded through their enactive mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). This is supported by Wyn et al. (2004, p. 14), who claim that "…evidence shows that when young people successfully complete courses or modules, they are then given the confidence to construct or reclaim 'successful selves' or identities, which will sustain them in the next stage". The self-efficacy increases gained through work experience have an impact on career planning. This aligns with the Hirschi (2009) study, which demonstrated that early work experience for adolescents was associated with positive changes in career planning and exploration.

Successes are celebrated throughout 'the School' in ways that encourage the students to feel recognised and proud. An example of this is, when students gain school-based traineeships and apprenticeships, these successes are published in school newsletters so that students and parents can read about their achievements. According to Bandura's theory about the sources of self-efficacy, reading about and seeing other students successfully gaining traineeships and apprenticeships, can enhance a student's self-efficacy through such vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977, 1997). The students may see their peers as role models and, through vicarious learning, may think that, if their peers can be successful, then so can they.

Through vicarious learning experiences, students can become more confident to conduct tasks such as speaking in front of the class, participating in group discussions, and taking part in projects. Some of the projects that I observed students participating in as part of their Social and Community Studies subject entailed raising money for cancer research and

organising donations for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). On these occasions, the students were passionate about their cause and confident to explain what they were doing and why. On days where they had engaged with community fundraising, they appeared proud of their efforts and demonstrated being genuinely thrilled to be able to showcase their achievements to the wider community.

Another source of student self-efficacy is the vocational learning opportunities they can take part in through the preparing for work activities. Vocational learning takes place in the FLP as there are some Certificate I and IIs that are offered in the program. Alternatively, students can also undertake TAFE courses, certificate courses with private RTOs, and, workplace learning as part of their traineeship or school-based apprenticeship.

Whilst the findings suggested that vocational learning contributes to a small degree to self-efficacy, there were more significant advantages achieved through work experience and part-time work. In relation to the learning that took place through these programs, the findings indicated that the students valued being able to increase their self-efficacy and be exposed to different industries. Students reported an increase in confidence gained through working in part-time jobs, a sense of success in being able to work a full day whilst on work experience, and the ability to improve their social awareness and social skills in dealing with members of the public. The increases in self-efficacy gained through these opportunities to undertake work experience, work placements and part time-work can impact positively on career confidence. The students are faced with different experiences and learn to adapt to changes, furthering their learning and development, which contributes to their increasing agency and ability to manage adaptation tasks related to career transition (Savickas, 2012).

Initially, when students commenced attending TAFE to complete courses, the FLP staff recognised that there were some issues with sending the students to a new environment. Staff indicated that the students had some difficulty fitting in to another new place, with some

experiencing social anxiety, which impacted upon attendance. To overcome these issues, the FLP now employs a teacher aide to assist at the TAFE where FLP students attended courses. This encourages the students to stay linked in, gives them a familiar person to talk to, should any issues arise, and assists in ensuring the student completes the necessary requirements of the course. The Myconos (2012) report found that VET courses had been significantly challenging for younger FLP students because of the difficulties they have adjusting to becoming self-reliant in the TAFE context. Myconos (2012) also suggested that participation in apprenticeships or traineeships in the students' preferred occupations would be more beneficial than completing "…low-level certificate courses conducted by registered training providers" (Myconos, 2012, p. viii). Polesel (2010) argued that Certificate Levels I and IIs, which are the typical qualifications offered to FLP students, are at such basic levels that they do not provide specific competencies for gaining employment in trades or in areas that require licences.

In this study the completion of VET Certificate I and IIs within 'the School' program did not appear to have the same positive impact on self-efficacy as participation in work experience or part-time work. The completion of these VET Certificate courses was seen by students and staff as a way to gain *points* to graduate with a QCE. When I observed classes of students completing these VET studies, many of the students advised me they had no particular interest in the content, and whilst there was an interest for some students, they were just doing the qualification to make up their points for the QCE. This results in the confidence boost that students gain from a completed qualification being short lived. Several past Year 12 students who were interviewed, the majority of whom were unemployed or underemployed, said these certificates were not relevant or helpful for them in gaining employment. Findings from a larger Australian Research Council project support this view (Smyth et al., 2013). The project analysed portraits of young people who had attended a re-

engagement programme. This research found that the students' lives were seemingly better but they had been severely circumscribed by the narrow choices around vocationalism that were offered by the programme. Concerns raised from the findings was that the natural talents and skills of the young people were not acknowledged or used as a way to improve their opportunities and life chances (Smyth et al., 2013).

Whilst the findings suggests that the Certificate I and IIs that the students complete at the FLP may not be beneficial in the long-term, there is evidence that self-efficacy is enhanced through their completion of the certificate to meet the overarching academic qualification they can gain from it. To ensure the value is gained from the certificates, in terms of self-efficacy, and has a longer-lasting contribution to the students, some enhancements to their delivery would be of benefit. The students may benefit from being further engaged in regular reflection on the content of these certificates to understand that what they are learning is applicable to many occupations and industries. Not only could they be undertaking the course to gain points for their QCE, but more focus could be on the transferrable skills they are obtaining. Assessment tasks can include more focus on exploration of a range of occupations where the skills they are learning can be utilised. This may work toward further development of their career adaptability competencies, particularly career curiosity. Students could be required to do a small presentation on the occupations they have explored and how the skills they have learnt in the course have impacted their possible career choices. These discussions can include asking the students to consider their new skills and set new goals which are followed up at regular intervals. This emphasis on reflection and understanding how they are developing in terms of their career skills and competencies would help to cement meaning to the learning gained through these certificates.

Contribution of academic qualifications to self-efficacy

The academic qualifications that the students receive as a culmination of their literacy and numeracy subjects, vocational certificates and other subjects undertaken are also viewed as being a reason for an increase in self-efficacy. However, this boost in self-efficacy is again short-lived for many of the students, and unsustainable if they have not been able to use the qualifications to gain employment or entry to further education and training.

The emphasis placed on the QCE by the teachers ensures the students see the value in completing it and, once they have achieved this, they have a sense of satisfaction. This is valid, and obvious amongst the graduating students. They expressed a sense of achievement, in terms of they are graduating, they feel successful. For many of them, this was a way of proving to other's in their family that they could do it, that they are smart. Senior teaching staff believe that the students gain self-worth through the completion of the QCE and that their resumes are something the students are proud of.

The challenges and expectations placed on the students to achieve the QCE has a positive impact, in that students are engaged in their learning journeys and receive the gratification of completing something which is held in high regard by 'the School'. Previous studies have found that, where there is a lack of challenge in the curriculum students can be less engaged (Msapenda & Hudson, 2013). If the environment sets high expectations and includes challenging and stimulating learning experiences, it is more likely to increase student engagement and set the young people up better for life beyond completion of the program (Gray & Hackling, 2009; Msapenda & Hudson, 2013; Robinson & Lamb, 2012).

The inclusion of career development learning across all aspects of the curriculum may facilitate this. For example, the students can commence their self-reflection in Year 10 through before the commencement of SET planning. This can then be used as a foundation to

commence goal-setting. In the English subject they can learn about job application processes, and learn how to compile a resume and cover letter. In the social studies subject, the excursions could have a focus on exposure to occupations and industries.

Within the excursion learning, students could be educated about the type of occupations that exist within the area they have visited, how these occupations impact the industry, what qualifications are required for these occupations, and students could produce a presentation to demonstrate their learning. Their learning should also be followed up and reflected on in further discussions regarding career.

Work experience could be reflected on and the skills and lessons learnt recorded in their career plans. These could also be discussed, ensuring the students have the opportunity to elaborate on what they have liked or disliked, whether they could improve in certain areas, or whether they would like to pursue this field of work. The maths classes already include a considerable element of career development learning that relates tasks to typical industries and occupations in which the mathematics is applied. It is recommended that this be continued.

Summary of self-efficacy

The FLP was assisting the students to have mastery experiences. With this, the students' sources of self-efficacy are reinforced by performing tasks they are successful at. However, even though the evidence suggests that self-efficacy is improved through the feeling of success, there is concern as to how long this feeling of success will last if the students cannot obtain decent work or move to further education and training post completion of Year 12. The findings suggest that this was an area of concern, as many of the past students were no longer being reinforced by successful achievements and, therefore, their self-efficacy decreased. The students often did not follow up on their enrolment to a

Certificate III program in the following year, as was suggested by the FLP staff, nor did all of them secure full-time employment. At the period of approximately 12 months post completion of Year 12, there were still students who did not know how to follow up on opportunities. Instead they were considering returning to the FLP for assistance. This has an impact on career adaptability and coping resources, which will be further discussed in the section on career development.

Overall summary of wellbeing and self-efficacy

In summary, the findings indicate that the social and emotional wellbeing and self-efficacy of students attending the FLP may have been improved through their enrolment. However, there is concern that these elements are short-lived, because when the students leave the FLP, there are many barriers that they face that can negatively impact on their wellbeing and self-efficacy. In my opinion, in order to overcome this short-term approach, career adaptability can be strengthened through providing more career development interventions throughout the overall curriculum. These interventions should allow significant time for reflective activities, exploration of occupations and linking these to values and skills and a wider introduction to world-of-work knowledge. The next section discusses barriers and the impact that the FLP experience had on the students' career goals.

RQ#2 – What influence does the FLP experience have on the students' career goals and graduate destinations?

During the semi-structured interviews the current and past students were asked if they had career goals and how or if these had changed through their enrolment at the FLP. There were mixed results, with some of the younger Year 10 students having general goals, whilst the older Year 12 students appeared to be less certain. It was the current students who were close to completion of their Year 12 who had lacked the most clarity. Many of these students

indicated they just hoped to get a job. Some were working in part-time jobs they had gained since commencing at the FLP and were going to continue in these roles whilst looking for other employment. The main concern for these students was the completion of their QCE so they could graduate. It was a common theme that the students' focus was on the qualifications that they had completed being enough to ensure they were eligible to graduate with a QCE.

Contribution of QCE to career goals

The pros and cons of the QCE emerged as a major theme, most likely due to the importance placed on this by the FLP staff. As discussed in Chapter 4, it is a requirement of the FLP that the students graduate with a QCE and there are several options available to the students in order to achieve this. However, some of the options result in the students undertaking low level VET certificates without any interest in pursuing these fields as a career choice. Whilst this in itself is not the whole reason that students would undertake lower-level VET certificates, there is benefit to be gained in trying out a variety of subjects whilst at school. What is a concern, however, is that the students demonstrated a lack of understanding as to how the learning they gained by completion of the certificate is of value to their career development. Setting the bar high for the students however, gives them a goal and a focus. The teaching staff perceive that the achievement of a QCE will enable the students to make a smooth transition to the workforce, although there is no evidence to suggest that the QCE helped the students to gain employment after graduating from secondary school, or had any impact on the formation of their career goals.

Career Goals

In terms of career goals, the students were asked if the FLP experience had an impact on them forming their career goals. Some of the students already had formed some ideas

about career goals and said that the FLP experience helped to cement these. This was due to them being able to complete vocational certificates in a field of interest (or undertake work experience or traineeships) in their specific fields. On the other hand, there were many Year 12 students who were still unsure about their future direction. Some past students also had difficulty in articulating goals for their future. This is consistent with research by Msapenda and Hudson (2013) who found that students in FLPs had short-term rather than long-term goals. They also indicated that careful attention was required to ensure individual case management of students was put in place to increase chances of successful transitions.

In addition, the teaching and support staff responses to the interview questions about student career goals suggested that they had little knowledge of the students' overall goals. The teaching staff were busy getting students through the curricula and ensuring all the necessary assessments were completed. Some teachers advised that the students had completed their SET plan in Year 10 and this is what drove their choices of subjects to ensure they could graduate with the QCE. It appeared that for the Year 11 and 12 students, the main focus was on completing requisite subjects or certificates, and/or remaining in their part-time employment.

In general, teaching and support staff also displayed a lack of understanding of career development and related interventions. Their knowledge of this field was limited to thinking that it was mostly about writing job applications and resumes and job search techniques, and their main focus was on the importance of students completing the QCE. The importance placed on completion of the QCE discounts a lot of the career development learning that could be taking place throughout the completion of the chosen curricula. Anything related to career development appeared to be referred to as being the responsibility of the ILO or Guidance Officer. Given the definition of career as the variety of experiences that one undertakes throughout one's life – the continuous process of learning and development that

includes both paid and unpaid work (Education Services Australia Ltd, 2017), it is useful to consider a more holistic approach to it. Career is now a culmination of everything that a person does in their life, whether, it is paid or unpaid (Education Services Australia Ltd, 2017). It takes into account the learning that takes place in a number of different roles. No longer is career defined as the one job or profession that a person may hold over a lifetime. Discussions I had with some staff indicated that their concern for the young people was more about getting their welfare needs looked after, as opposed to getting them to think about their careers. It was a common response from the teachers that these students were not ready to even think about a career. Although, as Msapenda and Hudson (2013) found, drawing on personal interests and career aspirations is a way in which FLP staff can engage students.

Findings from the 2016 Everybody's Core Business final report into school-to-work transitions and how schools are assisting students to make successful transitions supports this view. When referring to the tools that are necessary for successful transitions to work and study, the report highlights that "…there are teachers and schools that do not see the development of them as their 'core business'" (Department of Education and Training, 2016a, p. 23).

Unfortunately, this lack of understanding about career development prevents sufficient time and space being made available in the curriculum to help young people build career adaptability competencies. It is not about getting young people to think about a particular occupation, but rather to put some strategies in place so they can build career self-management capabilities to transition successfully, post- completion of school. Careers in the 21st century require individuals to be able to adapt to a changing landscape (Savickas, 2012). Without career self-management capabilities it is difficult for young people to successfully navigate this changing landscape.

Graduate destinations

Graduate destinations highlight where students typically transition to immediately post completion of Year 12. The options for students are to enter further education and training, gain employment, or become unemployed/underemployed. Past students of the FLP were interviewed to find out what impact the FLP experience had on their post-school graduate destinations. There were two groups of past students. The first had left 'the School' up to 2 years prior to being interviewed and the second group were the Year 12 students who participated in the first round of interviews and were then interviewed 12 months post-completion of Year 12. The past students, apart from one student who was attending university, were still trying to find employment. The student who was studying at university admitted, however, that it had become quite difficult for her because she was failing courses. The students who were interviewed in both Year 12 and post their completion had mixed responses. One had a full time job but had changed jobs twice in that time, some were working in casual roles and had experienced difficulty in gaining employment and some were thinking about going back to do further study, although they had not followed through on this, because they required further assistance.

'The School' follows up with the graduating Year 12 students approximately 4 months after they finish at the FLP. This is conducted by a teacher aide who telephones the student and either talks to them personally or to their parent/guardian. The information gained from this interview is to establish if the student is working, in training or education, or unemployed. It also seeks to establish if the young person is happy. The results of these conversations are brief. More detail is required to find out how many jobs the young person may have applied for, what courses they may have enrolled in, or if they are linked into employment services to assist with their job search. Many of the students are still unemployed or reported that they were thinking about further study. Some of the students

were still only working part-time and looking for full-time employment. The follow-up calls are considered by teaching staff as being conducted too soon after the students' graduate, as it does not give a good indication of where students could potentially be. Many students at this point are still considering their options regarding further study or need assistance in following this through, as was indicated in some of the interviews with past students. It is also difficult to track some of the students down, as they change phone numbers or do not return calls. This was consistent with data from other FLPs, with reports indicating difficulties contacting past students, and data being collected 6 – 12 months post-completion of a program, giving a short-term picture of destinations and only a single snapshot (Msapenda & Hudson, 2013; South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, 2013; te Riele, Wilson, et al., 2017; Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016). Many students undertake a variety of things as they make this transition. There may be a number of part-time jobs, volunteering or short courses that students complete as they transition from secondary school, furthering the notion of non-linear pathways (Stokes & Wyn, 2007; White & Wyn, 2008). When students undertake VET courses, for example, they do not always complete these, as they may choose to undertake a different more suitable course. This can reflect on indecision in relation to career pathways, but, in most cases, it relates to the instability in the lives of these students (Myconos, 2014).

Graduate destinations are impacted by the barriers the students face when they leave the FLP. When they are in the FLP, their social and emotional wellbeing and self-efficacy increases, however, they have not had the experiences to be able to strengthen their career adaptability competencies and resources. Once they leave the FLP, they are unsupported, and their wellbeing and self-efficacy can decrease. The next section discusses the barriers and the impact this has on the young people.

Barriers to successful transitions post FLP secondary education

The findings highlighted that many barriers are presented to students as they leave the supportive environment of the FLP. They no longer have somewhere to go everyday where they are accepted, respected, cared about and supported. They are required to readjust to their new situations, often without any full-time work or further education and training courses to go to. Some families offer no support or role modelling to encourage their children to pursue further education or work. There are many students who experience mental health issues, and, without ongoing support, they find it difficult to put themselves in situations outside of their comfort zone. This makes it difficult for the students to search for employment or attend courses. Transport is also an issue for young people in the FLP, as the public transport in a regional city is not as convenient as in metropolitan areas and the cost is prohibitive for some.

Students who are intending to go to TAFE the following year have almost a 3-month break before courses commence. Teachers reported that the students would often leave the FLP with an enrolment in TAFE for the following year, however, they never followed through with it. Some students waited for up to a year before deciding to go back to the FLP to seek assistance with enrolling at TAFE.

Interviews with past students suggested a variety of reasons why they were still unemployed or not in further education and training 12 months post completion of Year 12. Some students did not follow up with their TAFE enrolment to Certificate III programs, because they were unsure how to go about this, or whether they were really interested in the courses available. This was confirmed by TS6 who explained that many students return 12 months post completion to ask for help to enrol at TAFE. TS6 believed that, at that stage, the students were ready for the commitment of further study. This is not uncommon for students who have attended FLPs. Myconos (2014) found that the students who had attended the Brotherhood of St Laurence FLP returned to the school after their completion to get help

searching for jobs or to navigate processes for enrolling in VET courses. Unfortunately, this had placed an unplanned demand on the FLPs resources, for which they could find no simple solution (Myconos, 2014).

Some past Year 12 students thought they would be able to gain full time employment but several were employed casually in the retail or hospitality sector. They indicated that this fulfilled their need for survival, however, they did not foresee their long-term future involving jobs in these areas.

The skills gained through these work experiences, however, are valuable. Research conducted by Phillips et al. (2002) suggests that young people are not only reliant on the support of relevant adults, but also on the skills gained through work experience, to enable them to make an adaptive transition to the workplace.

The teaching staff raised their concerns in relation to these barriers that students face when they leave the supportive environment of the FLP. This was to such an extent that they are considering how to implement a year of transitional support, which is something they say would not be funded through the Queensland Education Department. This was also made clear through Myconos' 2012 report of the Brotherhood of St Laurance FLP. He found that on "…completion of the VCAL, students need intensive preparation for their search for work" (p. viii).

Lessons learned from this research and from the Msapenda and Hudson (2013) study is that there is a requirement to ensure students are better prepared for their transitions beyond the program and that there is also a need to assist students who want to maintain a link with their program (Myconos, 2012). Catering to former students who have yet to find work or suitable further training is thus a looming issue, which also poses organisational and resource allocation challenges (Myconos, 2012, p. viii).

When past students return to the program for assistance with job searching or enrolling in future training programs, it indicates a lack of career adaptability and self-management. If more time is spent on developing the career adaptability competencies whilst in the FLP, there may be less reliance on the program post completion, as students will have career management competencies to enable them to overcome barriers.

Summary of impact on career goals

In summary, it appears that students' experiences within the FLP have limited influence on their career goals. In my opinion, introducing career interventions which include goal-setting will enhance opportunities for teaching staff to focus on career goals and aspirations with the students. Further exposure to the world of work and the exploration of occupations and suitable career options will also allow students to gain further knowledge upon which they can self-reflect. These types of interventions will be discussed further in the recommendations section.

RQ#3 –What influence does the FLP experience have on students' career adaptability competencies required for successful post-school transitions?

Career adaptability

Savickas' (2005) Career Construction Theory (CCT) is utilised in this study to understand whether the students are building career adaptability competencies that assist them in making positive career transitions post school. CCT is based on personal constructivism and social constructionism and takes a contextualist perspective when viewing careers (Savickas, 2005). This is a realistic way in which to view the career transitions of marginalised youth in FLPs, due to their highly contextualised lives.

As discussed in the literature review, the CCT includes the processes of adaptivity (flexibility, willingness to change), adaptability (self-regulation, psychosocial resources),

adapting (orientation, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement) and adaptation (satisfaction, success, and development). The metacomptency of career adaptability is applied here to understand the effect that the interventions in the FLP have on the students' career transitions post Year 12. The four dimensions of career adaptability; career concern, control, curiosity and confidence are summarised in Table 6.1. The final column in the table gives a summary of the findings of each dimension from the study. Each adaptability dimension is then discussed in turn with reference to current findings.

Table 2

Career Adaptability Dimensions adapted from Savickas (2005) and McMahon, Watson, and Bimrose (2012).

Adaptability dimension	**Attitudes and Beliefs**	**Competence**	**Career Problem**	**Findings**
Concern	Planful, hopeful, optimistic, looking to the future	Planning	Indifference. Can contribute to pessimistic thoughts about future.	In general the students displayed a lack of planning. Year 10s showed some concern as they appeared more hopeful about their futures. The Year 12s generally were worried about getting a job.
Control	Decisive, responsible for decisions	Takes responsibility for decision making. Assertive. Disciplined. Wilful.	Difficulty making decisions.	Many students had difficulty taking responsibility for following up on enrolments to TAFE post Year 12, or generally had difficulty making decisions.

Adaptability dimension	Attitudes and Beliefs	Competence	Career Problem	Findings
Curiosity	Inquisitive	Explores options realistically	Approaches future unrealistically.	Overall it appeared that students lacked their own curiosity to explore options realistically. Many students had unrealistic visions of their futures.
Confidence	Efficacious	Problem solves	Inhibition and low self-consciousness.	Generally there was a lack of confidence among students to pursue certain avenues. The ability to sort out and follow up on enrolments for example showed a lack of confidence.

Career concern

As discussed previously, the students had varying responses to how they viewed their future and their career goals. Due to the small sample size, it was difficult to gain an insight into whether there were differences in the level of career adaptability, particularly career concern, across age and gender. Some younger students in Year 10 showed a sense of career concern, as they were hopeful about pursuing careers in a particular field. This was in contrast to the students who were due to complete Year 12. The latter were more concerned about graduating and being able to get a job. There was no specific occupation that they were hopeful about. There were, however, more males than females, who showed a stronger sense of career concern across the year levels.

The research regarding gender and age influences on career adaptability is not consistent in the literature. Patton and Creed (2001), in their study of Australian secondary school students, found that females had higher scores on career maturity knowledge scores across all year levels, although this varied for scores on attitude. Females were also found to be more career certain at ages 13 and 14 and less so at age 17. This is reflective of the findings of this study, whereby the Year 12s appeared less certain about their futures. The literature suggests that there may be some greater complexity around career choices of young women, who have the dilemma of considering both career and motherhood, whilst young men are introduced to the world of work and its expectations from a young age (Patton & Creed, 2001). Due to the small sample size, it is not conclusive that gender had an impact on the FLP students' career concern, although there were noticeable differences in the impact of age. Whilst the findings were in line with Patton and Creed (2001), it would ideally be expected that career concern would be higher in the Year 12 cohort. The fact that it was not could be related to the nearing of school leaving that creates a higher level of uncertainty (Patton & Creed, 2001).

Whilst the students were hopeful in gaining employment post-Year 12, it appeared that their career concern may have also impacted on their post-school transitions. This is an issue that requires consideration. Further enhancing the students' career adaptability to ensure they have developed career concern that allows them to plan and be hopeful about their futures, will assist in overcoming some of this uncertainty.

Career control

The construct of career control is the second dimension of career adaptability (Savickas, 2012). According to Savickas (2012, p. 160) "Control involves intrapersonal self-discipline and the processes of being conscientious, deliberate, organised, and decisive in performing vocational development tasks and making occupational transitions." The findings

from the interviews with the students who had completed Year 12, or were about to complete it, suggested that their career control was low. Only 1 out of the 5 Year 12 students interviewed in 2016 had consequently secured full-time employment prior to leaving Year 12, with the remaining students uncertain about their futures. Two out of the three past students interviewed were still unemployed and uncertain about their futures. The 2017 graduating Year 12 class showed slightly higher career concern, whereby they had shown the capacity to be assertive and take control of their decisions.

A lack of career control can mean confusion for the students. They are not sure where to go for assistance or they lack the self-confidence to ask questions or the self-discipline to follow up on further education and training. An example of this with the FLP students is that a number of students, particularly past students, indicated they had not known how to go about following up on TAFE enrolments and would wait up to 12 months post-completion of Year 12 to go back to the FLP and seek assistance. This is consistent with the Myconos (2012) findings, whereby students returned to the FLP after completion of their secondary studies to gain assistance with job applications and course enrolments.

Career curiosity

Following on from the dimension of career control is career curiosity. Career curiosity refers to the willingness to explore self-knowledge, values and interests, and find out how this fits with the world of work (Savickas, 2012). For the students enrolled in FLPs, it is likely that they will learn about their interests in relation to work through their work experience placements and part-time jobs. These experiences, however, are limited for most students to retail and hospitality related jobs. However, some exposure to work and related experiences has assisted the students to explore opportunities in these fields, even if that has meant moving from work experience to a part-time job. Savickas (2012) suggests that people who have explored beyond their own backyards have a much wider knowledge about "…their

abilities, interests, and values, as well as about the requirements, routines, and rewards of various occupations" (p.161). This would be expected of someone who had matured and experienced a variety of occupations, however, for young people with limited exposure to occupations and working, it is more difficult to gain this without undertaking suitable career development activities.

Many of the student responses indicated a lack of knowledge as to how they would achieve their career goals. Those who did have some idea of what they would like to do had unrealistic and uninformed ideas of how they would go about achieving it. Typically, these ideas were not founded on any research or investigation of occupations. For some, it was a Google search of the web about jobs that existed in other countries. Whilst this shows a level of career concern, in that some students were hopeful about their futures, a lack of career curiosity was evident in most students, because they had no clear understanding of the resources and qualifications required to realise their goals. This limited career curiosity could have been developed further with career development interventions. Such interventions can include more self-reflective tasks, which can be conducted with a PCG teacher or mentor using coaching tools. Excursions can also be used as a way for students to explore the type of occupations that exist in the particular place they have visited.

Savickas (2012) suggests that "…attitudes and dispositions that favour exploration and openness lead to experiences that increase competence in both self-knowledge and occupational information (p. 161). Considering this in the context of a young person attending an FLP, there needs to be additional assistance applied in order for the young person to know how to explore. Applying a coaching approach with the students to get them to focus on how to achieve their goals may facilitate this further. The students can be encouraged to be more reflective of their work experience or volunteering opportunities. Whilst some students mentioned that they would not want to pursue a career in the part-time

work they had been doing, it helped them to confirm their interests and encourage them to investigate other options. This, again, could be facilitated through reflective tasks and coaching.

Career confidence

The fourth dimension of career adaptability is career confidence. In relation to Career Construction Theory, confidence is the ability to successfully pursue a course of action required in making educational and vocational choices (Savickas, 2012). Confidence is built through experience, and for FLP students, this can include their learning experiences, work experience, and volunteering, for example. If they are achieving success at these, then their problem-solving abilities can improve and they are more likely to be open to exploring further.

However, career confidence can also be impacted by a lack of choice or exposure to different categories of experience (Savickas, 2005), for example the subjects that the students study as part of their FLP enrolment. For example students who have not been exposed to the subjects of math and science may be less interested in exploring occupational choices that require these skills, due to perceived lack of experience and confidence in these areas (Savickas, 2012). Given the limited number of subject choices or work experience opportunities, there is concern that this will limit their work volition. Work volition is defined as "…the perceived capacity to make occupational choices despite constraints." (Autin et al., 2017, p. 3)

The students need experiences to draw on, from which they can reflect upon, as the self is constructed from outside in, not from inside out. The self is therefore co-constructed through these interpersonal processes and experiences (Savickas, 2005). Many of these students have had negative experiences that have contributed to their enrolment in the FLP in

the first place and are therefore challenged to overcome these before thinking about career pathways. The only exposure to occupations for some of these young people is what they experience whilst at ‘the School’. The students are encouraged to undertake a variety of work experience but, in reality, they can only take part in what is available and this has been shown to be limited to the fields of hospitality and retail.

Whilst wellbeing is a focus for FLPs, the students’ experiences are also important to consider for the co-construction of selves, and how these can be reflected upon to increase career self-management competencies. The types of experiences that the students may have within the FLP include their learning experiences, work experience, building of relationships, participation in the mentoring program, part-time jobs and vocational learning. Whilst these are positive, the findings indicate that students are not engaging in broader exploratory experiences.

Considering the contextual factors in this study, whereby students have a variety of influencing factors that impact on their career transition, it could be beneficial to deliver interventions that can assist the young people to overcome their various barriers when they have completed Year 12. This would help prevent such a reliance on resources of the FLP by the students who return for assistance after they have completed school.

There is evidence to suggest that some of the factors can be mediated by individual and contextual factors, such as barriers upon graduation. When contextual factors are taken into account, the mediators, such as work volition, may not be strong enough to enable students to make successful career transitions. This supports the argument for enhanced career development interventions in the curriculum. Such interventions could include a coaching approach to career development focussed on students’ development of career adaptability competencies, and further embedding of career development practices across the curriculum. The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) is a useful way to understand the mediating and

moderating factors that contribute to successful career transitions such as securing decent work.

Psychology of working theory

According to the STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006) the influencing factors on the young persons' career choice may come from individual, social and/or societal-environmental systems. In addition to this, the PWT presents a view of key predictors and moderators of decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). Proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support and economic conditions may moderate the paths from marginalisation and economic constraints through to work volition, career adaptability and decent work.

The PWT posits that economic constraints and marginalisation are predictors that can have an effect on an individuals' work volition and career adaptability. Economic constraints relates to having access to opportunities in the world of work and factors that can impact on this are social class and social and cultural capital (Duffy et al., 2016). Many of the young people who attend the FLP are influenced by economic constraints to accessing decent work. There were several students who came from households where neither parent worked, and who were undergoing significant financial strain. The result of this affected students in a number of ways, from not having suitable clothing to wear to job interviews or jobs, not being able to get transport to and from school or job interviews, or just having the extra-curricular experiences that young people from families with a higher socio-economic status may have. In addition, social or cultural capital appeared lacking in many of the families and resulted in students not having community contacts that would assist the young person with exposure to the world of work. Some students were living independently and relied on the FLP staff for most of their assistance in relation to job search. The need to survive through earning an income was also apparent and therefore suggested their work volition was limited.

In other words, there was no freedom to choose, because they were constrained by financial barriers. This is turn impacts on the individual gaining decent work.

Marginalisation can affect career adaptability, as there are many aspects of marginalisation that can contribute to an individual perceiving a lack of hope toward career success. Such factors may include a lack of confidence due to not having career or education role models. Marginalisation is also a predictor that can affect the work volition of young people enrolled at the FLP. Many of the students considered themselves to be marginalised from mainstream forms of education. They perceived themselves as less entitled which can contribute to their low self-confidence and self-esteem. This type of marginalisation is not the only type these young people experience. For example, there are students who are marginalised in society due to their appearance, sexual preference, low socio-economic status, or mental health conditions. Some students reported not being able to cope with the pressure of being face-to-face with customers, due to their anxiety levels, and perceived themselves as failures, and removed themselves from the workplace. Consequently, the students in these situations can have their marginalisation reinforced.

In addition to the predictors, there are moderating factors that also impact on work volition and career adaptability. It is these moderating factors that require consideration when working with young people attending FLPs, as some of these factors are malleable. Moderating factors that can impact on the students are considered to be; proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support and economic conditions. These factors are different for each student however there are some that are developed throughout the young peoples' journeys in the FLP. For example, students attending the FLP are exposed to significant social support, which is evident in the findings of this study. However, the other moderating factors may be more difficult to influence.

In consideration of the contextual challenges these young people face (Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, 2014), the extent to which they possess these characteristics may be limited, impacting on their work volition and career adaptability, and subsequently their ability to gain decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). More information about these important moderators is presented in the following sections.

Proactive personality

Proactive personality involves having a predisposition to enact change by initiating action to influence one's environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Tolentino et al., 2014). In contrast, those who are not proactive will accept things the way they are. Whilst proactive personality is considered a relatively stable dispositional trait, there may be situations where this can be influenced through teaching practices. Observations within the FLP have indicated that students have a heavy reliance on the ILO at 'the School' for helping them to find work experience, school-based traineeships and apprenticeships, and part-time jobs and to compile resumes. There is also a reliance on the ILO after the students leave the FLP to assist them with enrolments into training courses, placing unnecessary demand on already-stretched resources. This indicates that, whilst the students have been enrolled in the program, they have been passive recipients of information. They have not been proactive in managing their own career transitions. This does not necessarily suggest that they lack a proactive personality disposition. For many of these students, it may be that they have not been shown how to manage these things or been given the opportunities to take these actions themselves. They have not had the experiences to practice these tasks and build self-efficacy which may be a pre-cursor to proactive personality

Critical consciousness

Critical consciousness, as defined by Paulo Freire (Freire, 1996; Watts et al., 2011), relates to perceiving social, political and economic contradictions, and then taking action to prevent oppression. Core elements of critical consciousness include critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action (Diemer et al., 2015). Students who have developed their critical consciousness are more likely to create and develop their agency and gain wider access to opportunities (Diemer et al., 2015).

In the FLP it is evident that students take part in project-based learning tasks that have a focus on social inclusion, with an aim to developing their critical consciousness. These projects include fundraising activities for social causes, as well as discussions in class in relation to current affairs. These fundraising tasks assist students to build career adaptability as they are developing agency, which contributes to building confidence. Whilst these activities are being conducted, more focus on reflection and motivation is required to ensure that students understand why they are taking the action and how this could impact them in their futures. This relates to building on an emancipatory communitarian approach (Blustein et al., 2005; Prilleltensky, 1997) to practice.

It is evident that there are emancipatory communitarian approaches utilised in the FLP in addition to project-based learning activities. For example, staff continue to work with community organisations and local industry to create vocational opportunities for the students. When the students become involved in supporting a community activity, there is a sense of pride that develops within the students. It goes beyond the student to increasing an awareness of ‘the School’ in the community, placing an emphasis on changing the stereotypical judgements about youth who attend alternative education programs. These activities could be strengthened by inviting parents to participate.

As discussed in Chapter 4, parents are often viewed by teaching staff, as a barrier to students' success. This can be due to their own negative experiences with education or they may not value education. Whilst not all parents are involved with their children who attend FLPs, for those who are, effort can be made to include them in activities to showcase their child's work and be part of it. In addition to the parents being invited to take part in their Year 10 student's SET plan, parents could be invited to attend regular sessions focussed on supporting their child's career development. It is acknowledged in the findings however, that there are some parents who do not value the education their child is receiving. With proactive emancipatory communitarian approaches that continue to invite and include parents to be part of their child's educational journey, this may be a precursor to changing the parent's perspectives.

Social support

Social support is another moderator that can positively affect career decision-making and the career development process (Duffy et al., 2016; Lent et al., 1994). In context of the PWT, social support relates to how much individuals are supported by family, friends, peers, and significant others, as well as the broader community, and how this may impact on them coping with stress that is associated with their marginalisation and economic constraints (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Duffy et al., 2016). As evidenced in the findings, the students at the FLP receive social support from staff and students within the FLP, which positively affects their wellbeing, however, this does not appear to have the same effect on their career adaptability. As Duffy et al. (2016) posit in the PWT, social support can act as a "buffer to the effects of the experiences that marginalisation and economic constraints have on feelings of work volition, career adaptability, and the ability to secure decent work" (p. 138). Whilst this buffering effect is enacted through the provision of social support, critical consciousness and emancipatory communitarian approaches at the FLP, the students have been found to be

generally removed from receiving such social support once they leave the FLP environment. This is a significant barrier to some students, as they have difficulty enacting the required processes to undertake job search activities or further education and training.

Economic conditions

Economic conditions, including unemployment rates, access to reasonable wages, career progression opportunities, and access to training, have an impact on how people develop meaningful work lives and obtain decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). These are also factors within the STF societal-environmental category and it is important to understand how these factors can influence career development. Particularly so for young people entering the world of work, an understanding of the labour market conditions of their local area can assist with career choices and influencing decisions. The FLP students interviewed showed a lack of understanding and depth of knowledge regarding the labour market information required in relation to their career choices. This is in line with their limited career curiosity, whereby they were not undertaking exploratory activities that would assist in them gaining knowledge. There was a strong indication that the students rely heavily on the ILO to assist with work experience placements, traineeships and apprenticeships. It was also evident that the opportunities are based purely on what is available. The progression from gaining work experience through to employment and for some, unemployment, when they completed Year 12, was influenced by economic conditions.

Outcomes of decent work

Overall the findings from the study suggest that economic constraints and marginalisation are factors that exist in the lives of young people who attend FLPs. Moderators from the PWT model; proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support and economic conditions (Duffy et al., 2016) can have an impact on work volition and career

adaptability. The PWT also shows that the outcomes of gaining decent work are that survival needs, social connectivity needs and self-determination needs are met (Duffy et al., 2016). This then flows through to wellbeing and work fulfilment. If the young people are not able to transition to decent work or further education and training, then their needs will not be fully met. The result of this being a decrease in wellbeing. This is evident in the findings, whereby young people have left the FLP and are still unemployed 12 months later. Although the participant sample was small, the findings suggests past students who were not employed post-completion of Year 12 had not obtained decent work. The risk is that they will face longer-term unemployment. This is a social risk that the government needs to consider. It places demands on the welfare system and can contribute to further social costs in areas such as health and justice through the young persons' reliance on mental health support or involvement in criminal activity. The building of career adaptability competencies alongside wellbeing is necessary to alleviate this from occurring.

The findings suggested that the three main themes of supportive relationships, preparation for work and pros and cons of the QCE, may have an impact on improving the social and emotional wellbeing and self-efficacy of students. However, these benefits may short-lived upon graduation as students encounter barriers to their transitions. To strengthen this journey, and to reduce barriers that students face on completion of secondary studies, career development interventions could be helpful.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, five broad recommendations are now proposed for implementing a career development program within the FLP. The aim of these recommendations is to provide career development interventions that can be used in the FLP in order for students to develop necessary career management competencies to make successful transitions post-secondary school graduation.

The findings suggested that wellbeing is improved through the supportive relationships that are built within the FLP and that the preparation for work interventions also contribute to improvements in wellbeing and self-efficacy. To strengthen these elements, it is suggested that the teaching and support staff and intergenerational mentors are provided with professional development regarding career interventions. This could assist with strengthening the relationships by giving the teachers and mentors the tools to have more specific career conversations with the young people, which, in turn could assist the students with building career adaptability competencies.

1. It is therefore recommended that teaching staff and mentors receive professional development in relation to career development and be given ongoing support in this area. The ILO could be encouraged to gain a minimum Certificate IV in career development to gain a broader understanding of career development. Teaching staff could also be offered professional development sessions relating to career development and assisted to understand the impact they have on the career development learning of students. Intergenerational mentors may also benefit from career development learning sessions and from being informed of the approaches used within the FLP in relation to career development. The mentors are often the only people the students talk to and trust in their first year at ‘the School’ and with whom they discuss future career plans.

Another outcome the findings suggested was that the Year 12 students did not have well-formed career goals as they transitioned out of the FLP. To assist the students with more focused career goal setting, the suggested recommendation is that the FLP implement a consistent approach across the year levels 10 -12 that includes a holistic focus on students’ development of their career goals.

2. It is recommended that a consistent approach to including career development learning throughout the curriculum from Years 10 – 12 is required. Whilst elements of this learning currently exist, it is ad hoc, causing the content to be weakened. The elements of career development can be included in almost all tasks and integrated throughout the pastoral care sessions, mentoring sessions, project-based learning, excursions, and subject content. This should include career counselling sessions for students with the career counsellor from Year 10 and then continue with sessions at least once per term thereon. More focus on getting students to be responsible for following up on further education and training enrolments and job opportunities is required.

In addition to developing career goals it may be beneficial to provide further exposure to occupations and get students involved in finding out more about what is available to them.

3. It is recommended that more exposure to occupations through excursions, problem-based learning projects, volunteering, visiting speakers and community projects is provided. Whilst this currently occurs, the learning experiences could be more formalised and followed through with students through reflective practices. The type of reflective practices could also include asking the students to research the industry/occupation and present a small summary of it to the whole class. Students should be encouraged to find out the qualifications required, labour market opportunities in their local area, related occupations, and whether the occupation is something they would be interested in, and report back to other students.
4. It is further recommended that when delivering VET courses as part of ‘the School’ curriculum, more focus is placed on how the skills being learned can be transferred across a number of industries/occupations. This can be done through teaching and guiding students to investigate the core competencies of the course and find

occupations where these exist. Short presentations amongst students is one way to share this knowledge.

The pros and cons of the QCE highlighted the short-sighted approach by students to choosing subjects that would assist them complete the required points to graduate with a QCE. It is suggested that the SET planning process be further focussed on the student's individual career planning.

5. It is recommended that when the Year 10 students are introduced to SET planning and commence choosing subjects for Years 11 and 12, there could be more focus on the students' goals, interests and abilities. Whilst it is acknowledged that gaining the QCE is an important element of education, it is suggested the focus on gaining the points could be compensated by an increased focus on career development learning.

Implications for policy and practice

Career development interventions for marginalised youth need to be considered when compiling a career development strategy for FLPs delivering secondary education. This research found that, although students attending FLPs have gained increased social and emotional wellbeing and self-efficacy, this can be short-lived as they have not developed the necessary career adaptability skills.

There is a social cost of not having well-developed career development education in schools. If marginalised youth are not prepared for successful transitions, the likelihood of long-term unemployment is higher, placing heavier reliance on the welfare system. There are also other social costs that can be a resulting factor of long-term unemployment such as reliance on the health system due to ill-health, mental ill-health and poor wellbeing.

Moreover, there may be young people affected by substance abuse and criminal activity, adding another community cost to the situation.

A national career development strategy must consider the approaches used more broadly to include marginalised youth. The strategy will need to incorporate how schools are funded to provide career development throughout their curriculum and where the most support may be required. Wellbeing does have to be a significant focus combined with career development and these two elements should be considered a priority particularly for FLPs.

Another implication for policy is that this research be considered by Education Queensland for future inclusion in curriculum syllabuses. More specifically for career education curriculum with a focus on delivery in FLPs.

In terms of implications for practice within the alternative education sector, there is benefit for teachers and support staff to learn about career development and add this to their pedagogical approaches. Knowledge of how to deliver career interventions to a diverse population, such as marginalised youth, which focuses on building career adaptability competencies necessary for individuals making career transitions in the 21st century, could be beneficial for teachers in this sector.

Limitations

As with any research this study has limitations. The limitations that I encountered within the research included the sample size of the population and potential researcher bias.

The findings of this research were drawn from 27 participants in total. This included 11 staff, 13 current students and 3 past students. Considering the size of the FLP, there was good representation in the sample of teaching and support staff. However, it would have been beneficial to have included more past students in the study to gain a wider selection of views and experiences. Past students were difficult to connect with due to the school not having

their most up to date contact details. Due to privacy issues the Head of Department of the FLP was required to contact a selection of students and ask if their contact details could be passed to the researcher. Whilst I tried to contact at least six past students I was unable to make contact with three of them. This small number of participants may be considered a limitation, however, the richness of their experiences contributed to the findings. As with qualitative research a small number of participants are often used in studies (Polkinghorne, 2005). A greater number of past students may have contributed further perspectives about their experiences and deeper further knowledge regarding graduate outcomes. This could be a consideration for future research.

As addressed previously in Chapter 3, in the section entitled Researcher Reflexivity, researcher bias was a consideration. There could have been the potential for researcher bias in this study as I was both a career development practitioner and researcher. At times, I was involved in discussions with teaching and support staff in relation to their practices regarding career development. It was in these situations that I ensured my own bias was addressed by refraining from making my own judgement of the situation but referring back to my capacity as researcher. This subjectivity was addressed by undertaking reflexive practices to ensure the minimisation of bias. A self-reflective journal was kept throughout the project to record experiences, reactions to particular situations and emergence of biases or assumptions as they arose (Morrow, 2005). Additional reflexive strategies included consulting with research supervisors and experienced researchers to discuss field notes where the researcher required an outsider's view to assist with avoiding bias (Sowden & Keeves, 1998). With these strategies in place I believe there were minimal limitations regarding the analysis of the data.

Significant and original contribution to knowledge

This study is unique in that it is the first of its kind to explore career development interventions within the alternative education sector in Australia. It has identified various strengths but it has highlighted some areas where the strengthening of career development interventions in FLPs may be required. It also highlighted that the students career goals could be better formulated to help them make successful transitions. Previous research with FLPs has focussed on wellbeing and reengagement of marginalised youth with education and training with a view that this would aid successful transitions post-secondary school. There has not been a focus on career development and preparing these students with the self-management skills and resources that will help them to identify career goals, make effective career decisions and manage career-related crisis and trauma throughout their life.

My significant and original contribution to the knowledge in relation to alternative education includes recommendations for career development interventions in FLPs. These interventions, if applied appropriately, will assist FLP students with successfully transitioning post-secondary school. The body of knowledge that exists in relation to outcomes for students who attend FLPs has also been strengthened. This is a diverse population of secondary students whereby career development interventions have not been researched in the Australian context. The sample size was small in this study, and the graduate destination data were not conclusive. However there was clear indication of the students experiencing difficulty moving into further education, training or employment post their completion of secondary education.

Further research

This study has linked two fields: alternative education and career development and it is suggested that future research in this area continue. There has been significant research in the past, as discussed in Chapter 2, on alternative education, however, the focus being on wellbeing and pedagogy. It has been highlighted that there is a lack of graduate destination data or the data are not comprehensive, for students who have attended FLPs (Mills & McGregor, 2010; Msapenda & Hudson, 2013; te Riele, 2012). It makes sense to therefore investigate the career development interventions in FLPs to be able to further the research on graduate destinations. It is necessary for future research to incorporate destination data specific to FLP students, particularly where the FLP is attached to a mainstream school, in order to determine the effectiveness of career development interventions. At this stage these data are difficult to access or in some cases, non-existent.

This study included a relatively small sample of student participants and therefore future studies would benefit from a larger sample of participants. It would also be beneficial to have an equal gender balance across the sample to compare differences in career adaptabilities of male and female students across the age levels.

As this study was bounded by a relatively short time frame, where data collection was conducted over an 18-month period, future studies are recommended to include the collection of longitudinal data collection over a longer period of time, for example, from Year 10 through to at least 2 years post-graduation. This 5-year period for data collection would enhance the findings in terms of graduate student destinations. The tracking of students further beyond their completion of secondary school would strengthen knowledge on how effectively they have been prepared to make these transitions.

Should the recommendations from this study be adopted, future research could be conducted to evaluate the outcome of the interventions. The participating FLP could serve as a pilot project and, if interventions are successful, the model could be rolled out and tested in other FLPs, mainstream secondary schools and internationally. Researchers and participating institutions could determine how they want to define success however, some indications of success might include clearly established career goals to enable transitions to decent work and/or further education or training, with minimal time between these transitions, well established career-related self-efficacy, career adaptability resources and career self-management competencies.

Previous research has evaluated FLP students' social and emotional wellbeing across multiple sites in Australia. A similar multi-site strategy could be implemented to focus on career development and graduate transitions. Given that this qualitative study has provided some support for the PWT in terms of the predictors and moderators of career related outcomes, further research utilising a quantitative approach could explore the application of the PWT model more comprehensively within the FLP context. For example when gathering destination data the Decent Work Scale (Duffy et al., 2017) could be used to evaluate outcomes for employed graduates in terms of work meeting their basic needs. The PWT model incorporates career adaptability and work volition therefore, future research could explore the impact of interventions on these key constructs and the moderating effects of proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support and economic conditions.

This study emphasised the need for educators to access various forms of professional development to enhance their ability to deliver career development interventions with marginalised youth in alternative education settings. Future research could explore the impact of professional development on the ability of teaching staff to effectively embed career

development learning into the curriculum and the outcome of this on students' career development.

Conclusion

The career development literature provides a variety of useful theoretical frameworks that identify important factors to consider in relation to a person's career choices, decision-making, adaptability, and self-management. In answering the three research questions, this study identified a range of individual, social, and environmental influences on the career development of young people attending a regional FLP. The overarching themes that emerged included supportive relationships, preparation for work, and the pros and cons of the QCE, which influenced the students' wellbeing, self-efficacy, and career goals, respectively. Supportive relationships are important in addressing the wellbeing of the young people attending the FLP, both informal and formal relationships enable a safe place in which the students can learn. In addition, the activities that involve preparing students for work such as work experience and VET classes, contribute positively to the students' self-efficacy and confidence. These activities are also important as many of the students attending FLPs require employment to survive. The pros and cons of completing the QCE is an important theme as there are benefits for the students in achieving successful graduate outcomes. There is, however, considerable planning required when assisting students with their selection of courses to complete the QCE to ensure that they can successfully graduate and transition to employment or further education and training. Several barriers influencing the students' career goals and post-school outcomes were identified, including family issues, lack of support post-graduation, and mental health issues.

Overall, the findings indicate that the participating FLP is successful in terms of enhancing the students' social and emotional wellbeing. The data indicate that FLPs can positively influence students' self-efficacy, however, any gains in wellbeing, is short-lived

once they leave ‘the School’. The FLP helps students who are marginalised to successfully achieve their QCE, providing extensive opportunities for students to engage in vocational learning, work experience, and traineeships. However, the data further indicate that there exists gaps in the career development learning opportunities available for students. Focussed effort is needed to enhance students’ career self-management skills and career adaptability resources and competencies, and, facilitate continued improvement in students’ levels of self-efficacy, once they leave the FLP.

It is therefore recommended that FLPs implement a career development program. Students who are marginalised deserve the opportunity and assistance afforded to them, through their FLP enrolment, to help them overcome barriers that prevent successful graduate outcomes. To enable these young people to obtain decent work and become productive members of society, career development interventions should be embedded into the FLP curriculum to strengthen students’ career adaptability, thereby increasing their opportunities to achieve work fulfilment and maintain positive wellbeing. Such an outcome would be of benefit to not only the young person, but the whole community.

Concluding reflexive comments

There is a lot to be learned as a researcher and particularly in this situation when embarking on such a large research project as a novice researcher. As a result there was certainly a lot that I learnt. I was fortunate however, that my experience as a researcher was extremely positive. I was warmly welcomed by both staff and students at the FLP where I conducted the research. I was also fortunate to have been able to learn from educators, service providers, volunteers and support staff who are passionate practitioners and committed to supporting the community’s marginalised youth who attend the FLP.

One aspect I was mindful of in the initial stages of the data collection was the existence of the pre-established working relationship between the university researchers and the stakeholders. I was concerned that it would be difficult to report any negative findings to the stakeholders but in essence this enhanced my sensitivity in relation to objectively presenting such findings.

My personal growth as a researcher has been remarkable and I am grateful for the opportunities this study has presented. I began this journey with a burning desire to 'make a difference'. I wanted to use my career development background to ascertain how marginalised youth attending FLPs were being prepared for life after school. The energy that fuelled my research progress was the passion I had to ensure that marginalised youth were able to access the necessary career adaptabilities and self-management competencies to make successful career transitions. As with any journey there were some issues that, as a new researcher, proved problematic at the time. My energy decreased at these times, however, with supervisory support and a willingness to self-reflect and find solutions for future issues, I continued on the journey.

I agree with Cooper (2002) who stated (refer to quote at beginning of this chapter) that there is much to learn about students' pathways and the bridges that are crossed throughout their journeys. In essence this paralleled my own research journey and the bridges crossed along the way. I believe I have navigated them and grown from the experiences and challenges encountered. Most of all I believe I have provided a unique and useful study to assist the alternative education sector to build strong and supportive bridges for their students who journey alongside them.

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Appendix A

Key Terms and Acronyms

CYPFS	-	Coaching Young People for Success
FLP	-	Flexible Learning Program
NEET	-	Not in Employment, Education or Training
PCG	-	Pastoral Care Group
QCE	-	Queensland Certificate of Education
RTO	-	Registered Training Organisation
SET Plan	-	Senior Education and Training Plan
TAFE	-	Technical and Further Education
VET	-	Vocational Education and Training

Appendix B

USQ Ethics Forms – Participant Information for current students, teaching and support staff and past students

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Research Project Interview

Project Details

Title of Project: Career development for marginalised youth: study of the practices within a Flexible Learning Program in South West Queensland

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H16REA114

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

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Dr Nancey Hoare
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Telephone: (07) 4631 1740

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD Project. The purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of young people, such as yourself, who attend the (School) and how these experiences impact on your knowledge of career pathways, career goal setting, confidence about your future, and your overall wellbeing.

The results of this project will help to inform the development of a program that works best for students attending flexible learning programs to provide them with skills to successfully transition beyond alternative education.

The research team requests your assistance so that we can gain firsthand knowledge of your experience as a student within a flexible learning program.

Participation

Your participation will involve taking part in an interview that will take approximately 30-50 Minutes, of your time.

The interview will take place at the (School) at a time and date convenient to you.

Questions will include things like:

What has your experience at (the school) been like so far?

What are your long term goals about what you want to achieve from your education?

The interview will be audio recorded.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. You may also ask that any data collected about you be destroyed. If you do wish to withdraw from this project or withdraw data collected about you, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the top of this form).

You will be provided with the opportunity to enter into the USQ School of Psychology and Counselling prize draw to win one of 2 X $50 or 1 X $100 pre-paid Visa gift cards. This draw is conducted twice per annum. Participants can opt in or out of the draw. If you wish to enter the prize draw will be provided with a form upon which you can enter your name and contact details. This form will be kept separate from your research data.

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the researchers, the University of Southern Queensland, or the (The School).

Expected Benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you other than giving you the opportunity to share your experiences about being involved in a flexible learning program. However, it may benefit future students who attend Flexible Learning Programs, as this research is about finding out what works best or what doesn't work to assist students in achieving their career goals and enhancing their wellbeing. The outcomes will help build a framework for flexible learning programs that can be used to assist future students in gaining skills for effective career transition beyond school.

If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the research once it is finalised you can advise us by completing the appropriate section on the consent form.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this project. Whilst not intentional, sometimes thinking about the sorts of issues raised in the interview can create some uncomfortable or distressing feelings. If this happens for you and you need to talk to someone about this immediately, you have the option to speak to the Chaplain, Social Worker, Head of School, your teachers or your Pastoral Care Group leader at (the school). Alternatively, you can also contact Headspace on 4639 9000, Lifeline on 13 11 14, Beyondblue on 1300 22 4636 or the SANE helpline on 1800 18 7263. You may also wish to consider consulting your General Practitioner (GP) for additional support.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All of your comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will be used to transcribe the data into a written document. At the time of transcription, a code will be assigned to the audio file and a pseudonym will be applied to the written data. Therefore, your real name is not recorded on any of the

data so that you cannot be identified. After the interview recording has been transcribed, the researcher will ask you to read the transcript and verify that all your responses have been accurately transcribed and that you are satisfied that the transcript is a true representation of the interview. You will be given one week in which to review the transcript and respond with endorsement.

The audio recording will be stored electronically and securely on a password-protected computer, and only the research team will have access to it. The recording will not be used for any other purpose other than transcribing responses into a written document which will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis, subsequent publications in refereed journals, and/or conference presentations.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data Management policy.

Consent to Participate

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. Please return your signed consent form to a member of the Research Team prior to participating in your interview.

If you are under the age of 18 it is a requirement that consent must also be given by your parent or guardian for you to take part in this research.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Team Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

University of Southern Queensland

Participant Information for USQ Research Project Interview

Project Details

Title of Project: Career development for marginalised youth: study of the practices within a Flexible Learning Program in South West Queensland

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H16REA114

Research Team Contact Details

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Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD Project. The purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of young people who attend the (School) and how these experiences impact on their knowledge of career pathways, career goal setting, confidence about their future and their overall wellbeing.

A broader goal of the research is to help develop a program that works best for students attending flexible learning programs in providing them with the right skills to successfully transition beyond alternative education.

The research team requests your assistance because it is important to gain first-hand knowledge of your experience as a teacher or support staff member within a flexible learning program. Your knowledge regarding the implementation of programs and the success of these as contributing toward student wellbeing and career adaptability is an imperative part of this research.

Participation

Your participation will involve participation in an interview that will take approximately 30-50 Minutes, of your time.

The interview will take place at the (School) at a time and date convenient to you.

Questions will include things like:

Can you tell me if you use strategies in your teaching that contribute to students' wellbeing?

What can you tell me about the pathways that are available to students at the FLP?

The interview will be audio recorded.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. You may also ask that any data collected about you be destroyed. If you do wish to withdraw from this project or withdraw data collected about you, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the top of this form).

You will be provided with the opportunity to enter into the USQ School of Psychology and Counselling prize draw to win one of 2 X $50 or 1 X $100 pre-paid Visa gift cards. This draw is conducted twice per annum. Participants can opt in or out of the draw. If you wish to enter the prize draw will be provided with a form upon which you can enter your name and contact details. This form will be kept separate from your research data.

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland or the (School).

Expected Benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you other than giving you the opportunity to have a say about your experiences working within a flexible learning program. However, it may benefit future students who attend Flexible Learning Programs as this research is about finding out what works best or what doesn't work to assist students' in achieving career goals and wellbeing. The outcomes will help build a framework for flexible learning programs that can be used to assist future students in gaining skills for effective career transition beyond school.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this project.

Sometimes thinking about the sorts of issues raised in the interview can create some uncomfortable or distressing feelings. If you need to talk to someone about this immediately you can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, Beyondblue on 1300 22 4636 or the SANE helpline on 1800 18 7263. You may also wish to consider consulting your General Practitioner (GP) for additional support.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will be used to transcribe the data into a written document. At time of transcription a code will be assigned to the audio file and a pseudonym will be applied to the written data. Therefore your real name is not recorded on any of the data so that you cannot be identified. After the interview recording has been transcribed the researcher will ask you to read the transcript and verify that all your responses are correct and that you are satisfied that your responses are a true representation of the interview. You will be given one week in which to review the transcript and respond with endorsement.

The audio recording will be stored electronically and only the research team will have access to it. The recording will not be used for any other purpose other than transcribing responses into a written document which will be used in the PhD thesis, subsequent publications in refereed journals and/or conference presentations.

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Telephone: (07) 4631 1740

Description

This research is being undertaken as part of a PhD Project. The purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of young people, such as yourself, who have attended the (school) and how these experiences have impacted on your knowledge of career pathways, career goal setting, self-esteem, wellbeing and your post school outcomes.

A broader goal of the research is to help develop a program that works best for students attending flexible learning programs in providing them with the right skills to successfully transition beyond alternative education.

The research team requests your assistance because it is important to gain first-hand knowledge of your experience as a student who attended a flexible learning program and how this has influenced your post school employment, education or training outcomes.

Participation

Your participation will involve participation in an interview that will take approximately 30-50 Minutes, of your time.

The interview will take place at the (school) at a time and date convenient to you.

Questions will include things like:

What was your experience at (the school) like?

What have you been doing since finishing Year 12 at (the school)?

The interview will be audio recorded.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. You may also ask that any data collected about you be destroyed. If you do wish to withdraw from this project or withdraw data collected about you, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the top of this form).

You will be provided with the opportunity to enter into the USQ School of Psychology and Counselling prize draw to win one of 2 X $50 or 1 X $100 pre-paid Visa gift cards. This draw is conducted twice per annum. Participants can opt in or out of the draw. If you wish to enter the prize draw will be provided with a form upon which you can enter your name and contact details. This form will be kept separate from your research data.

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland or the xxx School.

Expected Benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you other than giving you the opportunity to have a say about your experiences in a flexible learning program. However, it may benefit future students who attend Flexible Learning Programs as this research is about finding out what works best or what doesn't work to assist you in achieving career goals and wellbeing. The outcomes will help build a framework for flexible learning programs that can be used to assist future students in gaining skills for effective career transition beyond school.

Risks

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this project. These include emotional feelings that may cause you some distress. Sometimes thinking about the sorts of issues raised in the interview can create some uncomfortable or distressing feelings. If you need to talk to someone about this immediately you can contact either Headspace on 4639 9000, Lifeline on 13 11 14, BeyondBlue on 1300 22 4636 or the SANE helpline on 1800 18 7263. You may also wish to consider consulting your General Practitioner (GP) for additional support.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law.

The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording will be used to transcribe the data into a written document. At time of transcription a code will be assigned to the audio file and a pseudonym will be applied to the written data. Therefore your real name is not recorded on any of the data so that you cannot be identified. After the interview recording has been transcribed the researcher will ask you to read the transcript and verify that all your responses are correct and that you are satisfied that your

responses are a true representation of the interview. You will be given one week in which to review the transcript and respond with endorsement.

The audio recording will be stored electronically and only the research team will have access to it. The recording will not be used for any other purpose other than transcribing responses into a written document which will be used in the PhD thesis, subsequent publications in refereed journals and/or conference presentations.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data Management policy.

Consent to Participate

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. Please return your signed consent form to a member of the Research Team prior to participating in your interview.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Team Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix C

USQ Ethics Forms – Consent Forms for under 18 and over 18 years of age

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Research Project Interview

Project Details

Title of Project: Career development for marginalised youth: study of the practices within a Flexible Learning Program in South West Queensland

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H16REA114

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Ms Naomi Ryan
Email: naomi.ryan@usq.edu.au
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Other Investigator/Supervisor Details

Professor Lorelle Burton
Email: lorelle.burton@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 4631 2853
Mobile:

Dr Nancey Hoare
Email: Nancey.hoare@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 4631 1740

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that the interview will be audio recorded.
- Understand that you will be provided with a copy of the transcript of the interview for perusal and endorsement prior to inclusion of your data in the project.
- Understand that you may be observed during your classes at Flexi as part of this research.
- Understand that while information gained during the study will be published, you will not be identified and your personal results will remain confidential.
- Understand that any data collected may be used in future research.

- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au if you do have any concern or complaint about the ethical conduct of this project.
- Are over 18 years of age.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings ☐ **yes** ☐ **no** (please tick)

Please provide email address to receive summary: _____

Please return this sheet to a Research Team member prior to undertaking the interview.

University of Southern Queensland

Consent Form for USQ Research Project Interview (Under 18 years)

Project Details

Title of Project: Career development for marginalised youth: study of the practices within a Flexible Learning Program in South West Queensland

Human Research Ethics Approval Number: H16REA114

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Ms Naomi Ryan
Email: naomi.ryan@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 4631 2063
Mobile: 0421 078 724

Other Investigator/Supervisor Details

Professor Lorelle Burton
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Telephone: (07) 4631 2853
Mobile:

Dr Nancey Hoare
Email: Nancey.hoare@usq.edu.au
Telephone: (07) 4631 1740

Statement of Consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding your child's participation in this project.
- You and your child have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you or your child have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that the interview will be audio recorded.
- Understand that your child will be provided with a copy of the transcript of the interview for perusal and endorsement prior to inclusion of your child's data in the project.
- Understand that your child may be observed in their classes at [the FLP] as part of this research.
- Understand that while information gained during the study will be published, your child will not be identified and their personal results will remain confidential.
- Understand that any data collected may be used in future research.

- Understand that your child is free to withdraw from the research at any time, without comment or penalty, and that you are free to withdraw your consent for your child's participation at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au if you do have any concern or complaint about the ethical conduct of this project.
- Are the legal guardian of the child who will participate in this project.
- Agree for your child to participate in the project.

Child or Young Person's (under 18 years) Agreement to Participate

Name	
Signature	
Date	

Parent's (or Legal Guardian's) Consent for a Child or Young Person to Participate

Name	
Signature	
Date	

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings ☐ **yes** ☐ **no** (please tick)

Please provide email address to receive summary: _____

Please return this sheet to a Research Team member prior to your child participating in the Interview.

Appendix D

First Round Semi Structured Interview Questions – Current Students

Why did you enrol at the FLP?

Prompt: Were you school referred, parent referred, self-referred?

How long have you been coming to the FLP?

What has your experience at the FLP been like so far?

How does it compare to your previous school?

Prompt: Is it better or worse than your last school, why?

Prompt: What do you like best about it?

How would you describe yourself as a person at this moment in time?

How do you think being at Flexi might change the way you see yourself?

How curious are you about exploring a range of possibilities for your future career? (e.g., thinking about yourself in the future)

What are your important career goals at this point in time? Can you tell me why those goals are important to you?

Have these goals changed over the last year? If so, how?

What happens when things don't go quite as you would hope in relation to your future goals?

Do you have any new goals since starting at the FLP?

Prompt: Can you tell me a bit about these new goals?

What things do you think you need to do to achieve your goals?

How confident do you feel in being able to pursue your career goals or aspirations?

How do you think being at the FLP might help with your confidence in relation to your career goals?

Who do you feel comfortable talking to about your future either here at the FLP or in your personal life?

What do you think might stop you from achieving your goals?

How do you think you could change those things so you can achieve your goals?

How much responsibility do you take for making career decisions/choosing a career path/managing your future career?

How do you think being at the FLP might help you in terms of your overall wellbeing?

Semi Structured Interview Questions: Past year 12 students

Why did you enrol at the FLP?

Prompt: Were you school referred, parent referred, self-referred?

How long did you go to the FLP for?

What was your experience at the FLP like?

How did it compare to your previous school?

Prompt: Was it better or worse than your previous school, why?

Prompt: What did you like best about it?

Prompt: What were some negative things about it?

How would you describe yourself as a person at this moment in time?

Do you think your experience at the FLP might have changed the way you see yourself? In what way?

What have you been doing since finishing Year 12?

Prompt: working, further training or education?

Was this part of your goal when you started at the FLP?

Did your goals change through your time at the FLP?

Prompt: Can you tell me a bit about these new goals?

How successful do you feel at this point in time in relation to your career? Are you satisfied with where you are at the moment in your career?

How concerned are you about your future career (looking ahead and preparing for what might come about career-wise)?

What are your important career goals at this point in time? Can you tell me why those goals are important to you? How hopeful are you about your future and achieving your goals?

How confident do you feel in being able to pursue your career goals or aspirations?

How do you think being at the FLP contributed to your confidence in relation to your career goals?

What do you think might stop you from achieving your goals?

How do you think you could change those things so you can achieve your goals?

What happens when things don't go quite as you would hope in relation to your future goals?

How much responsibility do you take for making career decisions/choosing a career path/managing your future career? Or how much control do you feel you have over…. (prompts: control over shaping your career how you want it, putting in the effort, being persistent in pursuing your career goals, etc)?

What were the most significant things about your time at the FLP? *Prompt: was it around your learning or friendships, teaching support, mentoring etc?*

Do you think the FLP has adequately prepared you to make positive career transitions?

What do you think would have happened to you if you didn't enrol at the FLP?

What sort of things would you advise someone considering going to an FLP?

First Round Semi Structured Interview Questions: Teaching and Support Staff

Can you tell me about your role here at the FLP?

How long have you been working at the school?

What has your experience at the school been like so far?

How does it compare with previous schools you have worked in?

Can you tell me if you use strategies in your teaching that contribute to students' wellbeing?

Prompt: if yes, what are these strategies and do you think they are effective?

What sort of things do you think contribute the most to students' progression here at the FLP?

Are you aware of the students longer term goals for education, training or employment and how would you assist the students with achieving these?

What can you tell me about the pathways that are available to students at this school?

Prompt: for example VET certificates, QCE, tertiary pathways, employment?

Do you see any differences in the students' confidence as they progress through their education at the FLP?

Prompt: If so can you explain why these differences or changes occur?

Referring to your own experience here at the school, what do you believe are the most important strategies or principles that could influence student wellbeing, self-efficacy and positive career transitions for the students?

Do you know of any career development approaches or theories that are applied in the curriculum at the FLP to assist students with developing career competencies?

Can you tell me about the sort of barriers that the students' face in relation to achieving further education, training or employment outcomes?

What sort of strategies do you think can be applied for overcoming these barriers?

Can you provide specific examples of students' who have overcome barriers and what their outcomes have been post Year 12?

Can you outline the biggest strengths the FLP has in contributing to successful transitions for marginalised youth?

Appendix E

Second Round Interview Questions

Second round interviews: Past year 12 students (first interviewed as Year 12 students 2016)

Semi Structured Interview Questions:

It has been approximately 12 months since you were last interviewed for this research. Can you tell me what you have been doing since completing Year 12 last year? *Prompt: working, further training or education?*

Was this how you had planned things at the end of Year 12 or have things changed? In what way?

How did your qualifications and certificates that you completed at Flexi help you with where you are today?

How would you describe yourself?

How do you think your experience at Flexi might have changed the way you see yourself? In what way?

How successful do you feel at this point in time in relation to your career? How satisfied are you with where you are at the moment in your career?

How concerned are you about your future career (looking ahead and preparing for what might come about career-wise)?

What are your important career goals at this point in time? Can you tell me why those goals are important to you? How hopeful are you about your future and achieving your career goals?

How confident do you feel in being able to pursue your career goals or aspirations?

How do you think being at Flexi contributed to your confidence in relation to your career goals?

What do you think might stop you from achieving your career goals?

How do you think you could change those things so you can achieve your career goals?

What do you do when things don't go quite as you would hope in relation to your future career goals?

How much responsibility do you take for making career decisions/choosing a career path/managing your future career? Or how much control do you feel you have over managing your career (prompts: control over shaping your career how you want it, putting in the effort, being persistent in pursuing your career goals, etc)?

What were the most significant things about your time at Flexi? *Prompt: was it around your learning or friendships, teaching support, mentoring etc?*

How do you think Flexi has prepared you to make positive career transitions?

What do you think would have happened to you if you didn't enrol at Flexi?