The Phenomenon of Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

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ABSTRACT

This research was concerned with the phenomenon of problematic school-related absenteeism (PSRA) within the Victorian secondary school system with particular reference to middle schooling. The study investigated categories of PSRA, identified major risk factors associated with PSRA, and outlined outcomes relevant to selected school-based strategies employed in the management and minimisation of PSRA.

A review of literature was undertaken that identified a number of major categories and risk factors that were associated with PSRA. Subsequently, a conceptual framework was developed. It was the conceptual framework underpinned by the research questions that guided the research design and the collection and analysis of data.

Five research questions underpinned this research. The primary research question was: "In relation to problematic school-related absenteeism, are there any emergent trends or patterns highlighted in the analysis of data concerning class of school classification, namely, Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, Catholic Girls, Government, and Independent within the Victorian secondary school system." The study was developed with reference to a number of social and contextual issues and factors that related to middle school students under investigation.

The first stage of the study involved the collection of data through the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism, Student-Questionnaire: Middle School Transition, and School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism from which an empirical database was constructed. Data received from students and schools were analysed and emergent patterns or trends associated with PSRA were established.

The second stage involved twelve case study profiles in which Year 9 students' perceptions in relation to school life were investigated. The case study profiles provided a greater insight into key risk factors associated with PSRA.

The case study profiles not only provided greater insight and depth into risk factors associated with PSRA, but also highlighted student-related issues such as educational outcomes, future aspirations, and the meaning of citizenship.

Finally, the thesis presented a number of curriculum and policy recommendations to all key stakeholders including schools directly involved with the research and policy makers such as the Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Office.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

This is to certify that

(i)   the thesis comprises only my original work,

(ii)   due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii)   the thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, references, appendices, and footnotes.

Robert Wylie Rennie

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ACU: Australian Catholic University

AISV: Association of Independent Schools of Victoria

BAZ: Ballarat Zone

BEZ: Bendigo Zone

CASES21:   Computerised Administrative System Environment in Schools

CECV: Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

CEO: Catholic Education Office

CSP: Case Study Profile

DECS: Department of Education and Children's Services

DET: Department of Education and Training

EMZ: Eastern Metropolitan Zone

ERM: Electronic Roll Marking

GEZ: Geelong Zone

GLZ: Gippsland Zone

HREC: Human Research Ethics Committee

ISSA: Intra-Sample Statistical Analysis

NMZ: Northern Metropolitan Zone

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

PSRA: Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

RSB: Registered Schools Board

SMZ: Southern Metropolitan Zone

SPSS: Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (Version 14.0)

SQ: MST: Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition

SQ: PCA: School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

SQ: SRA: Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism

WMZ: Western Metropolitan Zone

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL-RELATED ABSENTEEISM

"School success is an important factor in achieving the transition to responsible adulthood and citizenship."
(Fitzgibbon, 1996, p. 3)

Introduction

This research is concerned with the phenomenon of problematic school-related absenteeism within the Victorian secondary school system with particular reference to middle school students, school management, the law governing school-related absenteeism, and the concept of citizenship. For the purposes of this study *problematic school-related absenteeism (PSRA)* is a generic term taken to mean the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, or explained absence that can occur with parental knowledge and consent. Historically, since the advent of compulsory education, the effects in relation to PSRA have been regarded by politicians, parents, pedagogues, psychologists and other interested professionals as a key issue, as students who experience PSRA are considered to be at risk (Rothman, 2001).

According to the *Education Act 1958*[1] it is compulsory for any child of school age to regularly attend school unless a reasonable excuse is provided. The Act highlights school attendance as part of a three-way accountability system, whereby students below a given age are obliged to regularly attend school, parents[2] are accountable for maximum school attendance, and schools are obliged to provide the best education possible given the circumstances of each student (Parliament of Victoria, 2004). Moreover, this failure to meet legal obligations regarding school attendance represents a challenge not just to students, parents, and educational systems, but to communities and society in general.

The magnitude of PSRA is documented throughout widespread independent studies that show this phenomenon is an escalating global problem. For instance, on any given school day in the United States, hundreds of thousands of students are absent from classrooms, many without a *bona fide* excuse (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). In the United Kingdom, according to government figures, some 50,000 students truant from

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[1] At the completion of this thesis the *Education Act 1958* was in the process of being superseded by the *Education and Training and Reform Act 2006*.

[2] In the present study parent(s) are deemed to include guardian(s).

school each day (Hastings, 2003). Further, over the past decade, PSRA has achieved a greater prominence in the field of educational research.

Recent research confirms non-attendance levels have been rising, particularly in what is now conventionally called the middle years of schooling, namely, the 14 to 16 age group (Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood, 2004). During these formative years of schooling students and parents are still obliged to maintain regular attendance until the adolescent reaches the legal age to leave school.

The Victorian Auditor-General's report, *Management of Absenteeism* acknowledges that absence rates increased particularly within the middle years of schooling from 1996 to 2002 (Cameron, 2004). Further, in a recent report, the Department of Education and Training (DET) Victoria (2004) confirms this trend with middle school absence rates in 2003 peaking at an average of 20.00 days per student in Year 9. This is equivalent to missing almost 10 per cent of the school year or half a day every week.[3] The mean absence days per student 2000-2003 for year levels 8-10 are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Mean Absent Days per Student 2000-2003 - Year Levels 8-10

Year	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
2000	17.64	19.68	18.66
2001	18.08	20.47	19.08
2002	18.27	20.54	19.01
2003	18.50	20.00	18.80

(Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2004)

According to a report by Winkler (2003) the average student displaying PSRA within the Victorian secondary school system is absent approximately one in every thirteen school days. This means that by the completion of their education, an entire year has been missed. However, in the majority of cases, student absences are authorised either by parents or by the school (Cameron, 2004; Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk, 2003). In all likelihood many student absences are legitimate for reasons such as temporary sickness or long-term ill-health. However, it is often difficult to account for absences in relation to

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[3] 2004 data was unavailable for examination at the time of conducting this research.

fractional truancy; that is, times when students are deliberately late for classes or skip particular classes.

PSRA is also a key issue for broader reasons that may affect future academic, employment, and social skills. These reasons include truancy, school refusal, delinquency, early school withdrawal, and parental condoned absenteeism. In a study conducted by Hobsons Bay City Council (2000) within the inner Western suburbs of Melbourne, it was found that as a result of missing critical stages of interaction and development within the school community, students experiencing PSRA are more likely to experience both immediate and long-term emotional crises that may be detrimental to their future educational, employment and social success. Further, according to Wheatley & Spillane (2001), as a result of long-term emotional crises, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and minor or gross criminal activities are often linked to PSRA. Rothman (2001) notes the negative consequences on regular attendees as teachers must accommodate non-attendees within the same class. In their *Literature review of school absenteeism on non-engaging issues in Victoria*, Wheatley and Spillane (2001) support Rothman's contention by emphasising the point that "if a student is absent when a key concept is taught, they are likely to have increasing difficulty as the course progresses" (p. 18). The short-term consequence of PSRA can compound issues such as self-esteem, social isolation and dissatisfaction (Thompson & Perry, 2005). However, in the long-term, the community bears the social and economic costs (Cameron, 2004). These costs are likely to escalate if any trends to increased non-compliance with the laws of compulsory school attendance are not noticed and action not taken to remedy the situation promptly.

Fitzgibbon, in the *Report of the inquiry into truancy and exclusion of children and young people from school 1996*, affirms that:

> The social and economic cost to these young people themselves and to the Australian community is measured in the numbers who become long-term unemployed, homeless, caught in a poverty trap, and dependent on welfare and in the individual and community cost of those who become involved in the juvenile justice system. (p. 3)

A recent study on school attachment and attendance conducted by Bucci (2002) within the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, supported the findings of Fitzgibbon (1996) by stating that "the ones who leave school early run the strong risk of exclusion from reciprocal relationships in the community, incomplete or damaged rites to adulthood, and

personal vulnerability which can trigger substance abuse and criminal acts" (p. 5). Research conducted by Oman, McLeroy, Vesely, Aspy, Smith, and Penn (2002) and Walls (2003) highlights significant associations between student background factors, PSRA and early school leaving associated with delinquent behaviour. Although, there appears to be a consensus among these researchers that the socio-economic cost to young people who leave school early is significant, there are no definitive research studies to suggest that all early school leavers are likely to fail to become skilled, independent members of society. However, there is ample research evidence to indicate that these young people are most at risk of not achieving the transition to responsible adulthood and citizenship. Fitzgibbon (1996) states that "school success is an important factor in achieving the transition to responsible adulthood and citizenship" (p. 3). It is apparent that the remarks made by Fitzgibbon (1996) are still relevant today as researchers are still reporting the same findings and at an alarming rate. Therefore, the intention of this study is not to present a school-based intervention program to combat PSRA, but to determine and assess if PSRA is a multi-causal phenomenon consisting of different types, with each type displaying different risk or precipitating factors. The present study is based on the premise that PSRA can be managed during early onset and particularly during the middle years of schooling. Effective management may minimise:

- the number of adolescents deemed to be at risk in relation to their educational, employment, and social prospects;
- stress placed upon families due to legal obligations; and
- pressures placed upon school resources to combat PSRA.

Focus of the Present Study

Although, Section 1.5 of the *Report of the inquiry into truancy and exclusion of children and young people from school (1996)* highlights some outstanding achievements in Australian education such as avoiding a downward spiral in attendance rates, there is no concrete evidence presented to support this statement. In fact, the evidence suggests that absence rates are marginally increasing each year (DET, Australian Capital Territory, 2005; DET, Tasmania, 2005; DET, Victoria, 2004; DET, Western Australia, 2005). The current study attempts to identify what aspects of PSRA are perceived by students as deterring them from achieving regular attendance at school. The study also offers a

justification for building on and expanding school-based management programs as a vital strand of wellbeing that minimises PSRA and promotes the intrinsic values of education. This may help determine if the research being conducted does indeed have a positive impact upon minimising PSRA, and ultimately, what its impact is on the results within this study, with particular reference to the middle years of schooling.

Aims

The aims of the study are:

- to investigate the phenomenon of PSRA;
- to distinguish between the different types of PSRA;
- to identify the major risk factors associated with different types of PSRA;
- to outline the outcomes relevant to selected school-based strategies employed in the management and minimisation of PSRA; and
- to present an argument regarding the inclusion of active citizenship in the school-based curriculum.

Issues

Additionally, this study raises wider issues such as parental condoned absenteeism and its link in relation to the concept of citizenship that are central to the phenomenon of PSRA. These issues aim to invite input from parents, politicians, pedagogues, psychologists and other interested educational practitioners. For example:

1.   Should the government amend legislation to hold parents or guardians more accountable for persistent non-attendance of their children from school?

2.   Should schools provide more strategies such as educational literature, home visits, and school seminars as a support for parents regarding their legal obligations in relation to their children's required attendance at school?

3.   Should students undertake further curriculum-based studies regarding the meaning, expectations, and implications of citizenship?

Historical Overview

Since the nineteenth century, after the United States and European countries enacted laws to mandate school attendance, PSRA in adolescents has been researched and reported extensively, receiving attention, in particular, from educators and psychologists as well as pedagogues, politicians and other interested professionals. A by-product of this extensive attention, however, has been the considerable disparity in fundamental definitions and descriptions regarding the phenomenon of PSRA. Moreover, the advent of compulsory education also led to PSRA becoming a serious social and behavioural problem that has been the subject of considerable consternation across the wider spectrum of today's society. Reid (1985) notes the legacy of compulsory education and helps to put some recent problems in relation to PSRA into their proper perspective by asserting that:

> Humphries' history of working class education between 1899 and 1939 is a reminder of the repressive nature of schooling in those early days when education first became available for all children, irrespective of status or ability. The widespread resistance to the introduction of compulsory education in 1918 provoked the shape of truancy, classroom unrest, and refusal to learn. (p. 11)

There is no definitive history written on the phenomenon of PSRA, but there are a number of reports that present valuable information regarding its development. As Western society felt the impact of increased industrialisation, urbanisation and immigration, compulsory education and child labour laws were introduced to preserve social order and provide a competent work force (Reid, 1985). In the United Kingdom the *Education Act 1870* was introduced to make attendance at school compulsory and School Boards were given powers to fix the age of school leavers. By the beginning of the twentieth century, academics were already undertaking investigations into the causes of PSRA.

The perceptions of what constitutes PSRA have changed radically over the past century. Until the 1930s the different forms of prolonged absence from school were considered as *truancy* (Hersov, 1985), that is, "an unlawful and willful absence from school without the knowledge and consent of the parents" (Williams, 1927, p. 277). Any child with problematic attendance was deemed to be a delinquent (Berecz, 1969). Past research conducted by Dayton (1928), Doll (1921), Kirkpatrick & Lodge (1935), McElwee

(1931), Mercer (1930), and Partridge (1939) reported that PSRA was linked to delinquency, poor parenting, deviant peer influence, problematic school environments, school maladjustment, lack of motivation, and lower intelligence. The idea that PSRA was generally linked to delinquency was questioned by Lippman (1936) who identified a sub-type of neurotic delinquency in some adolescents who appeared anxious and depressed whilst considered as delinquent truants. The earliest confirmed study into phobic components of PSRA was conducted by Broadwin (1932) who described an obsessional-neurotic type of truancy that highlighted a major feature of persistent non-attendance at school. According to Broadwin (1932) school refusing behaviour stems from the child fearing something may happen to his mother because of a strong, infantile, love attachment to her. Broadwin's (1932) early diagnosis and description of school refusal provided the catalyst for further research.

Johnson, Falstein, Szurek, and Svedsen (1941) coined the term "school phobia" (p. 5) to describe a separation anxiety; that is, intense distress following anticipated or actual separation from significant others in children refusing to attend school. According to Johnson and colleagues there are two common factors that lead to the development of school phobia. Events are believed to occur in the mother's life, which bring about feelings of resentment and hostility towards the child. At the same time, acute anxiety develops in the child, who begins to feel guilty about leaving the mother to attend school. The teacher who is considered a diluted fear form of the mother soon becomes the phobic object. This dichotomy of school phobia and separation anxiety further splintered the debate regarding PSRA.

Further, confusion between school phobia and psychoneurotic truancy/school refusal proponents began to occur in the late 1940s to mid-1950s. Warren (1948) conducted a study that indicates school refusers suffer from symptoms of anxiety and depression. Warren (1948) also found that school-refusing behaviours often occur in dysfunctional family settings in which marital problems, maternal anxiety, and parental inconsistency are present. In the 1950s the original distinction between specific school phobia and general psychoneurotic truancy/school refusal was further broadened. The prevailing nuances in the literature classifications of this disorder are highlighted in Chapter 2 of the present work. The categories depicting school refusal are presented in Table 1.2 overleaf.

Table 1.2

Categories Depicting School Refusal

Source	Categories	Personality	Prognosis
Coolidge et al. (1957)	Neurotic	Basically sound	Good
	Characterological	Chronic, complex disorders	Guarded
Kennedy (1965)	Type 1	Basically stable	Good
	Type 2	Chronic, complex	Excellent
	Mild acute school refusal	Basically stable	Good
	Chronic severe school refusal	Chronic maladaptive disorders	Guarded
Marine (1968)	Simple separation anxiety	Sound	
	Childhood psychosis with school refusal symptoms	Psychoses: depressive and compulsive reactions	Poor

(McDonald & Sheperd, 1976)

Waldfogel, Coolidge, and Hahn (1957) divided school refusers into two sub-types which they termed neurotic and characterological. The neurotic group comprised mostly younger children who were predominantly female. An abrupt onset of the disorder was a common characteristic of this group. In contrast, the chronic group of school refusers consisted of older adolescent males whose condition was incipient and gradually developed. With the resurgence of behaviourism in the 1960s, school phobia was again defined more specifically. Kennedy (1965), following on from past research, expanded the neurotic-characterololgical dichotomy proposed by Coolidge, Hahn, and Peck (1957), by employing a differential diagnosis which successfully distinguished between an acute and a chronic type of school refusal. Kennedy (1965) proposed 10 criteria by which difficult symptoms of school refusal could be identified within Type 1 and Type 2 school refusers. The criteria for Type 1 and Type 2 school refusal are presented in Table 1.3 overleaf.

Marine (1968) expanded the two-factor typology into a four-fold classification scheme: simple separation anxiety; mild school refusal; chronic severe school refusal; and childhood psychosis with school refusal symptoms. Marine's diagnostic categories are presented in Table 1.4 overleaf.

Table 1.3

Criteria for Type 1 and Type 2 School Refusal

Type 1	Type 2
(1) The present illness is the first episode	(1) Second, third or fourth episode
(2) Monday onset, following an illness on the previous Thursday or Friday	(2) Monday onset following a minor illness, not a prevalent antecedent
(3) An acute onset	(3) Incipient onset
(4) Lower grades most prevalent	(4) Upper grades most prevalent
(5) Expressed concern about death	(5) Death theme not present
Mother's physical health in question: Actually ill or child thinks so	(6) Health of mother not an issue
(7) Good communication between parents	(7) Poor communication between parents
(8) Mother and father well adjusted in most areas	(8) Mother shows neurotic behaviour Father shows a character disorder
(9) Father competitive with mother in household management	(9) Father shows little interest in household or children
(10) Parents achieve understanding of dynamics easily	(10) Parents very difficult to work with

(Kennedy, 1965)

Table 1.4

Marine's Diagnostic Categories

Diagnosis	Treatment Modality	Change agents
1. Simple Separation Anxiety	Primary prevention by school personnel	Teacher, principal
2. Mild School Refusal	Crisis intervention using structured treatment	Teacher, principal, school nurse, pediatrician guidance counsellor
3. Chronic Severe School Refusal	Family therapy, close collaboration between therapist and teacher gradual return to school	School social worker school psychologist, psychiatric team, mental health team
4. Childhood Psychosis with School Refusal Symptoms	1. Residential treatment 2. Special class for emotionally disturbed plus psychotherapy for each child and casework for parents	Psychiatric team

(Marine, 1968)

Following on the research conducted by Marine (1968), McDonald and Shepherd (1976) questioned whether simple separation anxiety is indeed a type of school refusal due to its transient nature and spontaneous remission because the anxiety generally dissipates

after one week. However, as Marine (1968) contended, the problem is distressing for the child and can be both prevented and treated by the parents and school. Hersov (1977) presented the notion that school refusal was not a valid clinical condition, but rather a number of symptoms reacting with a variety of psychiatric disorders. Further, Kearney and Silverman (1995) argued that the term school phobia is inappropriate for this phenomenon because, even when there is a fear of something at school, it is not necessarily of phobic proportion.

Separation Anxiety Disorder, as a psychiatric term, is defined as "excessive anxiety concerning separation from those to whom the child is attached" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 124.). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2000) separation anxiety can be an associated feature of pervasive developmental disorders, schizophrenia, or other psychotic disorders. Separation Anxiety Disorder is distinguished from General Anxiety Disorder in that the anxiety predominantly concerns separation from home and attachment appears to be the predominant feature. Typically, a child with Separation Anxiety Disorder may be reluctant to attend school in order to remain at home with the significant adult figures. In the diagnosis, a reluctance to attend school is only one of eight symptoms of separation anxiety disorder. Although diagnostic criteria for Separation Anxiety Disorder (DSM-1V-TR) was established as a universal language for psychiatric disorders, in real terms, it does not provide clear guidance and adds little to the understanding of school refusal behaviours. The diagnostic criteria for Separation Anxiety Disorder (DSM-1V-TR) are presented in Table 1.5 overleaf.

Although the literature regarding PSRA contains numerous references to school refusal a clear classification of the disorder is far from being achieved. Following on from the work of Hersov (1977) and other authors (Kearney, 2001; Kearney and Silverman, 1995; King, Ollendick, Tonge, Heyne, Pritchard, Rollings, Young, & Myerson, 1996) the term 'school refusal' was preferred to that of psychoneurotic truancy, and many still use the terms truancy and school refusal interchangeably (Brandibas, 2005; Phelps, Cox, & Bajorek, 1992). In summary, the historical overview of PSRA pointed out an initial split between the terms delinquent truancy and psychoneurotic truancy/school refusal.

Table 1.5

Diagnostic Criteria for Separation Anxiety Disorder (DSM-IV-TR)

A.	Developmentally inappropriate and excessive anxiety concerning separation from home or from those to whom the individual child is attached, as evidenced by at three (or more) of the following:
(1)	recurrent excessive distress when separation from home or major attachment figures occurs or is anticipated;
(2)	persistent and excessive worry about losing, or about possible harm befalling, major attachment figures;
(3)	persistent and excessive worry that an untoward event will lead to separation from a major attachment figure (e.g., getting lost or being kidnapped);
(4)	persistent reluctance or refusal to go to school or elsewhere because of fear of separation;
(5)	persistently and exclusively fearful or reluctant to be alone without major attachment figures at home or without significant adults in other settings;
(6)	persistent reluctance or refusal to go to sleep without being near a major attachment figure or to sleep away from home;
(7)	repeated nightmares involving the theme of separation; and
(8)	repeated complaints of physical symptoms (such as headaches, stomach-aches, nausea, or vomiting) when separation from major attachment figures occurs or is anticipated.
B.	Duration of disturbance of at least two weeks.
C.	Onset before the age of 18.
D.	The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, academic (occupational), or other important areas of functioning.
E.	The disturbance does not occur exclusively during the course of a Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Schizophrenia, or any other Psychotic Disorder With Agoraphobia.

(American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

Rationale of the Present Research

The rationale of the present research is based on the premise that problematic school-related absenteeism is prevalent in all schools within the Victorian secondary school system, and further, that PSRA will apply equally to all secondary school systems within the states and territories of the Commonwealth of Australia. The main intent of this section is: to update and comment on the statistics regarding PSRA in the Victorian secondary school system; to complement this with information from other sources within Australia; and to present a comparison with international trends.

Department of Education and Training

Within the Commonwealth of Australia each state and territorial government is responsible for implementing its own policy in relation to education. This policy also includes monitoring PSRA. In order to present PSRA in its present context, up-to-date data were sought within each state and territory as a widespread sample for generalisation. All state and territory DET offices were contacted to submit absence rates for Year Levels 8, 9, and 10 for the period 2000 to 2004 or last available data. However, actual positive responses were received from five states and one territory. What was clear, from several of the contacts' reactions to the request for data, was that attendance is currently a concern regarding most Australian systems. Most of the data collected were obtained from DET web-sites, namely, Victoria, Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, and Western Australia.

Department of Education and Training Victoria

According to the latest figures released by DET Victoria (2004), school-related absenteeism is increasing annually, and most notably within the middle school years. The mean absent days per middle school student by year level in 2002 is presented in Table 1.6.

Table 1.6

Mean Absent Days per Middle School Student by Year Level in 2003

Year level	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
75th percentile	21.1	23.3	21.4
Mean	18.5	20.0	18.8
25th percentile	15.5	16.9	15.2

(Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2004)

According to Withers (2004) these means are calculated without reference to differing numbers of expected school attendance days at the various year levels. When these differences are taken into account, as depicted in Table 1.7 overleaf, the situation appears rather more stable and somewhat less prone to the incremental creep observable in

Table 1.6. The percentage attendance per annum 2000-2002 in Victoria in the middle years of schooling is presented in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7

Percentage Attendance per Annum 2000-2002 in Victoria for the Middle Years of Schooling

Year	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
2000	91.04	90.01	88.08
2001	90.82	89.61	87.31
2002	90.73	89.57	87.86

(Department of Education and Training Victoria, (2004)

Department of Education and Training Australian Capital Territory

According to DET Australian Capital Territory (2004), data prior to 2003 are not accurate or are not centrally located. The annual absentee rates for Australian Capital Territory government middle school students 2003-2004 are presented in Table 1.8.

Table 1.8

Annual Absentee Rates for Australian Capital Territory Government Middle School Students 2003-2004

Year	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
2003	4.2%	4.7%	4.8%
2004	4.6%	6.0%	6.6%

(Department of Education Australian Capital Territory, 2005)

Department of Education and Training New South Wales

DET New South Wales (2005) collect data from schools via a paper-based collection at the end of Semester 1, namely, the last day of Term 2, and towards the end of Semester 2, namely, the last Friday of November. The annual absentee rates for New South Wales government middle school students 2003-2004 are presented in Table 1.9.

Table 1.9

Annual Absentee Rates for New South Wales Government Middle School Students 2000-2004

Year	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
2000	10.38%	11.74%	12.06%
2001	10.18%	11.53%	11.91%
2002	10.42%	11.63%	12.11%
2003	10.40%	11.58%	12.02%
2004	9.67%	11.14%	11.02%

(Department of Education and Training New South Wales, 2005)

Department of Education and Training South Australia

DET South Australia (2004) presented data for the 2002-2003 school years. These figures indicate a significant reduction in absentee rates in all year levels, namely Years 8, 9, and 10 from the 2002 school year to the 2003 school year. The annual absentee rates for South Australian government middle school students 2002-2003 are presented in Table 1.10.

Table 1.10

Annual Absentee Rates for South Australian Government Middle School Students 2002-2003

Year	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
2002	10.3%	11.6%	11.9%
2003	9.2%	10.9%	11.6%

(Department of Education and Training South Australia, 2005)

Department of Education and Training Tasmania

DET Tasmania (2005), as part of its Annual Report, notes the annual average daily absence rate for 2003 was 7.4%, down from 7.69% in 2002. The absentee rate attributed to sickness was 3.25% in 2003 compared to 2.92% in 2002 whilst the absence rate not

attributed to sickness was 4.15% in 2003, down from 4.77% in 2002. These differences may reflect higher sickness rates in 2003, or better identification of absence reasons by schools. These data provide evidence that the reduction in the total absence rate to 7.4% in 2003 was unlikely to be due to reduced sickness, and more likely to reflect a reduction in controllable non-sickness-related absences. The annual absentee rates for Tasmania government middle school students 2003-2004 are presented in Table 1.11.

Table 1.11

Annual Absentee Rates for Tasmania Government Middle School Students 2003

Year Level	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
Sickness	4.1	4.0	4.2
Non Sickness	5.5	6.8	9.4
Total	9.6	10.9	13.6

(Department of Education Tasmania, 2005)

Department of Education and Training Western Australia

DET Western Australia (2005) presented data for the 2000-2004 school years. These figures indicate a significant increase in absentee rates in all year levels, namely Years 8, 9, and 10, from the 2000 school year to the 2004 school year. The annual absentee rates for Western Australia government middle school students 2000-2004 are presented in Table 1.12 overleaf.

Table 1.12

Annual Absentee Rates for Western Australia Government Middle School Students 2000-2004

Year	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
2000	7.52%	9.42%	10.87%
2001	7.78%	9.57%	11.13%
2002	8.20%	10.18%	11.54%
2003	8.47%	10.71%	12.38%
2004	9.26%	11.08%	13.06%

(Department of Education and Training Western Australia, 2005)

DET statistics from the respective states and territories, although both broad and detailed, do not present a complete picture of PSRA within the Commonwealth education systems. It is still extremely difficult to estimate the extent of non-attendance in schools in this country. This is despite Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's 1996 report, *Truancy and exclusion of children and young people from school* (Fitzgibbon, 1996, p. ix), listed below.

1.   The collection of national data on the incidence of truancy, formal and informal exclusion and expulsion.

2.   Developing a national system for monitoring the transfer of students between schools.

3 (a).   Precise statements for the grounds and procedures associated with each category of exclusion.

3 (b).   Parent information and school training materials on procedures for suspensions, exclusion and expulsion, including mechanisms of appeal.

The above data indicate that days absent per student, and rates of unexplained absence, continue to rise slightly in most year levels. Taken over a period of time this is a significant increase in PSRA.

International Trends

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001) provides a cross-national perspective based on information provided by over 250,000 15-year-old students surveyed in 32 countries. In Australia 5,176 students from 231 schools provided survey data that included answers to a question asking how many times in the previous two weeks prior to the 15th July and 15th August periods they had missed school, skipped classes, or arrived late for school. These data were used to construct a participation score with an overall mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100 that could be used to compare Australian responses with those of students from other countries. The selected country means and standard deviations for the PISA index of participation among 15 year-old middle school students are presented in Table 1.13.

Table 1.13

Selected Country Means and Standard Deviations for the PISA Index of Participation among 15 Year-Old Middle School Students

Country	Mean	Standard error	Standard deviation
Australia	502	2.1	89
Belgium	518	1.7	94
Canada	481	1.1	104
Denmark	461	2.4	124
France	512	2.1	93
Germany	523	1.9	85
Italy	484	2.6	98
Japan	555	1.9	57
Korea	546	1.5	71
New Zealand	479	2.1	110
Poland	477	3.7	119
Sweden	489	1.5	99
United Kingdom	509	1.5	86
United States	494	3.9	100
OECD average	500	0.4	100

(Willms, 2003)

Based on data presented in Table 1.13 Australia is close to the average of OECD countries on the index of participation. Australia's participation rate is a slightly higher than the United States', slightly lower than the United Kingdom, and significantly higher than New Zealand's and Canada's. According to this index, 15-year-old participation regarding regular school attendance in Australia is significantly lower than that of Japan and Korea (Willms, 2003). The Victorian Auditor-General's report regarding the *Management of Absenteeism* highlighted that Australia had one of the highest rates of absenteeism by Year 8 students of any OECD country, (seven per cent) (Cameron, 2004). Australia ranked equal third worst behind Scotland, (eight per cent) and the Czech Republic, (eight per cent). The OECD average was approximately five per cent of Year 8 students' absences on a typical day for any given reason in 1995.

Research Questions

According to Punch (2005) the role of research questions is to:

1.   Organise the project, and give direction and coherence.

2.   Delimit the project, showing its boundaries.

3.   Keep the researcher focused during the project.

4.   Provide a framework for writing up the project.

5.   Point to the data that will be needed.

Therefore, the primary objective of any research project is to pose questions in such a way that the results, conclusions, and inferences drawn from the study can be delivered with confidence and integrity. To accomplish this objective the researcher should: develop specific, unambiguous questions; collect data using appropriate research methods; analyse the data appropriately; and offer defensible interpretations of the results. Completing these tasks in a systematic manner allows a researcher to achieve the desired outcomes. In the present study, the desired outcomes were to describe, understand, explain, and predict phenomenon in relation to PSRA. Neuman (2006) points out that "Both quantitative and qualitative researchers begin with a topic that must be narrowed. The quantitative style requires that a researcher quickly focus on a topic. The qualitative researcher style is more flexible and encourages slowly focusing the topic throughout a study" (p. 149).

Schools collect their own data on attendance, but there is no collated Australia-wide information presently available on attendance or non-attendance. The majority of studies to date have investigated attendance rates and related variables in predominantly secondary school students within the government system. Further, these studies have concentrated on one particular aspect of non-attendance, namely, 'truancy'. While discussions regarding causes of student absenteeism and relationships between absenteeism and school and family continue, there is little information about what level of absenteeism identifies a student who is at risk, what level of absenteeism is common in Australian schools, or what patterns of absenteeism look like. As a result of PSRA: more students are identified as being at risk with regard to their future educational, employment and social prospects; more parents are suffering stress in relation to compliance with legal obligations regarding their children's non-attendance at school; and more socio-political pressures are being placed on schools to develop strategies to ensure students attend school on a regular basis.

Five research questions underpin this research. The three primary research questions driving the present study were developed specifically to investigate the key issues of problematic school-related absenteeism in relation to middle school students under investigation:

1.   In relation to problematic school-related absenteeism, are there any emergent trends or patterns highlighted in the analysis of data concerning school classification, namely, Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, Catholic Girls, Government, and Independent within the Victorian secondary school system?

2.   What are Year 9 students' perceptions regarding PSRA?

3.   Is parental condoned absenteeism a widespread concern within the Victorian secondary school system?

The two secondary research questions were developed with reference to a number of contextual issues and factors which also form the basis of the present study:

4.   What are the main categories of PSRA?

5.   Can the major risk factors associated with each category of PSRA be readily identified?

Ethical Considerations

Educational research focuses primarily on human beings. The research is ethically responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects while conducting a study. Researchers must protect participants from physical and mental discomfort, harm, and danger. The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Australian Catholic University (ACU) has given its approval to conduct this research. (HREC approval is presented in Appendix A.) Burns (2000) states, "Ethical principles, rules and conventions distinguish socially acceptable behaviour from that which is considered socially unacceptable" (p. 17). By following the required ethical considerations it is anticipated in this study that any problems relating to the participants, methods or procedures will be minimised.

The code of conduct employed in this study accords with the codes of the British Psychological Society (1993), the American Psychological Association (2003), and the Australian Association for Research in Education (1998). It includes the following requirements:

- procedures are designed to minimise any exposure to risks of participants;
- any risks to participants are outweighed by the anticipated benefits of the research;
- the rights and welfare of participants are protected;
- participation should be voluntary;
- participants have the right to know the nature, purposes and duration of the study, and should sign the appropriate consent form agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study;
- participants should be free to withdraw from the study for any reason;
- all information obtained is confidential; and
- participants are informed of the findings of the study.

In order to obtain approval for this research from the HREC, a number of conditions had to be satisfied. Initial approval was required from the Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Office to approach secondary schools within their

jurisdiction in order to conduct research. (Secondary Schools Listings are presented in Appendix B.)

After receiving DET and CEO approvals, further confirmation was sought from each school principal. The principal received a formal request for the school to participate in the study. (Invitation: School Participation is presented in Appendix C.) The school confirmed its participation by acknowledging the consent form. (Consent: School Participation is presented in Appendix D.) In relation to student participation an information letter was sent to the parent/guardian. (Information Letter To Parents/Guardians is presented in Appendix E.)

Prior to participation, the parent or guardian was required to sign a consent form. (Consent: Parents/Guardians Of Participant is presented in Appendix F.) The student also received an invitation letter and, before participating, was required to complete a consent form. If under the age of 18 years, the student was required to complete an assent form. (Invitation: Student Participation presented in Appendix G.) and (Assent: Participants Aged Under 18 Years is presented in Appendix H.) The above documents are relevant to issues of privacy and confidentiality, right to discontinue, informed consent, publication of findings, process of appeal, and voluntary participation.

Significance of the Present Study

The significance of this study is to present findings regarding the perceptions of secondary school students in relation to the study of PSRA within the Victorian secondary school system. It is anticipated that the outcomes relevant to the present study will offer secondary schools important information when employed in conjunction with their management programs to assist in managing and minimising PSRA. Despite the proliferation of studies involving PSRA, there has been little research conducted within the Victorian secondary system as a whole. In reference to a recent report on school attendance Withers (2004) states:

> No attempt was made to establish the existence or otherwise of attendance records for Catholic schools. Given the fractured nature of systemic and non-systemic arrangements within and between dioceses and archdioceses for provision of Catholic education, the task was considered too onerous. Similarly, no attempt was made to capture data for other non-Government independent schools. Enquiries suggest that no aggregated data

are in fact available, such records being kept confidential as a
feature of each school's independence. (p. 50)

Hence, the present study was established to collect quantitative and qualitative data
within Government, Catholic and Independent secondary schools to provide a broad base
of non-attendance information that would highlight emergent trends and patterns of PSRA,
with particular reference to middle schooling within the Victorian secondary school
system. More importantly, the findings of the research:

- are not limited in providing benefits only to participating schools;
- can be applied to all school systems Australia wide;
- can also be applied to all international school and systems.

Key Terminology

This section provides working definitions for key terms employed throughout this
thesis.

At Risk

Students are described as *at risk* when they are underachieving at secondary school
and are unlikely to achieve their full potential.

Authorised Absence

Authorised absence is a sub-category encompassing a number of activities imposed
by the school on students which are not a normal part of the school curriculum. These
include: detention; disciplinary absence from classrooms; off-learning task penalties; and
time out in school.

Delinquency

Delinquency refers to the committing of a minor crime or non-serious misconduct
by a juvenile.

Descriptors of Non-Attendance

Descriptors of non-attendance include illness, suspension, exclusion, expulsion, and transition.

Early School Withdrawal

Early school withdrawal refers to absence by children whose parents keep them away from school on a regular or long-term basis, for reasons related to the needs of the family, or children who have chosen not to attend school for their own reasons. This absence may occur with the permission of the school.

Fractional Truancy

Fractional truancy refers to students who arrive late, leave early or skip individual classes.

Frequent or Persistent Absenteeism

Frequent or persistent absenteeism refers to student absences of 15% or higher, whether authorised or not.

Junior School

Junior school consists of students from Year 7 to Year 8.

Middle School

Middle school consists of students from Year 9 to Year 10.

Parental Condoned Absenteeism

Parental condoned absenteeism refers to parental approved withdrawals such as family functions, holidays, and personal appointments.

Problematic School-Related Absenteeism (PSRA)

Problematic school-related absenteeism (PSRA) is a generic term taken to mean the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, or explained absence that can occur with parental knowledge and consent.

Regular Attendance

Regular attendance means that students must maintain an 85% attendance rate at school.

Risk Factors

Risk factors are deemed to be those which are contributing to or causing students to display PSRA.

School Non-Attendance

School non-attendance refers to the broad category used to denote all absences from school. The term defines the condition whereby students who are required to attend school choose not to do so. Reasons offered to explain student absences may be classified as explained or unexplained.

School Refusal

School refusal refers to absence by children who refuse to attend school in the face of persuasion and punishment by parents, and of possible school discipline.
This form of absenteeism is widely recognised as a disorder involving persistent non-attendance at school, excessive anxiety and physical complaints.

Secondary School Students

Secondary school students means students aged from 14 to 16 years, enrolled in Years 8, 9, and 10 who formed the sample under investigation. Students in the Year 9 cohort formed the sample from which the case studies were selected.

Truancy

Truancy means the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age that occurs without parental knowledge or consent.

Unauthorised Absence

Unauthorised absence may include truancy, occasional absenteeism, school refusal, school withdrawal, and dropping out by underage students. Suspensions and expulsions may also be accounted as unauthorised absence in some records, whilst in others they are not collated or not allocated.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1: Problematic School-Related Absenteeism outlines current concerns in relation to this phenomenon in an historical context; a context which tends to show that these concerns are not new, but which have not, as yet, been resolved. This chapter considers new research regarding the management and minimisation of PSRA in order that adolescents may improve their attendance at school and, thereby, enhance their future educational, employment and social prospects. The concept of active citizenship underpins the value explicit in regular and habitual attendance at school.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature examines definitional issues regarding categories relevant to PSRA within the context of this study and specifically outlines risk factors associated with this phenomenon. This chapter also describes the measurement and management of PSRA, and presents a review of documents relevant to the law governing students, parents and schools, and to *The Australian Citizenship Act 1948*.

Chapter 3: Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological Framework discusses the conceptual considerations derived from the literature review that provide the basis of the development of theory, research questions, and research design to ensure that the underpinning of concepts regarding the present study is represented adequately.

The rationale is outlined for employing elements of humanistic psychology and grounded theory, and multiple methods approach. This chapter presents the primary objective of grounded theory to expand upon an explanation of a phenomenon, such as PSRA and, in relation to multiple methods, presents the reader with the latest research and other information currently available in the area of methodology.

Chapter 4: Method focuses on a multiple methods approach in relation to the employment both of quantitative and qualitative paradigms, and describes the sample and setting of the study. The reasons for the use of data sources and data collection are outlined.

Chapter 5: Quantitative Data Analysis presents the analysis of data from completed student and school questionnaires. The first two sections explain the reasons for employing the statistical approach used to analyse the quantitative data, examines the data collection process of the main research and the descriptive statistics regarding the questionnaires. Chapter 5 also presents the key findings and outcomes of quantitative data analysis.

Chapter 6: Qualitative Data Analysis presents the analysis of data in relation to the research sample. A cross case analysis of selected students was undertaken from Catholic, Government, and Independent schools to evaluate engagement issues, patterns regarding PSRA, and interrelationships between secondary schools and students. This chapter aims to describe the participants as fully as possible according to their responses to questionnaires and during interviews. Chapter 6 also includes students' perceptions of their learning environment, and their concepts of citizenship.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions contains an interpretation of the main findings within the parameters of the study. This chapter critically analyses the nature of PSRA, school-based management programs, legal obligations and implications of the concept of citizenship, and offers recommendations for future research. Chapter 7 will also summarise the strengths and limitations of paradigms underpinning this research.

Summary

Problematic school-related absenteeism (PSRA) has long been recognised by educational, familial, and other social institutions to be a major problem affecting the lives of adolescents.   Generally, adolescents who are experiencing PSRA may engage in delinquent activities, and lack the social skills and the commitment necessary for success in the workplace and in future relationships.   Thus, PSRA has serious consequences, implied in citizenship responsibilities, for students, parents, schools, and the community and society.

An historical overview of previous research and reveals that there is considerable disparity among researchers about fundamental definitions and descriptions of PSRA, the most notable split occurring between definitions of truancy and school refusal.

Data obtained from DET offices throughout Australia confirm that although PSRA shows a slight annual increase over most year levels, taken over a period of time there has been a significant increase, particularly in the middle years of schooling.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"In our community, we have to understand that the great and formative influences on young people are their parents and that's why it's very important that people take parenting seriously in order for children to attend school on a regular basis." John Howard, Prime Minister (Crabb, 2004, January 27, p. 1)

Introduction

An extensive review of literature on problematic school-related absenteeism identifies it as a worldwide phenomenon of immense and increasing proportion. The literature[1] has allowed the researcher to build a historical basis for the present study. The aims of this literature review are:

- to investigate terms, categories, and risk factors associated with PSRA;
- to outline systems of the measurement and management of PSRA; and
- to present a summary of the law and the concept of citizenship in relation to PSRA.

Categories of Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

A review of the literature reveals that past research presents differing definitions associated with the phenomenon of PSRA that have ultimately led to some confusion regarding its categorisation (Moore, 2004; Williams, 1927). Reid (2005) contends that, "Due to these definitional problems, most authors using the term 'truancy' provide situation specific definitions, as the generic terms often means different things to different people" (p. 59). For instance, in the greater proportion of the literature, truancy and school refusal have been used to describe the same phenomenon associated with PSRA. This lack of consensus regarding definitional issues has resulted in an interchangeability of terms:

- truancy and school refusal (Brandibas, 2005; Broadwin, 1932; Johnson et al., 1941; Phelps et al., 1992; Warren, 1948);
- truancy and delinquency (Berecz, 1969; Kearney, 2001; Reid, 1982);

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[1] In this review, literature from Western societies is emphasised given that data primarily emanate from these countries.

- delinquency and early school withdrawal (Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2002; Hansen, 2003);

- truancy and parental condoned absenteeism (Galloway, 1983); and

- parental condoned absenteeism and school refusal (Malcolm et al., 2003).

In order to avoid some confusion regarding definitional issues the present study has categorised PSRA into five broad areas: truancy; school refusal; delinquency; early school withdrawal; and parental condoned absenteeism.

Truancy

Truancy is only one of several terms associated with PSRA, but is perceived to be the main category and attracts most of the attention in research into this phenomenon (Atkinson, Halsey, Wilkin, & Kinder, 2000; Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2005). Although truancy is part of the broader dimension of school non-attendance, it is by no means the only category used to account for the majority of daily student absences. Definitions of truancy abound some of which include contradictory elements. For instance, *The Australian concise Oxford Dictionary* defines a truant as a "child who stays away from school without leave or explanation" (Moore, 2004, p. 1247). This definition is limiting and fails to consider the notion of hidden truancy which, for example, may be underpinned by fractional truancy or parental condoned absenteeism. Other definitions point out parents may in fact know about their child's act of truancy and thereby condone the child's absence from school. Fitzgibbon (1996) notes that, "school truancy is taken to mean the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory age, although it can occur with parent knowledge and sometimes consent" (p. 80). However, Tyerman (1958) defines truants as "those who absent themselves from school without lawful cause and without permission of the parents" (p. 217).

Although educators and researchers such as Heyne, Rollings, King, & Tonge, (2002) and O'Keefe & Stoll (1995) agree that truancy is defined through the prevalence of PSRA, there is no universal agreement on the frequency or type of absenteeism that defines *truancy*. Accordingly, this lack of a standardised operational definition creates problems for schools and other authorised agencies responsible for the recording and reporting on the incidence and prevalence of truancy (Wiehe, 2000). In fact, some of the broader definitions of truancy can result in exaggerated reports of truancy rates.

In the present study, *truancy* means the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age that occurs without parental knowledge or consent. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) The rationale for employing this term is to standardise criteria for absenteeism reporting by schools and to standardise categories and risk factors associated with PSRA for future research.

School Refusal

According to the literature, school refusal is a complex disorder (Kearney & Bates, 2005; Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006; Suveg, Aschenbrand, & Kendall, 2005). Whilst the condition only occurs in 5% of the general school population (Tyrell, 2005), the problem accounts for about 8% of clinically referred children (Burke & Silverman, 1987). The clinical importance and significance of this problem is widened by the increased number of recent publications concerned with this behavioural disorder. According to Blagg (1987) the ratio of papers on school refusal to that of other childhood fears has been estimated at 25:1. For instance, in Sydney, during the period 1994 to 1998, in one clinical centre, 192 adolescents were assessed and treated for severe school refusal (McShane, Walter, & Rey, 2001).

Determining what constitutes a case of school refusal can be a difficult task. For example, long-standing school refusal may be mistaken for school withdrawal; that is, where parents appear not to be interested in their child's attendance when, in fact, they have unwillingly given up their attempts to get their child to attend school (Bober, 2006). In some cases there may be a mixture of phobias, anxieties and anti-social behaviour, such as truancy, associated with attendance problems. Kearney and Silverman (1995) defined school refusing behaviour as "child-motivated refusal to attend school or experiencing difficulties with remaining in school for an entire day" (p. 104). Further, King et al. (1996) expanded on the definition proposed by Kearney and Silverman (1995) to include youths who: are completely absent from school; initially attend school, but then leave during the school day; go to school after having behavioural problems such as morning tantrums or psychosomatic complaints; and display marked distress on school days and plead with their parents to allow them to remain home from school. The terms school refusal, school phobia, school avoidance, reluctance to attend school, and separation anxiety have been used interchangeably throughout the literature even though researchers have used similar diagnostic criteria (Berg, Nichols, & Pritchard, 1969; Cooper, 1966; Denney, 1974;

Goldberg, 1953; Gordon & Young, 1976; Hersov, 1960; Last & Strauss, 1990; Ollendick & Myer, 1984). For instance, Tyrell (2005), writing an article for a professional journal, employs the term school phobia to describe school refusal behaviour.

School refusal refers to absence by children who refuse to attend school in the face of persuasion and punishment by parents, and of possible school discipline. This form of absenteeism is widely recognised as a disorder involving persistent non-attendance at school, excessive anxiety and physical complaints (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) The rationale for employing this term is to standardise criteria for absenteeism reporting by schools and to standardise categories and risk factors associated with PSRA for future research.

Delinquency

Truancy has been identified as one of the early warning signs that adolescents may be headed towards delinquent activity that may result in negative educational, employment and undesirable social outcomes (Baker et al., 2001; McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004; White, Fyfe, Campbell, & Goldkamp, 2001). Recent longitudinal studies indicate that PSRA is linked to serious delinquent activity in youth: for instance, substance abuse often resulting in criminal activities such as burglary, car theft and vandalism (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Department of Justice, Washington, DC., 1996; Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2004). Sapp and Abbott (2003) found that PSRA characteristics of male juveniles were a high failure rate, frequent fighting, and anti-social behaviour. A step closer to clarifying any causal connection has been the suggestion that PSRA and delinquency may be associated, in part, to common antecedents, such as home, school, peers, gender, culture and socio-economic environment (Johnson, 1986; Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2003; Vermeiren, Bogaerts, Ruchkin, Deboutte, & Schawb-Stone, 2004). Reid (1982) found that adolescents experiencing persistent PSRA display disruptive behavioural patterns and have committed at least one delinquent offence. Reid's findings were supported by evidence made available to the *Select Committee on Youth Affairs* which precipitated the conclusion that "there is a high correlation between school failure and anti-social behaviour including truancy, classroom disruption and juvenile crime" (Watkins, 1992, p. 55). Tyerman (1958) places the truancy versus delinquency debate into perspective when he advocates:

> Truanting is an offence against the law, and is, therefore, a delinquent act. In contrast to the other delinquents, however, the truant has neither overtly injured anyone nor damaged any property. His offence is primarily one of omission rather than commission, though from truancy a considerable number of other delinquencies originate. (p. 217)

According to O'Keefe and Stoll (1995) truancy and delinquency are connected statistically, but only in a minority of cases, as most truants are not considered criminals. Rather than a link between persistent absenteeism, delinquency and the associated influences PSRA is more likely to be considered an association, rather than a causal relationship.

Delinquency refers to the committing of a minor crime or non-serious misconduct by a juvenile (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) The rationale for employing this term is to standardise criteria for absenteeism reporting by schools and to standardise categories and risk factors associated with PSRA for future research.

Early School Withdrawal

Early school withdrawal prevention has become a topic of increasing national importance in the past 15 years (Havsy, 2004). Kopperud (2006) places this issue of early school withdrawal into perspective by affirming that, "Every year a staggering number of students disappear from the educational system" (p. 30). Research has confirmed a link between early withdrawal by adolescents who left school without qualifications and those who were found to be at an increased risk regarding involvement in juvenile crime, substance abuse, welfare dependence, and having reduced participation in further training or education (Fergusson et al., 2002). Additionally, school non-attendance has been shown to predict early leaving prior to graduation. Secondary school administrators have voiced concern regarding the contribution of student absenteeism to poor academic performance and the likelihood of early withdrawal (Kronick & Harris, 1998).

As a result, schools face the difficult task of deciding which strategies will make regular school attendance more meaningful. These strategies aimed, in particular, at middle school students may assist in the management and minimsation of PSRA. Strategies may include:

- educational engagement by offering challenging curriculum, fostering self-esteem, good implementing study habits, and organisational skills (Barack 2006; Suhyun & Jingyo, 2006);

- improving parenting styles (Boveja, 1998; Van Dorn, Bowen, & Blau, 2006);

- improving teacher-student relationships (Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, & Thoma, 2003); and

- more consideration of age, ethnic and gender differences (Durham, 2006; Wenden & Zabin, 2005).

Hansen (2003) found that criminal activities namely, property, handling and violent offences rise and peak in the mid teens with those adolescents who leave school early. This is particularly relevant to the United States where 5.5% to 20% of youths are absent from school on any given day and 11.1% of youths aged 16 to 24 years have dropped out of school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Colman & Colman (2006) contend that there are approximately 8,000 students who have dropped out of the Victorian secondary school system suffering severe behavioural problems.

Early school withdrawal refers to absence by children whose parents keep them away from school on a regular or long-term basis, for reasons related to the needs of the family, or children who have chosen not to attend school for their own reasons. This absence may occur with the permission of the school. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) The rationale for employing this term is to standardise criteria for absenteeism reporting by schools and to standardise categories and risk factors associated with PSRA for future research.

Parental Condoned Absenteeism

Research has suggested that, directly or indirectly, parents play a major role in keeping their children absent from school (Hallam & Roaf, 1997; Sheppard, 2005). Parental condoned absenteeism is still an unknown quantity in relation to PSRA. Recent research has found that parental perceptions of PSRA differ from that of students and teachers (Malcolm et al., 2003). Parents held that schools were responsible for students' attendance at school whilst schools held that parents were responsible (Chen, 2001). This is evidenced by the considerable variation in parental responsibility laws among states and territories within the Commonwealth of Australia. According to Chen (2001), research

found that there was a lack of public support for parental responsibility for their children's non-attendance at school. However, the public did place some responsibility on parents when a juvenile crime occurred, but agreement with blaming and punishing parents was not a priority (Brank & Weisz, 2004).

In relation to parental condoned absenteeism, the question of lawful absence needs to be clarified and revised in light of school attendance being compulsory. Within the Victorian secondary school system, for example, school attendance is compulsory until the end of the school year in which the student turns sixteen, which is regulated by the Victorian *Education Act 1958*. Thus unexplained absence is deemed to be an offence whereby parents can receive a fine of up to $20 per day if found culpable (Parliament of Victoria, 2004).

Parental condoned absenteeism refers to parental approved withdrawals such as family functions, holidays, and personal appointments. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) The rationale for employing this term is to standardise criteria for absenteeism reporting by schools and to standardise categories and risk factors associated with PSRA for future research.

Risk Factors Associated with Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

The literature suggests that PSRA is more appropriately seen as a symptom than a cause; hence a closer assessment of the contributing risk factors needs to be undertaken. Persistent absentees do not constitute a homogenous group as the behaviour may be attributed to a variety of factors (Tyerman, 1958). Although certain conditions and circumstances are considered to be of particular importance, such as the individual, family, school environment, communal and societal, and local demographics, there appears to be no definitive cause-effect relationships. Tyerman (1958) sums up the argument by advocating that, "Two children may play truant from the same class in the same school at the same time, but their homes, their personalities and the reasons for playing truant may be very different. Every truant is unique" (p. 104). According to Withers (2004) the literature generally identifies five major risk factors associated with PSRA, namely: personal, familial, school, communal and societal, and demographic.

Personal Risk Factors

Personal risk factors include: psychosocial; physical; and behavioural.

Psychosocial Factors

Psychosocial factors include self-esteem, motivation, cognitive constructs, and low intelligence.

Lack of self-esteem and poor self-image related to specific situations, or a general lack of feeling regarding self-worth all appear frequently on the list of characteristics attributed to students at risk due to school non-attendance. De Kalb (1999), Englander (1986), Kinder, Wakefield, & Wilkin (1996), and Reid (2005), highlight that students experiencing PSRA have significantly lower self-concepts. While students with low self-esteem have an ability to feel part of the school culture, they may become frustrated and bored with school, and dislike the teachers, and any form of authority (Bell et al., 1994; Scott & Dinham 2005; Tyerman, 1968). Skues, Cunningham, and Pokharel (2005) note that students bullied by peers tend to exhibit less self-esteem and are less motivated to perform well at school. Although D'Amico and Cardaci (2003) found no associations between self-esteem and scholastic achievement, further research conducted by Valentine and Du Bois (2005) found a small, favourable influence of positive belief on academic achievement in later years. According to Parra and Oliva (2004) there appears to be no significant difference of levels of self-esteem in relation to gender.

Low motivation, expressed as lack of interest, boredom, and lack of engagement is linked with the notion of self-esteem and the intrinsic sense of belonging and self-worth. Thompson and Perry (2005) suggested students who experienced low motivation often performed poorly in academic situations. A correlation was noted between school attendance and the perceived value of school attendance. Schools where students had little regard for, or placed little value on school attendance, tended to experience higher absence rates than schools where students placed value on attending school (Clement, 2003).

Relatively little research has been directed toward exploring cognitive constructs that may characterise students with poor attendance, for instance, faulty beliefs about self and the world. These constructs may include unrealistic expectations of people, immature delayed levels of moral reasoning, empathy and other pro-social conditions. Some studies have examined school attendance in relation to the locus of control and its relationship to

attributional style (Kee, 2001). The findings suggest that attributional style is a significant cognitive factor in explaining why some students play truant from school but others do not, even though they are under the influence of similar school conditions (Clement, 2003).

Research conducted by Reid (1982) confirmed that persistent absentees displayed significantly lower intelligence and were underachievers. This was confirmed by Levanto (1995) who found that students with a high IQ score displayed a high rate of attendance.

Physical Factors

Physical factors include physical health and psychological wellbeing.

Closs (2000) contends that the major cause of absence, namely, health reasons be disaggregated and addressed both to support the education of students whose absence is inevitable and to improve the school attendance of students whose health may not otherwise permit it. Further, Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoch, Shepherd, Carlton, and Lawrence (1997) affirm that:

> Schools have a primary mandate to provide for the education of children. The also have an interest in their students' health and emotional well-being in so far that these can have important implications for learning and development. Schools are also faced with dealing with a range of behavioural and emotional problems, many of which can have a significant bearing on student learning and the general environment of the school. (p. 63)

The behavioural and emotional problems alluded to by Zubrick et al. (1997) include these issues regularly featured in the media, namely, bullying, smoking, drinking, drugs, eating disorders and suicide.

Historically, PSRA has generally focused on the distinction between truancy and school refusal with the former traditionally being linked to conduct disorder (Dayton, 1928; Doll, 1921; Kirkpatrick & Lodge, 1935; McElwee, 1931; Mercer, 1930; Partridge, 1939) and the latter to a separation anxiety disorder (Coolidge et al., 1957; Hersov, 1977; Johnson et al., 1941; Marine, 1968). (see Chapter I of the present work.)   However, research has demonstrated that truancy and school refusal exist in the absence of such disorders and, more significantly, that some children and young people exhibit the characteristics of both types of non-attendance behaviour.   Lauchlan (2003).   Egger,

Costello, and Angold (2003) examined the association between anxious school refusal, truancy, and psychiatric disorders in middle school students and found the majority of the sample had a psychiatric disorder. Saito (2000) reported that a sample of middle school students exhibiting PSRA displayed poor social adjustment, showed depression, violence toward their family members, and delusional-related symptoms associated with PSRA. However, after intervention to manage and mimimise PSRA was implemented, those students completing secondary or higher education were generally more socially adjusted than those dropping out of school. Brandibas, Jeunier, and Fouraste (2004) emphasised the need to conceive truancy, institutionally as well as scientifically, as a process that must take into account emotional dimensions, as issues associated with truancy seldom take into account psychological criteria. Moreover, as Petrides, Chamorro-Premuzic, Fredrickson, and Furnham (2005) argue, major individual different dimensions influence important outcome variables such as academic achievment and anti-social behaviours.

Behavioural Factors

Behavioural factors include academic performance, truancy, and teacher conflict.

How schools define PSRA, and their efforts to further define and understand the attributes associated with these phenomenon, tend to heighten the problem rather than reduce or minimise it. Past research (Kearney, 2001; Rothman, 2001) suggests students experiencing PSRA were perceived as discipline problems and were punished for their actions and behaviours. This resulted in schools tending to focus their attention on the individual's abilities and attributes, or lack of, which may have reinforced the sense of failure with some students and thus continued to perpetuate the problem rather than resolve it. Present research (Colvin & Wendt, 1999; McCoy-Byers, 2000) notes effective strategies employed to minimise and defuse anger and aggression in the classroom. In the Victorian secondary school system information to support the relationship between poor academic performance and behaviour as a result of PSRA is readily available (DET, Victoria, 2004). Research conducted by Coventry, Cornish, Cooke, and Vinall (1984) shows students experiencing PSRA are:

> academically underachievers, though only a few were of low intelligence. Three-quarters had not mastered basic arithmetic. Over half were two years behind in their reading but most of the other half had reading ages equal to or far higher than their real

ages. Very importantly, even those who were intelligent or had achieved quite well at school regarded their own achievement as hopeless. (pp. 28-29)

Payne et al. (2003) and Vermeiren et al. (2004) support the assertion that peers are significant others in the lives of students choosing to absent themselves from school. Kinder et al. (1996) reported that, as peer groups have the ability to coerce or persuade students into the act of truancy, the relationship between peers and teachers is significant. Research conducted by these writers found that the students are more likely to miss school while in the company of their peers. As contended by Kinder et al. (1985) "The main case of truancy and disruptive behaviour were the influence of friends and peers" (p. 61). Aitkinson et al. (2000) and Reid (2002) supported these earlier findings and added that the influence of peer groups on students' decisions to miss school was not restricted to students attending the same school.

Woodward and Ferguson (2000) examined the relationship between educational underachievement and unemployment among middle school students who had suffered problematic peer relations during childhood. They found that these students appeared to be placed at an increased risk of experiencing a range of adolescent interpersonal problems, namely, with teachers, PSRA, suspension and early school leaving. These results highlight the importance of successful childhood peer relationships for academic and occupational success.

Familial Risk Factors

Familial risk factors include: family structure; family functioning; family socio-economic status; and parental attitude to schooling.

Family Structure

According to Reid (2002) variables associated with students' home background suggest there is no single category of parent whose children experience PSRA.

In more recent times society has undergone considerable social change. Families may be classified as two-parent, single-parent, no-parent, blended, or extended. Extended families have generally been replaced by the nuclear and the single parent family (Butler, 2003).

Research conducted by Butler (2003) found that adolescents experiencing PSRA exhibited a tendency to have defacto, single, separated, divorced, or remarried families. Fragmented and reconstituted family structures and family size are also considered variables in the discussion on school attendance and students at risk (Wheatley & Spillane, 2001). Family structure coupled with family functioning such as conflict, abuse, modelling, and mobility, may be significant factors in the overall issues of PSRA.

Family Functioning

Kinder et al. (1996), Malcolm et al. (2003), and Wheatley and Spillane (2001) have stated strongly that adolescents' experiences at home which may include extremes in social and emotional support, discipline, abuse, family security, and parental involvement, compound the their feelings of insecurity, lack of self-worth, and belonging. These experiences result in compensatory behaviours such as long-term absence from school.

Reid (1999) found that families are becoming increasingly ill-equipped to provide a home environment that is conducive to academic achievement. This is due to a lack of understanding by the general public of the amount of effort and resources which schools put into their attendance processes compound this problem. Further, Reid (1999) suggests that parents should be educated to understand the value of their role in reinforcing practices which includes providing incentives for students who attend school regularly, while providing disincentives for non-attendance. Research conducted by Malcolm et al., (2003) has shown that problems created by adolescents experiencing severe PRSA such as delinquency cannot be solved by school-based programs alone.

Harvard College (2006) contended that "Parents need to be trained to help adolescents" (p. 1). However, further research suggests that more political pressure is being placed on schools to be responsible for maintaining school attendance as parents are increasingly abdicating this responsibility (Malcolm et al., 2003).

Family Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status is a universal variable consisting of a number of sub-categories: parental education, parental occupation, unemployment rates, family composition and family income. Socio-economic hardship, which may apply to lower class or working class families and manifest itself in poor housing conditions and periods

of unemployment or erratic employment often underpins PSRA (Reid, 2002; Tyerman, 1958; Woodward & Fergusson, 2000). Although there is no definitive research to indicate that absenteeism has a direct correlation to a family's low socio-economic status such as inadequate housing and unemployment, Atkinson et al., (2000), Malcolm et al., (2003), and Reid (1999) suggest that students experiencing PSRA are more than likely to come from disadvantaged home backgrounds and unfavourable social circumstances.

The correlation, or association, of absenteeism with any one group of the abovementioned factors is almost impossible to qualify. Nor can other socio-economic factors be isolated, such as: questionable child-rearing practices, questionable role modeling by the parent as a significant other, marital conflict or break-up, negative parental attitudes, expectations, and interest in the child's education. The authoritative impact of the school can further add to the set of the circumstances that may be a very realistic part of the persistent absentee's life (Kinder et al., 1996; Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2004). While socio-economic status and PSRA are more than likely associated, there is insufficient information to determine which factor or factors contributing to or associated with socio-economic status may be the most influential.

Parental Attitude to Schooling

Research highlights that the home background and the attitude of the parents is a contributing factor to the level of absenteeism, with parental attitude to school attendance one of the major concerns (Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2005). With truancy contributing to a small proportion of the overall absences, the greater proportion of unauthorised absences haas been attributed to parental knowledge, whereby parents have approved or consented to the child's absence, or in some extreme cases, the parents have been unable or unwilling to ensure the child returns to school (Kinder & Wilken, 1998; Reid, 2002). In other words, children are more likely to be at home with the parents' knowledge and consent than truanting.

Further, both Bradshaw (2002) and Wheatley and Spillane (2001) have stated strongly that experiences at home which may include extremes in social and emotional support, discipline, abuse, financial security, and parental involvement, compound the frequent absentee's feelings of insecurity, lack of self-worth and belonging. These feelings may manifest themselves in the student's attitude and tendency to display compensatory behaviours such as long-term absence from school. Parents' attitudes, expectations, beliefs

about schooling and learning, guide their behaviour with their children and have a causal influence on their children's achievements, attitudes and behaviours (Coleman, 1987).

Gardner, Ritblatt, Shulamit, and Beatty (2000) examined academic achievement, absenteeism, and dropout rate in school as a function of parental involvement. Involved and concerned parents manage to communicate their concern about their children's school progress whether or not they are highly educated themselves (Malcolm et al., 2003).

School Risk Factors

School risk factors include: school organisation; curriculum; school climate: and school leadership.

School Organisation

A national USA review of school discipline issues conducted in 1996-97 found that public school principals identified student absenteeism, class cutting and tardiness as the main discipline problems in their schools (Heaveside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998). It has also been argued that absenteeism tends to be lower, or reduced, in schools where the students feel safe and perceive discipline to be fair and effective. In these schools students have a strong academic focus and a high percentage is enrolled in academic programs. There is a willingness to complete homework, achieve good grades, and an interest in academic accomplishment; individual differences and rates of learning are acknowledged; students are involved in the organisation of the school; and there are close parent-school relations. Rewards, not punishments, are on offer and school experiences are enjoyed by the students (Sheppard, 2005). As asserted by Tyerman (1968):

> A child who enjoys school is unlikely to play truant. But if he is
> to enjoy school, he must feel that he is liked, that he can do the
> work, and that his parents and other adults have a good opinion
> of the school. I have never met a persistent truant who has had
> these three assurances. (p. 71)

Guttmacher, Weitzman, Kapadia, and Weinberg (2002) emphasise factors such as the size of school, buildings, resources, geographic isolation, classroom management and discipline, pastoral care policies, and school climate and culture.

The internal organisational features of schools such as class size can have significant consequences for all students, especially students who are deemed to be at risk. Gardner et al., (2000) found that although larger schools exhibited higher academic achievement, the smaller schools had lower drop out rates, lower absenteeism and higher parental involvement in the school. The number of students in a class has the potential to affect how much is learned in a variety of ways. For instance, it could affect how much time the teacher is able to focus on individual students (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, & Willms, 2001). However, estimated school effects may also be related to the kinds of students enrolled rather than the organisational characteristics of the school (Weaver & Qi, 2005).

Curriculum

A number of the contributory factors are under school control, such as policies, procedures, and curriculum. Reid (1983) suggests schools differ from one another in many ways. These include curriculum, and the emphasis on academic subjects, as opposed to vocational subjects and the nature of staff, including their ability, qualifications and experience. These factors are critical to a student's school success.

Wallace, Venville, and Rennie (2005) advocate three strategies to engage middle school students in the classroom: exemplify the synchronised, cross-curricular, thematic, project based, school-specialised, and community–focused forms employed in integration; review knowledge interests, or ends-in-view that may be pursued in integrated teaching; and view the curriculum from a world-wide perspective.

School Climate

Previous research has found that school and classroom climate have important effects on children's perceptions and behaviours (Ehrenberg et al., 2001). More specifically, there are thought to be two types of support, that is, emotional and instrumental, provided at the level of the classroom and the school. Sprott, 2004 found that an emotionally supportive classroom and school climate related to lower levels of violence, and was a predictive of lower rates of offences against property.

School factors often relate to students' experiences of the school environment, and the body of literature consistently identifies several common experiences, including:

boredom with schoolwork, inadequate student-teacher relationships, being bullied, under threats or involved in fights (Wheatley & Spillane, 2001). Futher, Wheatley and Spillane (2001) make the important point that these same characteristics, as outlined in various sources and linked to non-attendance, are similarly linked in a range of research reports as factors contributing to underage school leaving. An alternative summary of school factors suggests that experiences leading to absenteeism fall into three categories, namely, academic failure, inadequately responsive schools, and alienating environments (Bicknell, 1999; Brooks, 1997).

Power (2004) attests that "Some teachers are born leaders, others achieve leadership and others have it thrust upon them" (p. 14). The author argues that the principal of a school has both a direct and indirect impact on the school climate. It follows that when the climate of the school is positive, both students and teachers work more effectively.

School Leadership

Research suggests that the role of the principal and leadership teams is paramount to ensure a smooth and cohesive operation of the school (Clement, 2003; Rodwell, 2003).

Communal and Societal Risk Factors

Communal and societal risk factors include: poverty; communal norms; and communal disorganisation.

Poverty

A Senate Report into Poverty and Financial Hardship of Australian Families estimates that 743,000 children were living in poverty in 2000 (Senate Unit Affairs Reference Committee, 2004). Jones (2005) argues that the impact of poverty has had a negative impact on children's education. Further, Gehrke (2005) elaborates that many children living in poverty fail to reach the basic benchmarks of achievement, whilst schools in poorer socio-economic areas face the greatest gap between their expectations for students and the reality in terms of resources, achievement and teacher quality. Therefore, it is apparent that PSRA has the greatest impact in these schools.

Communal Norms

Most influential literature examining the effects of communal norms has been concerned with the particular conditions associated with PSRA that greatly increase the risk of young people developing behavioural problems and being drawn into delinquent patterns of behaviour that may restrict their life opportunities. Prior (2005) argues that a sense of isolation, deprivation, conflict, and violence are conditions for adversity, and lead to poorer child development.

Communal Disorganisation

Communal disorganisation includes varied and complex combinations of circumstances in each case. According to Wheatley and Spillane (2001) key risk factors include:

- transience, mobility, and homelessness;
- geographical isolation;
- low parental value, or interest in education;
- low socio-economic status, or unemployment;
- illness and attention deficit disorders;
- differing cultural expectations;
- substance abuse; and
- abuse of, or by, family members.

These factors are interrelated in many instances, and may be combined with school factors in increasing the likelihood of non-attendance. Whilst the effects of transience and homelessness are perhaps readily apparent in inconsistent school attendance, parents placing a low value on education may be equally important. In this instance parents may be more likely or willing to keep students out of school, less likely to participate in communication with the school and less likely to promote links between school and later success (Rollings, King, Tonge, Heyne, & Young, 1998).

Low incomes, unemployment and welfare dependency limit a family's ability to meet the costs associated with schooling, a difficulty which may also lead to embarrassment and, or, disciplinary consequences for students (Reid, 2000; Woodward &

Fergusson, 2000). Such families might also require child care and other tasks of students, and be willing to keep students from school for this purpose (Malcolm et al., 2003). Similar examples and extrapolations may be drawn for each of the listed personal and family risk factors above and, whether experienced in isolation or combination, each presents a problem for attendance.

Demographic Risk Factors

Demographic risk factors include: school classification; year level; and gender.

School Classification

Demographic factors are concerned with the incidence and distribution of PSRA. Mocan, Scafidi, and Tekin (2002) found that there was no evidence to suggest that attendance at Catholic schools led to lower exposure to risk factors associated with PSRA than at government schools.

Year Level

Oman et al. (2002) examined the relationships among youth risk behaviours and demographic factors, specifically regarding the adolescent age group. Results show numerous significant youth risk factor behaviour differences within the demographic factors, and many differences varied by adolescent age group.

Family structure was the demographic factor most associated with risk behaviours. Wheatley and Spillane (2001) concluded that relationships among risk behaviours and demographic factors vary within adolescent age groups. For instance, previous studies (Dayton, 1928, Doll, 1921; Kirkpatrick & Lodge, 1935, McElwee, 1931; Mercer, 1930; Partridge, 1939) have reviewed data on school refusal in terms of variables such as prevalence rates, age of onset, gender distribution, socio-ecomomic status, intellectual capacity, and family factors.

Gender

Yates (2003) contended that girls tend to be absent from school more than boys,

due to a greater incidence of illness among teenage girls, and they tend not to truant as often as boys do. However, in analysing attendance figures, studies conducted by Ireson and Hallam (2001) and Person (1990) indicated no significant difference in attendance rates when comparing boys and girls. There is no conclusive evidence to indicate that boys or girls absent themselves from school more than each other.

Middle School Transition

Prendergast (2005) views the middle years of schooling as difficult years for adolescents with emotional and social behaviour at times seeming unstable in relation to the adolescent's physical, psychosocial, and psycho-cognitive development. According to Braggett (1997), understanding the wide diversity of adolescents in a cultural, sexual and social sense continues to be an essential prerequisite to creating developmentally appropriate educational experiences. It also provides a developmental basis for education practices.

Havinghurst (2002) points out that over the past decade there has been a growing awareness of the value of paying particular attention to the needs of young adolescents in terms of curriculum, teaching and learning styles. Manning (2000) maintains that the middle school has grown beyond its infancy stage. It is now a school in and of itself, with its own identity. Middle level advocates recognise the tremendous progress made during the last several decades, but they also realise that middle level schools continue to face challenges (Main & Bryer, 2005; Neuman, 2006; Pendergast, 2005). Middle level educators have a responsibility to maintain the momentum of reforming and improving schools for young adolescents, even in the midst of critics who claim middle schools focus too much on the child, emphasise cooperation rather than competition, and lack an emphasis on a college preparatory curriculum (Beane, 1999; Saks, 1999).

Adolescents experience physical, psychosocial, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual stress during the middle years of schooling and this is often the time when PSRA becomes prevalent in adolescents.

Physical Development

There are tremendous physical differences that can be found in a group of young adolescents. Selected developmental characteristics include growth spurts and the onset of

puberty. While all young adolescents experience the same developmental sequence, their individual developmental rates and growth spurts vary widely (Garrison & Magoon, 1972). All adolescents will experience a growth spurt that results in rapid increases in body size, as well as readily apparent skeletal and structural changes (Tanner, 1990). With the onset of puberty, they also experience physiological changes associated with the development of the reproductive system (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Psychosocial Development

While less obvious than physical changes, significant psychosocial changes also are a part of young adolescents' experiences. Young adolescents shift their allegiance and affiliation from parents and teachers toward the peer group, which becomes their primary source for standards and models of behavior (Conger & Galambos, 1991). They make friends and interact socially, a characteristic crucial to psychosocial development (Jourard, 1968). Seeking freedom and independence from adult authority becomes almost commonplace with this age group (Hamachek, 1995). Finally, young adolescents' preoccupation with themselves leads to an examination of all aspects of their development and overall self (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Cognitive Development

Young adolescents begin to develop the ability to make reasoned moral and ethical choices (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Similarly, depending on their developmental rate, they begin to think hypothetically, abstractly, reflectively, and critically as a progression from the concrete operations stage to the formal operations stage (Bybee & Sund, 1982). Still, middle level educators, in their efforts to address adolescents' cognitive development, should understand, and plan accordingly, for considerable cognitive diversity (Hamachek, 1995). Since all young adolescents do not reach the formal operations stage at the same time, educators should avoid over-challenging late developers to think beyond their capacity (Newman, 2004).

Young adolescents are in a period of transition: from junior to secondary school and from childhood to young adulthood. Throughout their progression through the education system, young adolescents have to face many challenges as they strive to

establish their independence and identity formulate their own views and values and discover their place in the community.

Challenges

Adolescents do not progress through these multiple developmental tasks separately (Marcia, 1980). At any given time, adolescents may be dealing with several tasks. According to Ingersoll (2002), early adolescence is marked by rapid physical growth and maturation. The focus of adolescents' self concepts is thus often on their physical development and self evaluation of their physical acceptability. Middle adolescence is marked by the emergence of new thinking skills (Thatcher, Walker, & Guidice, 1987). The intellectual world of the young person is suddenly greatly expanded. Late adolescence is marked to be the final preparation for adulthood. The developmental demands of late adolescence often extend into the period that we think of as young adulthood (Flavell, 1985). Hamachek (1995) states that:

> Adolescence represents a very special time in the chronology of a young person's developmental history. As youngsters move from junior high to high school they not only grow as physical persons, but also develop as psychological and cognitive persons. Middle childhood is a time when they begin to develop a more definitive self-image. Adolescence is a stage when youngsters work on refining that self-image and begin to develop, at a deeper level, those special feelings of being unique individuals (pp. 126-127).

Manning (2000) is of the opinion that once middle level educators recognise and understand young adolescents' physical, psychosocial and cognitive developmental characteristics, they can plan and implement educational experiences that are developmentally appropriate. Such understanding provides insight into young adolescents' concerns and questions about overall development, body changes, and the onset of puberty. However, the discussion, whilst recognising the affective strand of education and the spiritual and moral development of the adolescent, rarely mentions the pastoral care connotations of these aspects of their education as a whole.

Pastoral Care Programs

The focus on the physical, psychosocial, and cognitive development in relation to young adolescents draws attention to the need for more adequate pastoral care in the middle schooling years (Schools Council, 1992).

According to Bragget (1997), if pastoral care is to be an important aspect of the school's welfare policy, it deserves more than the passing reference it may receive in the 10-15 minutes devoted to roll call each day. The interest in pastoral care follows out of, and heightens awareness of, the administration strand of the curriculum and a greater recognition of psychological characteristics and needs in the adolescent (Hamachek, 1995). These characteristics include emotional swings, sensitivity to criticism, attitudes, values and the search for identity.

As the adolescent's ability to reason increases there is often a growing interest in the world of ethics and morals. Students frequently see aspects of their universe as fair or unfair and wider social issues of poverty and injustice become topics of concern and discussion (Braggett, 1997). Authority, including that of parents, teachers and institutions such as the school, the church and government authorities, is questioned and challenged Imposed values are also questioned with young adolescents rejecting and opposing pronouncements from parents and teachers (Robson, Cohen, & McGuiness, 1999). There is a need for schools to take seriously the psychological needs of young people and to develop programs. These programs should support and encourage the development of positive attitudes and values and build self-esteem, particularly as the young adolescent searches for answers to social issues and spiritual concerns, and try to make sense of the complexity of relationships (Le Cornu & Collins, 2004).

Young adolescents learn through their experiences within the school situation. They are developing in a number of areas such as physical, psychosocial, and cognitive, and those persons and institutions with which they come in contact will also influence how each individual experiences the process of development (Hamachek, 1995). Effective pastoral care endeavours to promote a holistic approach to the way education is experienced by the school community. A school's approach to such issues as the facilitation of learning, school yard supervision, interviews with parents, multicultural situations, and staff relations, all demonstrate the quality of pastoral care in that school (Treston, 1997). In one sense, all schools offer pastoral care for its students and staff. However, holistic education rejects any dualistic view of education which separates the

academic dimension from other aspects of the school's curriculum or differentiates education into the realms of the secular and sacred.

Application of Pastoral Care Programs

This study acknowledges the differences in the ideology of pastoral care offered by schools. Schools aim to offer the students the best environment in which they can learn and develop. It is important for schools to develop a pastoral care program which conveys and creates a caring setting for students. Although one of the primary functions of school is to assist students to acquire cognitive skills so that viable and rewarding outcomes are achieved, this is not the only legitimate result in the education equation. Most teachers recognise that school for many of our students is merely a background to the more immediate issues in their lives (Treston, 1997). However, it is the social links and experiences within the school that form the connections that ultimately lead to the acceptance of adjustments and adaptations necessary to conform to the norms of the adult world. In some cases pastoral care programs fail to recognise the range of developmental difference in a single year level (Treston, 1997). For example, some Year 9 students are still quite immature, both physically and emotionally, whilst others are three or four years ahead of them and are quite self-assured young people. Therefore, if a pastoral care program is to be successful it must meaningfully engage all students by catering to their diverse needs and interests.

Catholic, Government, and Independent schools provide their students with a pastoral care program and although aims may be similar, in real terms outcomes may differ depending on different dogmas adhered to by school. Pastoral care, therefore, can be an integral part of any school-based intervention program as it provides a holistic approach to the minimisation of PSRA.

Measurement of Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

Keeping track of attendance is a difficult task for many schools. Typically, schools require parents to provide a reasonable excuse such as a note of explanation or making contact with the school of a student's absence. Traditional record keeping, reporting and monitoring of attendance or absences are questionable. Although schools have developed general procedures to cater for students who arrive late or leave early, it is impossible to

account for all absences. Official daily absentee figures may underestimate the true magnitude of the absence rate and raise questions about the overall validity of the data (deJung & Duckworth, 1986). Also, accurate data on truancy are not kept by schools (Cameron, 2004). This is partly due to the difficulty inherent in determining whether an absence is legitimate or not.

Secondary schools use a variety of mechanisms including computerised systems. General procedures for recording attendance vary with schools recording attendance during the first lesson, before recess, after lunch, at the end of day or at the beginning of every lesson. To account for the absences on a daily basis, an absentee report is compiled and published by staff allocated to this task, then amended and updated as information comes to light during ensuing stages. The Computerised Administrative System Environment in Schools (CAES21) is the primary information and management system used within government schools in Victoria[2] (Cameron, 2004). It is employed to manage all of the major financial and administrative functions within each school, and for ultimately recording and restoring student attendance/absence data in most instances. CASES21 has many features to assist schools in managing student attendance, including electronic roll marking (ERM) capabilities. It stores the attendance records of all students in the school, including reasons for absences. While schools do not have to use the ERM capabilities of CASES21, those schools who use manual roll marking processes have to ensure that both attendance and absence data is entered into CASES21 so that manual reports on student absences can be produced by the central office of the Department of Education and Training. Schools that use third-party ERM products to maintain their attendance records are not required to re-input this information into CASES21.

These schools can submit their annual summary absence reports to DET by keying figures into a web-based form. The Victorian Auditor-General's report on *Managing School Attendance* suggests that approximately 10 per cent of government schools across Victoria use some form of ERM (Cameron, 2004). Student absence codes included in CASES21 are DET Victoria's official standards for recording and classifying the reasons for student absences. (CASES21 student absence codes are presented in Appendix I.)

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[2] Registered non-government schools are not required to use CASE21. Attendance monitoring systems used by registered schools must comply with requirements established by the Registered Schools Board.

CASES21 absence codes fall within 2 broad categories:

1. Codes for absences that are counted by DET in published absence statistics/benchmarks include: health-related; unapproved absences (such as school refusal and truancy); disciplinary categories (such as suspension); school choice; and parental choice (such as parent approved family holidays, religious, or cultural observance).

2. Codes for curriculum-related absences which are not counted when determining absence rates for each school, for example, sports days, excursions, and camps.

The Victorian Auditor General's report on *Managing School Attendance* identified a number of issues with the CASES21 data definitions that impact on the usefulness and consistency of the data (Cameron, 2004).

1. Overlap in codes.
    Not all of the current absence codes are mutually exclusive, for example, it is possible to classify a specific health-related absence as medical, illness, medical appointment, hospitalised, or dental depending on the information available. This does not promote consistent use of the codes by schools and, therefore, limits their use for inclusion in broader analyses across multiple schools.

2. Parental choice.
    The parental choice code does not clearly identify why a student is absent other than the reason being approved by the parent. While DET and schools generally treat absences under this code as approved, it is possible for the actual reason which is normally unknown to the school to be inconsistent with the definition of reasonable excuse as defined by the *Community Services Act 1970*. Such absences should not be accepted without question by the school.

3. Distinguishing approved and unapproved absences.
    DET's data standards cannot adequately distinguish approved from unapproved absences. For example, unapproved absences due to school withdrawal where the parent keeps the child away from school for reasons related to the needs of the

parent are not separately identified by CASES21 absence codes. Schools normally classify these absences under parental choice. This situation is problematic given that DET and schools generally treat this category of absence as approved.

However, CASES21 has several features that can assist schools in follow-up and report on absences. For example, it can generate:

1.   Follow-up letters for parents for unexplained absences.

2.   Absence reports by classroom teacher for follow-up and verification.

3.   Reports for year-level coordinators that can help them monitor the follow-up process.

4.   Reports that identify and track explained and unexplained absences, including reasons for absence. These can be summary reports at the school-level, detailed reports at the student level. They can cover a specific day, or wider time frame.

An important source of data is the schools' attendance records, in particular, the process of collection and analysis. However, complications involving human error can take place in the process of checking attendance and communicating all data to the staff, parents, students, and other appropriate authorities. As outlined by Cameron (2004) data may become contaminated during the initial phases of recording and classification. School attendance records may not be accurate due to inconsistent procedures for recording absences, errors made in entering teacher absence reports into office records and procedures not uniformly followed. For example, if a student is absent and submits a note to explain his illness upon return to school is the absence recorded as "sick" or "note"?

Accurate accounting of daily absences and the subsequent need to monitor the absences are crucial. Regardless of who is designated this role, be it the class teacher, homeroom teacher, attendance officer, or the assistant principal, problems surface with regard to the amount of time necessary to trace an absence, verify it as a *authorised* or *unauthorised* absence and then communicate the findings to the appropriate person to update the necessary records and implement follow-up action if necessary. The present study found that few schools had someone appointed to this position on a full time basis.

Similarly, the degree to which it is possible to thoroughly investigate some absences is questionable. For instance, should fractional truancy be concerned with known persistent absentees only or also with the students who miss the odd lesson here and there?

As Duckworth (1988) contended, "Scepticism is wide spread among school personnel about absentee excuses presented by students or parents. Some suggest that it would be better to eliminate the distinction between excused and unexcused altogether. An absence is an absence" (pp. 2-3). The strongest argument for this simplification of policy is that it would save resources now devoted to the processing of excuses. However, simplification could unfairly penalise absent students for unavoidable causes, for instance, an illness. It could also hinder administration from focussing on students who are really beating the system. The difficulties associated with the collection, classification, monitoring and interpretations of data further complicates, and has far reaching ramifications for, the true indication of the nature and extent of school non-attendance, be it *authorised* or *unauthorised*. The lack of accurate data and universally accepted procedures based on clear definitions are significant shortcomings in the research of this topic under study.

The Victorian Auditor-General's report regarding *Managing School Attendance* highlighted the lack of accurate school non-attendance data throughout the Victoria secondary school system and this, coupled with the inaccuracy of the existing data, adds to the difficulty of collecting, classifying and monitoring data (Cameron, 2004). The interpretation of any data is always questionable, as the data may not reflect a true representation of the overall population. As a consequence, the release of non-attendance figures at the local, state or national level will always draw some criticism with regard to validity and reliability, which is partly due to the lack of consistent reporting and monitoring procedures. The reporting of absentee figures can vary markedly from department to department and even from school to school. Therefore, it is difficult to make any conclusive statements about the nature and extent of school non-attendance. Existing school data may be questioned further with regard to the procedures employed at the school level to collect and monitor attendance. As contended by Cameron (2004) and Duckworth (1988) several problems are inherent at this level due to the nature and complexity of clearly delineating school non-attendance patterns. Although schools have developed general procedures for recording attendance and the provision of additional procedures to cater for students who turn up late or have to leave early, it is almost impossible to account for all absences. Hence, concerns centre on the fact that official

daily absence figures may under-estimate the true magnitude of the problem and thus undermine the validity of the data.

Absenteeism rates cannot be accurately measured by counting the number of students not present at any one designated time during the school day. There is a common reliance on attendance rolls/registers to calculate the attendance rate. Attendance rolls or registers may systematically report the rate of non-attendance as they also systematically miss the students who wag class after the count is taken, be it at the beginning of the morning or afternoon. Calculating the attendance is only part of the story. The importance of statistical records to answer pertinent questions in relation to school non-attendance was supported and highlighted as a key strategy in the *Report of the Junior Secondary Review* undertaken by the Education department of South Australia (Eyers, 1992) which asserts:

> If the system wants to monitor what happens in one of the most volatile areas of its activity, then records, statistical collections, and analyses of what is actually going on are very important. The schools have always had these data in a raw form in their roll books. The system needs to collect the information, consider then act upon it. (p. 40)

Management of Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

Preventing and redressing absenteeism can be placed within the well-documented relationship between resilience, connectedness and wellbeing. Building resilience has been described as promoting those factors that buffer against various stresses and their negative outcomes for young people (Anglicare Werribee Family Services, 2000).

The notion of connectedness points to the importance of relationships and feelings of connection to others during development (DET Victoria, 2004). Both concepts involve the promotion of protective factors that may, in the example of school participation, work against those risk factors likely to lead to non-attendance. This clinical model of reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors for young people has been identified as central to the prevention of negative outcomes (Wheatley & Spillane, 2001). School connectedness relies heavily on adequate engagement and attachment of young people within their school and community. According to Wheatley & Spillane (2001, p. 5), "engagement" is a term employed differentially to the term "attendance" to emphasise the importance of children and young people identifying with, belonging to and being willing participants in education, rather than a reluctant physical presence only. Bucci (2002)

argued that attendance issues may be best redressed by a focus on issues of engagement and attachment.

Dwyer (1996) points to various methods that may be employed by school communities to attach and connect to students, by building an environment that has some or all of the following features:

- a supportive school culture;

- friendly and mutually respectful teacher-student relationships;

- opportunities for cooperative learning;

- catering for diversity;

- options for practical and applied knowledge;

- smaller scale school structures;

- avenues for student participation;

- collaborative work by teachers in curriculum planning and practice;

- flexibility in timetabling, subject choice and work organization; and

- an articulated curriculum linking cooperative learning practices to more individualised and independent modes of study.

Schools

The literature dealing with intervention frameworks further suggests schools have a role to play from start to finish on the continuum of prevention to post-intervention. It is not adequate, however, for schools and school networks to concentrate exclusively on measures preventing absenteeism without also redressing current attendance problems and identifying the individuals, and/or, groups involved. The literature also provides some specific advice regarding responses to nominated forms of absenteeism that may form part of broader interventions and frameworks for addressing attachment. By way of example, much has been written regarding the need for accuracy, consistency and ongoing review of mechanisms for measuring truancy. Rollings et al. (1999) note:

> It is important that any attendance statistics take into account lateness, early leaving, skipped lessons as well as absence for the durations of the school day. The statistics should differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence, and

any unauthorised absence should be immediately followed up
with parents. (p. 6)

It becomes apparent when analysing opinion on issues of attendance that a balance
must be struck between individual circumstances, families, school culture and structure,
government and institutional linkages and systematic factors affecting school attachment.
Tackling student absenteeism through both prevention and redress requires support and
planning above and beyond any individual's circumstances and relationships. Responses
and solutions for single cases will always require attention to the particular details of the
case in hand; however the mechanisms for applying and identifying such responses will
require a broader commitment and awareness of the complexities involved. Wheatley and
Spillane (2001) advocate that:

> Only a whole school, whole community and whole government
> response will embrace all the contributing risk and protective
> factors that predicate successful or unsuccessful engagement in
> education. (p. 20)

Galand, Macquet, and Philippot (2000) studied how secondary school students at
risk of school drop out perceive school and the variables connected with absenteeism. The
results emphasised the importance of school social integration, that is, identification with
school and good relationships with teachers and students for secondary school students at
risk of dropping out of school. Reid (2004) reported the implementation of a long-term
strategic approach to combat PSRA in a panel-based approach including the use of the
governor's attendance panel, attendance support panel and the progress review panel.
Evidence suggests that the approach is very effective in helping schools to monitor pupils
with attendance and learning support needs in order to improve rates of attendance.

In Georgia a *Truancy School* was created with cooperation from the county board
of education, the superintendent, and the county juvenile court. The school gives
chronically truant students an educational setting focused on their individual circumstances
and needs resulting in daily a 97 percent attendance rate (McGiboney, 2001). *The Truancy
Court Diversion Project* was developed in Kentucky to address the need for alternative
methods of handling student truancy among high-risk children. As a result, Saturday
school, behaviour contracts, drug screening, tutoring, psychological assessments, anger
management, referrals to other programs and services, programs on substance abuse and
domestic violence and violence-abatement classes were implemented (Munoz, 2001).

Results indicate that the program was being implemented as designed, major stakeholders were satisfied with the program, and positive changes were occurring based on numbers of student absences. *The Truancy Court Diversion Program* involves systems-orientated family interventions in the course of a broader community systems approach to deal with truancy. In this model, families join with the educational system, the mental health care system, and the social services system in the treatment of traunt behaviours among high school students (Sheverbush, Smith, & DeGruson, 2000).

Pastoral Care

The notion of pastoral care is an important aspect of the management and minimisation of PSRA. In this sense, research (Le Cornu & Collins, 2004; Robson, Cohen, & McGuiness, 1999), suggests that pastoral care is seen as promoting a holistic approach to the emotional, social and academic wellbeing of a young adolescent experiencing PSRA. This has led to more recognition of the schools' responsibility for the present difficulties. Research into the various intervention programs available for tackling non-attendance has failed to find any conclusive evidence in favor of a particular understanding of an approach (Lauchlan, 2003). The effectiveness of intervention may depend upon an individual pupil's needs and his or her specific reasons for refusing to go to school.

Department of Eduction and Training Strategies

According to the latest figures released by the respective state and territory DET offices within the Commonwealth of Australia, PSRA is increasing annually and, as a result, various statewide initiatives have been implemented to manage and minimise PSRA. The Department of Education and Training within each state and territory, in conjunction with secondary schools, allocate a high priority to minimising PSRA through its respective management programs.

Department of Education and Training Victoria

Within the state of Victoria the Gippsland Region with an average of 15.35 days

absence per student in 2002, had the greatest increase and the highest absence rate. The state average absence rate for 2002 was 14.26 days. In 2002, three of the four metropolitan regions also had above average absence rates, namely: Northern Region, 15.18 days per student; Western Region, 15.14 days per student; and Southern Region, 14.64 days per student. Of the five non-metropolitan regions, only one other region, apart from Gippsland, had an above-average absence rate, namely, Central Highlands Wimmera with 14.53 days per student. The average days absence per student Prep to Year 12 DET Victoria Regions 2002 are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Average Days Absence per Student Prep to Year 12 DET Victoria Regions 2002

Region	Average Days Absent	State Average	Difference
Barwon South Western	14.17	14.26	- .09
Central Highlands Wimmera	14.53	14.26	+ .27
Eastern Metropolitan	12.75	14.26	- 1.51
Loddon Campaspe Mallee	13.92	14.26	- 0.34
Goulburn North Eastern	14.00	14.26	- 0.26
Gippsland	15.35	14.26	+ 1.27
Northern Metropolitan	15.18	14.26	+ 0.92
Southern Metropolitan	14.64	14.26	+ 0.38
Western Metropolitan	15.14	14.26	+ 0.88

(Cameron, 2004)

The Gippsland Region exemplifies the use of effective strategies to support schools with its "It's not okay to be away" strategy. This strategy commenced in 2004 using a multi-layered approach that links with other related DET initiatives such as Early Years programs, Middle Years initiatives and student wellbeing initiatives. Elements of the "It's Not Okay To Be Away" – DET Gippsland region attendance strategy are presented in Table 2.2 overleaf.

Table 2.2

"It's Not Okay To Be Away" – DET Gippsland Region Attendance Strategy

1.	a media campaign in term 1, 2004 covering print, radio and TV;
2.	the establishment of a regional "Attendance Week" coinciding with the media campaign;
3.	collaboration with local primary/secondary schools and community organizations to adopt the slogan *"It's Not Okay To Be Away"*;
4.	consistent communications emphasizing that attendance is a community issue – not just an issue for schools; and
5.	development of a regional Attendance Support Kit for use within schools that include: (a) parent and student information brochures; posters; (b) Power Point presentations for schools and school councils; (c) Whole-school planning documents such as sample polices, case studies, improvement frameworks, teacher information, surveys, and some best practice strategies; and (d) Information on the role of teachers.

(Cameron, 2004)

Department of Education and Training Australian Capital Territory

Since January 1, 2005, all ACT schools have been subject to the *Australian Capital Territory Education Act 2004* (Parliament of Australian Capital Territory, 2004).

Section 35 sets down the procedures to be used to encourage school attendance at government schools.

1.   The principal of a government school must set up procedures to encourage children to attend school regularly and help parents to encourage their children to attend school regularly.

2.   The principal must refer parents and children to support services that encourage children to attend regularly when the procedures mentioned in subsection (1) are not successful.

3.   If a child enrolled at a government school has not been attending school regularly, the principal of the school may, by written notice, require the child's parents and the child to meet with an authorised person at a stated place and time.

Department of Education and Training New South Wales

DET New South Wales has a broad range of school-based and state wide strategies. These include the strategies set out in the draft *Anti-truancy plan.*[3]

1.   The 2002-2003 budget announced funding for the employment of eight school attendance officers over a three-year period.

2.   An alternative secondary program, the 'Ludmilla Alternative Pathways Program' for indigenous students, was implemented to enable all indigenous students to participate in a strong career orientation program.

3.   The 'Careers Pathways' pilot project was introduced as an alternative school-based program offering high risk senior level indigenous students the opportunity to gain higher academic qualifications.

Department of Education and Training Queensland

Department of Education and Training, Queensland (2004) *Annual Report 2002-2003* includes a summary of Queensland's state school disciplinary absences for Term 4, 2002 to Term 2, 2003. In Term 4, 2002 DET introduced a School Disciplinary Absence Collection System. The absences are categorised as:

1.   Short suspension, namely, 1-5 days.
2.   Long suspension, namely, 6-20 days.
3.   Suspensions with recommendation for exclusion.
4.   Cancellation of enrolment.

In the same report, the reasons for school disciplinary absences are listed as:

■   absences otherwise not particularised, but presumed to include illness;
■   conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school not defined;

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[3] Ministerial approval pending.

- verbal or non-verbal misconduct;

- physical misconduct;

- property misconduct;

- substance misconduct;

- persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others; and

- refusal to participate in the program of instruction.

An article in the *Brisbane Sunday Mail* (2004, April 11), entitled 'Our Truancy Crisis', focused on DET Queensland's statistics showing absences among secondary school students. Rates ranged from an average of 14.2 days per annum at Year 8 level to 17.8 days at Year 12. The overall average for all year levels was 16.4. It was further reported that almost half the absences were unexplained and therefore unauthorised (Withers, 2004).

Department of Education and Training South Australia

Some published material is available relating to a survey undertaken in South Australian government schools during Term 2, 2002 by DET. The findings of the report are listed below.

The overall attendance rate for all students in all schools across the whole term was 91.1%.

2.   In Term 2, 10.1% students were absent for more than 10 days out of a possible 50.

3.   Students' absences in Years 2-5 were between 7% and 7.2%.

4.   Reception, known in other States as Prep or Kindergarten, students had the highest absence rate of all primary students at 9.1%.

5.   Absentee rates were higher for secondary than for primary students, as were unexplained absences.

6.   The highest absentee rate was in Year 10.

7.   Girls had a higher absence rate, i.e. 9.0% than boys, i.e. 8.8%.

8.   Indigenous absence rate was 17.2% with a significant number of absences occurring on a Friday.

The absence statistics in South Australia: 1997 and 2002 are presented in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3

Absence Statistics in South Australia: 1997 and 2002

Year	1997	2002
Overall absence rate	7.4%	8.9%
Girls' absence rates	7.5%	9.0%
Boys' absence rates	7.3%	8.8%
Indigenous absence rates	16.7%	17.2%

(Department of Education Training South Australia, 1999)

Strategies introduced to address PSRA in South Australian schools are listed below.

1.   An 'Attendance Improvement Package' was distributed to all Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) school and preschool sites in January 2003. This package can be downloaded from the DECS website. The package provides assistance to schools and preschools to analyse their attendance or absence data, for all students and for targeted groups of students as appropriate, and establish targets for improvement. From the beginning of 2004, each school site was required to have an Attendance Improvement Plan in place detailing its targets and the strategies to achieve them.

2.   In 2002 the Minister for Education announced the allocation of $2 million over four years for the 'Attendance Action Zones' program. The five districts with the highest absenteeism rates according to the Term 2, 2002 data were each allocated

$100,000 per annum in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 to implement strategies to improve attendance.

3. Within the 'Attendance Action Zones' project a number of secondary schools implemented the SMS text messaging process, while others employed School Service Officers for additional hours to make direct contact with parents of children who were absent without an explanation. Several schools employed Community Liaison Workers to improve home/school relationships, particularly and those of specific cultural groups such as Aboriginal or Vietnamese families. This strategy has been successful.

4. Other school retention initiatives under the 'Social Inclusion School Retention Action Plan' have also been successful in increasing engagement of students at risk. Examples of these include the Teenage Mothers support programs at both Gepps Cross Girls' and Edward John Eyre High Schools and the Student Mentoring program in a significant number of DECS high schools.

5. Vocational education programs such as 'Structured Workplace Learning and School Based New Apprenticeships', coordinated through the 'Futures Connect' team have also been successful in re-engaging students with their learning.

Department of Education and Training Tasmania

DET Tasmania figures indicate up to 11% of students are absent from school on any given day, that is, some 8,000 students. Some 57% of those students are absent without explanation (Haley, 2002). Bailey (2002) notes that of this group, most are absent with parental knowledge. However, the department concedes that approximately 1.5% are truants. Under rules that came into effect in 2003 schools are required to contact some 140 parents the same day as a child's absence to inquire about the student's whereabouts to combat the state's high rate of truancy (DET, Tasmania, 2005). The average absentee rate was higher for Term 2 than that for Terms 1 or 3. The absentee rates for each term of the school year are presented in Table 2.4 overleaf.

Table 2.4

Absentee Rates for each Term of the School Year 2003

Type of absence rate	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Annual
Average daily absence rate	5.92%	9.24%	7.27%	7.4%
Highest average daily absence rate for one week	7.77% (Week 14)	11.22% (Week 9)	8.25% (Week 3)	11.22% (Term 2 Week 9)
Lowest average daily absence rate for one week	3.47% (Week 1)	5.91% (Week 1)	6.24% (Week 13)	3.47% (Term 1 Week 1)

(Department of Education Tasmania, 2004)

Department of Education and Training Western Australia

DET Western Australia employs a case management approach to attendance issues. In secondary schools this often involves members of the school's Student Services team. Typical case management strategies include:

1.   Parent-teacher meetings, often including the student, and ongoing liaison.

2.   Identification of factors contributing to attendance concerns, for instance, academic, social, and emotional.

3.   Support from appropriate school personnel.

4.   Development of an intervention plan with all stakeholders to address non-attendance. The plan may include a period of intensive monitoring with positive rewards for increasing attendance and sanctions for truancy.

5. Schools and districts have developed ongoing partnerships with key agencies such as the Western Australian Police Service and Department of Community Development.

6. In districts, school attendance officers and the local police work together proactively in the area of student non-attendance, regularly visiting shopping centres and other areas likely to attract adolescents.

It has been estimated that approximately 2500 Western Australian school students miss classes without explanation each day (Lam, 2004). The Western Australian Government has launched a new school leave pass aimed at reducing truancy rates in public schools. The schools issue passes to students who have permission to be absent from school. Under this scheme schools and police are allowed to identify and better deal with truant students. Police and shopkeepers use the pass to identify students who have permission to be absent from school (DET, Western Australia, 2005).

Problematic School-Related Absenteeism and the Law

Within the Victorian secondary school system schools are legally obliged to record student attendance and absence. It is the parent's statutory responsibility to ensure that their children attend school on a regular basis. It is the school's responsibility to monitor and follow-up a student absence by obtaining an explanation from the parent. This legislation applies equally to non-government schools.

The *Education Act 1958* (Parliament of Victoria, (2004), *Community Services Act 1970* (Parliament of Victoria, 2000), and *Child Employment Act 2003* (Parliament of Victoria, 2003), underpin the legislative framework for maintaining attendance at school within the Victorian secondary school system.

Education Act 1958

In relation to attendance at school the *Education Act 1958* states:

1. The parents of every child of school age shall, unless there is a reasonable excuse for the child's non-

> attendance, cause such child to attend a State school on every school half-day in each week.
>
> 2.   Attendance at the school on any school day for two hours before noon or for two hours after noon shall in each case be attendance on a school half-day.
>
> 3.   It shall be a reasonable excuse as regards any child that the child has been excused by a general or particular order of the Minister. (p. 97)

In relation to work experience arrangements the *Education Act 1958* states:

> A pupil at school may be placed with an employer for obtaining work experience as part of the pupil's education if the principal or head teacher of the school has made an arrangement in writing with the employer about the placement of the pupil with the employer. (p. 104)

The *Education Act 1958* permits students aged 14 and over up to 10 days each term i.e. up to 40 days each school year to undertake work experience.

The *Education Act 1958* established the *Registered Schools Board* (RSB) as the body responsible for registering and regulating non-government schools in Victoria. This legislation requires registered schools to record student attendances on each half-day in an attendance registered approved by the RSB. A register must be kept at the school and be available for inspection at all times by any person authorised by the Minister. There are penalties for registered schools that fail to mark attendance registers, or which refuse to make them available for inspection. The *Education Act 1958* also describes the circumstances in which the Minister can exempt a child from attendance.

Community Services Act 1970

In Victoria, schools should only approve student absences if parents[4] can provide a reasonable excuse defined by the *Community Services Act 1970* (Parliament of Victoria 2000). This legislation requires parents of school age children to ensure that their children attend a state school on each school half-day of each week, unless they have a reasonable

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[4] 'parent' includes guardian and every person who is liable to maintain or has the actual custody of a child and any person with whom a child resides or who is the occupier of a house in which a child resides.

excuse not to do so, or unless a child has been excused from attending by order of the Minister. The Minister can exempt a child from attendance if:

1.   The child's parents are ill or are experiencing hardship.

2.   A medical practitioner has recommended treatment that would prevent the child from attending school.

3.   It is in the child's interests to be exempted from attending school.

Child Employment Act 2003

The *Child Employment Act 2003* states that a child may be employed:

1.   In accordance with a permit.

2.   In a family business, in accordance with Division 4.

A child may also be employed in accordance with a work experience arrangement under Part 1VA of the *Education Act 1958* but cannot be employed during school hours on a school day unless the Minister has granted that child an exemption.

The *Child Employment Act 2003* also states that a parent or guardian must not let children go to work if that work will limit their attendance at school or their capacity to benefit from school.

Student Attendance Guidelines 1997

DET's policy on student attendance for government schools, including the associated *Student Attendance Guidelines 1997*, largely reinforces and clarifies the responsibilities of parents and schools as prescribed within legislation (DET Victoria, 2004). While student attendance at school remains a legal obligation on parents, emphasis in Victoria has shifted to incorporate and extend the role of schools in providing active support for the retention of all students until the completion of a full secondary education or adoption of alternate pathways. DET's guidelines have been developed to assist schools in supporting full attendance. They set out the school systems' responsibilities and procedural requirements for supporting and managing school attendance, transfer, exemption, and home education. Research into school attendance has identified factors that facilitate effectiveness in this area, namely:

- a supportive school environment;

- a curriculum that provides for all students;

- structures and approaches that facilitate the success of all students;

- effective record keeping;

- prompt follow-up of absences;

- close liaison with parents/caregivers;

- guidance and support for those with attendance problems; and

- a cooperative community/interagency approach in this area.

Concept of Citizenship

The present study takes into account the legal obligations imposed upon the community and society in relation to the concept of citizenship. This research also highlights the value of civics and citizenship education with reference to problematic school-related absenteeism.

The Australian Citizenship Act 1948

In relation to parental responsibility, these obligations are stated in *The Australian Citizenship Act 1948* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002). *The Australian Citizenship Act 1948* states:

> For the purposes of this Act, a person is a *responsible* parent in relation to a child if:
>
> (a)   the person is a parent of the child except where, because of orders made under the Family Law Act 1975, the person no longer has any parental responsibility to the child; or
> (b)   the person (whether or not a parent of the child) has a residence order in relation to the child; or
> (c)   the person (whether or not a parent of the child) has a specific issues order in relation to the child under which the person is responsible for the child's long-term or day-to-day care, welfare and development; or
> (d)   the person (whether or not a parent of the child) has guardianship or custody of the child, jointly or otherwise, under the law in force in a foreign country or a law of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory, whether because of

adoption, operation of a law, an order of the court or otherwise. (pp. 4-5)

Although *The Citizenship Act 1948* highlights the term *responsible* parent it does not define the obligations of a *responsible* parent in relation to PSRA. However; the *Student Attendance Guidelines (1997)* provide an understanding of the concept of citizenship articulated by the Federal Government in relation to PSRA (DET, Victoria, 2004).

The concept of citizenship in relation to PSRA is a key issue in the political arena. The Federal Labor party proposed a version of mutual responsibility. This included new obligations for future citizenship by taking a tough stance on parenting in that:

> Parents must take responsibility for the behaviour and education of their children, and if a Labor Government was elected "parent responsibility orders" would be implemented similar to those launched by the Gallup Labor Government in Western Australia (Crabb, 2004, January 27, p. 1).

Under this policy, parents of problem children are required to sign contracts agreeing to take responsibility for their children and, in cases where children continue to experience persistent PSRA, allow courts to impose fines of up to $3,000.

The Prime Minister, the Right Honorable, John Howard also indicates parents play an important part in their children's upbringing and asserts that:

> In our community, we have to understand that the great and formative influences on young people are their parents and that's why it's very important that people take parenting seriously in order for children to attend school on a regular basis (Crabb, 2004, January 27, p. 1).

Civics and Citizenship Education

In Australia, and in other Western democratic countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Japan, civics education is being given a high priority status in policy formation (Marsh, 2000). Kennedy (1997) acknowledges that "Civics education is about shared values and a common vision for the future and is the biggest educational challenge facing Australia today" (p. 80). As Australia enters the new millennium with considerable

debate regarding republicanism there has been a call to change citizenship education (Carey, 2004; Marsh, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 2005).

Changing citizenship education supports educators in understanding the links between global change and the everyday realities of both teachers and students. Although there is no direct link to PSRA, civics education can redefine the role that schools play in creating a new vision of citizenship. Changing citizenship education is of interest to all concerned with social justice and adolescent participation in decision-making (Osler & Starkey, 2005).

According to the government it is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate and appreciate, through democratic values, that they have both moral rights and moral duties to society. The implication here is that school attendance is part of parental responsibilities. If students are encouraged to participate as a moral obligation inherent in the school system society, it is more than likely as adults they will be more inclined to participate productively in society (Kennedy, 1997). Moreover, Carey (2004) points out those education analysts (Kraft, 1967; Lingard, 1994; Starr & Moore, 1994) who strongly advocate the use of curriculum in engaging young people as informed, skilled, and active participants in the notion of values and moral education. Values and moral education are an integral part of teaching. A supportive classroom environment is an important basis for effective discussion regarding civics and citizenship education, and that this engagement must extend beyond the school into the wider community (Marsh, 2000).

When considering democratic education, educators such as, Kraft, (1967), Lingard, (1994), and Starr & Moore, (1994), promote holistic education through creating caring classrooms, building communities of learning where every student has access to knowledge, and teaching students to be active citizens. Teachers work to reach and build relationships with students to establish resiliency, connectedness, and democratic practices (Barker, Basile, & Olson, 2005). Teachers act as role models for students as part of the civics and citizenship education process so that students can achieve a successful transition to adulthood. This is a template for future good citizenship. Therefore, there is an expectation that students meet these challenges and act as responsible students. This implicitly includes regular attendance at school.

Marsh (2004) emphasises that funding support for civics education could enable Australian students and teachers to actively discuss and reflect about democratic values, and in the process become informed, active citizens in the civic community. To sum up the citizenship debate Carey (2004) argues that, "We must invite government officials,

teachers, parents, students, and leaders in the wider community and society to contribute, and through participation allow debate" (p. 36). Coleman (1972) and Pearl (1978) believe an approach that builds a valued role for students and that develops models for community participation should be employed. For instance, inquiry-based and activity orientated teaching (Harwood 1992), active citizenship projects (The Civic Experts Group, 1994), and environmental education (Robottom & Hart, 1993) initiate responsibility, independence and productive capacity.

The Australian Government and Federal Opposition both linked PSRA with the concept of citizenship and intimated that they would rewrite *The Citizenship Act 1948* to include more specific obligations on individuals taking out Citizenship (Crabb, 2004, January 27, p. 1). However, both parties have not placed a high priority on their agendas for civics and citizenship education change. Their emphasis is on parental responsibilities in cited acts such as the Victorian *Education Act 1958* which suggests that legal sanctions are more effective than a national civics and citizenship curriculum in ameliorating the incidence of PSRA.

Summary

According to the literature, problematic school-related absenteeism is on the rise, and is causing considerable concern to parents, pedagogues and politicians. Moreover, past research suggests that, if not addressed, PSRA, particularly in the adolescent years, may have significant negative effects on students, schools, and the community and society as a whole. As the study of PSRA has evolved and grown, so has an increasingly fractured state of terminology. The early study of problematic absenteeism thus involved separate dimensions of traditional, delinquent truancy and psychoneurotic truancy/school refusal. Within the latter, school phobia was described as a specific anxiety or fear-based subtype. However, many researchers used, and still do use, the terms truancy, school refusal, school phobia, and separation anxiety interchangeably. This confusion about how each term should be used indicates the need for a common definitional system.

The literature suggests that a broad range of risk factors may contribute to the development of PSRA. Commonly cited risk factors include personal, familial, school, communal and societal, and demographic. Therefore, this study has attempted to distinguish between the different categories of PSRA and to identify the risk factors

associated with each category in order that individual schools may apply effective management programs to combat the negative effects of PSRA.

In relation to middle school transition physical, psychosocial, and cognitive factors are noted as playing a major role in the development of adolescents and sometimes putting students at risk in relation to PSRA.

Department of Education and Training programs and strategies to combat PSRA in all Australian states and territories are described and an aspect dealt with in more detail is the "It's Not Okay To Be Away" program established in Gippsland, Victoria. Pastoral care programs within the Catholic school system are noted.

The measurement of PSRA by CASES21 employed in Government schools is discussed. Lists of student absence codes are highlighted. The inconsistencies of this system are noted.

A summary of the law in relation to the *Education Act 1958*, *Community Services Act 1970*, and *Child Employment Act 2003* underpinning the legislative framework for attendance at school within the Victorian secondary school system is outlined. The concept of citizenship and the implications regarding civics and citizenship education are considered.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL, THEORETICAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

"A conceptual framework explains either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationships among them."
(Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 18)

Introduction

The present study is concerned with the phenomenon of problematic school-related absenteeism. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) This chapter focuses on the conceptual considerations that stem from the theoretical framework derived from the literature review. (see Chapter 2 of the present work.) In order for the present study to have strong theoretical underpinnings coupled with a sound methodology a review of relevant literature was undertaken to provide a basis for the development of theory, research questions, and research design.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) the theoretical framework of a research study assists researchers in their endeavours to elucidate interactions among a number of variables whilst the methodological framework sets out to test the stated hypotheses or propositions and answer the research questions. Research conducted into the phenomenon of PSRA must resolve two theoretical issues.

First, what is to be studied? According to Corbin and Holt (2005), "Since concepts form the foundation of a theory, the first step in developing a theory is 'concept identification'" (p. 50). Therefore, the present study must explicitly define what is meant by the concept of PSRA. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, past literature reviews of studies involving PSRA have consistently expressed concerns particularly regarding definitional issues (Fitzgibbon, 1996; Moore, 2004; Tyerman, 1958; Wiehe, 2000). This lack of consistency underpinning both theory and methodology has ultimately led to an inconsistency and confusion of results across widespread studies in relation to PSRA. In the present study, PSRA refers to a wide range of school non-attendance issues, such as truancy (Atkinson et al., 2000; Malcolm et al., 2003, Reid, 2005); school refusal (Kearney & Bates, 2005; Tyrell, 2005); delinquency (Baker et al., 2001; Fergusson et al., 2005; McCluskey et al., 2004); early leaving and dropout (Havsy, 2004; Kopperud, 2006; Kronnick & Harris, 1998); and

parental condoned absenteeism (Hallam & Roaf, 1997; Malcolm et al., 2003; Sheppard, 2005). Recent research suggests that PSRA is still an ambiguous hypothetical concept. Complicating the problem of arriving at a proper and precise definition is the fact that "truancy" is commonly employed as an umbrella term to account for the majority of PSRA in day-to-day communication within the education field to explain unauthorised absences from school.

Secondly, once the theoretical concepts in relation to PSRA have been defined a particular methodology is employed to gather empirical evidence. Defining a theoretical concept such as PSRA will direct the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the study. The conceptualisation and operationalisation of the constructs involved assist in the clarification of what is being studied by identifying observable and measurable forms of school-related absenteeism and under what conditions.

Explicitly stating the theory underpinning the research study identifies relevant causes and specifies the priority ordering of the relevant variables. The dependent variable of PSRA was measured through examination of school attendance records, that is, in excess of 15% non-attendance. Therefore, it is particularly important that the constructs employed are operationally defined on the basis of well validated instruments and the assumptions and techniques of the methodology employed to assess the proposed relationships.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework of the Present Study</div>

The present study argues that a number of categories and risk factors underpin the phenomenon of PSRA. Categories include truancy, school-refusal, delinquency, early school withdrawal and dropout, and parental condoned absenteeism. Risk factors are personal, familial, school-based, communal and societal orientated, and demographic. PSRA conceptual models were structured to in order to measure the phenomenon associated with PSRA, namely, school-related absenteeism, middle school transition, and parental condoned absenteeism.

PSRA Conceptual Models

Based on the literature and underpinned by elements of humanistic psychology, the researcher developed three conceptual models, namely, the School-Related Absenteeism Conceptual Model, the Middle School Transition Conceptual Model, and the Parental Condoned Absenteeism Conceptual Model. These three conceptual models form the basis of the present study's investigations of the phenomenon of PSRA.

School-Related Absenteeism Conceptual Model

The Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA) incorporates a 1-5 point Likert Scale based on the school-related absenteeism conceptual model and was developed by the researcher in order to assess students' perceptions of specific situations relevant to PSRA. The rationale for employing this particular questionnaire highlights categories and risk factors associated with PSRA. The researcher developed three measurement indicators, namely, knowledge, skills, and values and these underpin the SQ: SRA construct. The school-related absenteeism conceptual model is depicted in Figure 3.1.
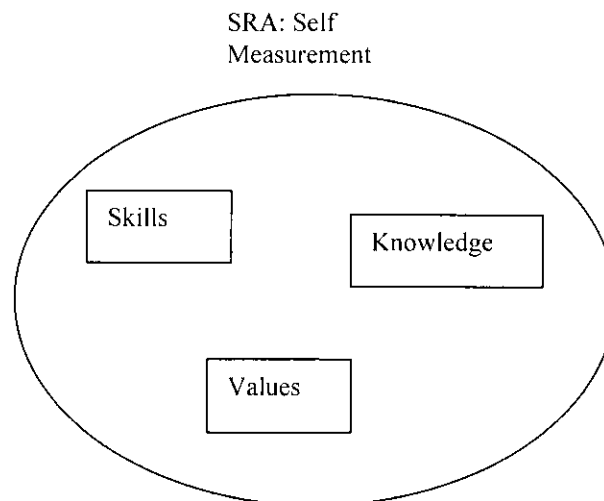
Figure 3.1. School-Related Absenteeism Conceptual Model

Middle School Transition Conceptual Model

The Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST) incorporates 20 items based on the middle school transition conceptual model and was developed by the researcher in order to assess students' perceptions of their ability to cope with specific situations occurring in their life relevant to PSRA. The rationale for employing this particular questionnaire is to elicit specific information relevant to students' perceptions of school life such as, future aspirations, and school non-attendance. Seven measurement indicators, namely, Middle School Transition, Peer Group, PSRA, Curriculum, Future Aspirations, Risk factors, and Citizenship underpin the SQ: MST construct. The middle school transition absenteeism conceptual model is depicted in Figure 3.2.
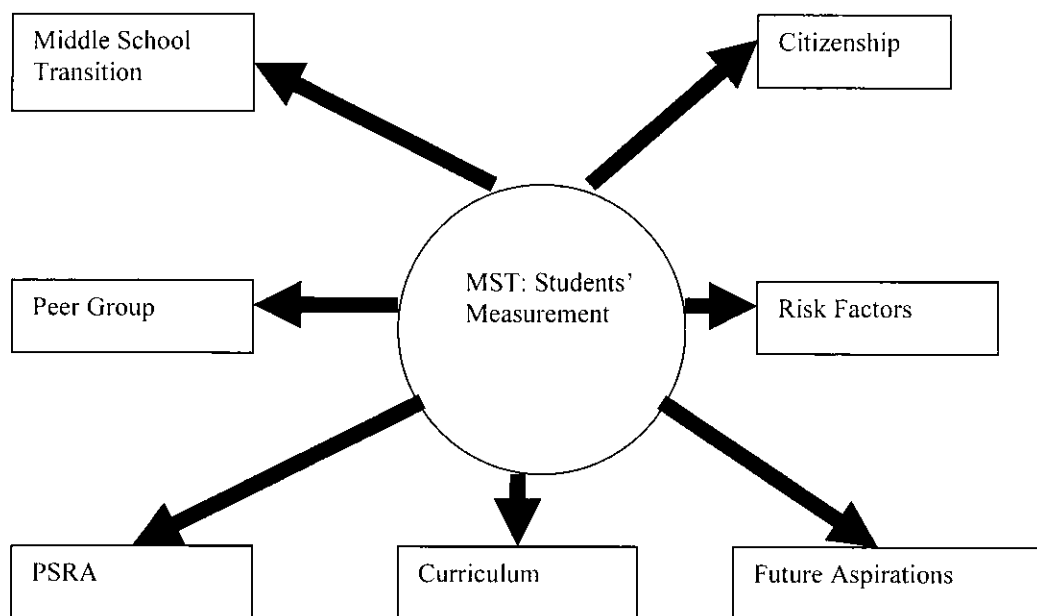
Figure 3.2. Middle School Transition Conceptual Model

Parental Condoned Absenteeism Conceptual Model

The School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned (SQ: PCA) incorporates six items based on the parental condoned absenteeism conceptual model and was developed by the researcher in order to assess schools' measurement of parental condoned

absenteeism. The rationale for employing this particular questionnaire is to elicit specific information relevant to parental condoned absenteeism. Six measurement indicators, namely, Year Level, Type, Issue, Group, Programs/Strategies, and Resources underpin the SQ: PCA construct. The parental condoned absenteeism conceptual model is depicted in Figure 3.3.
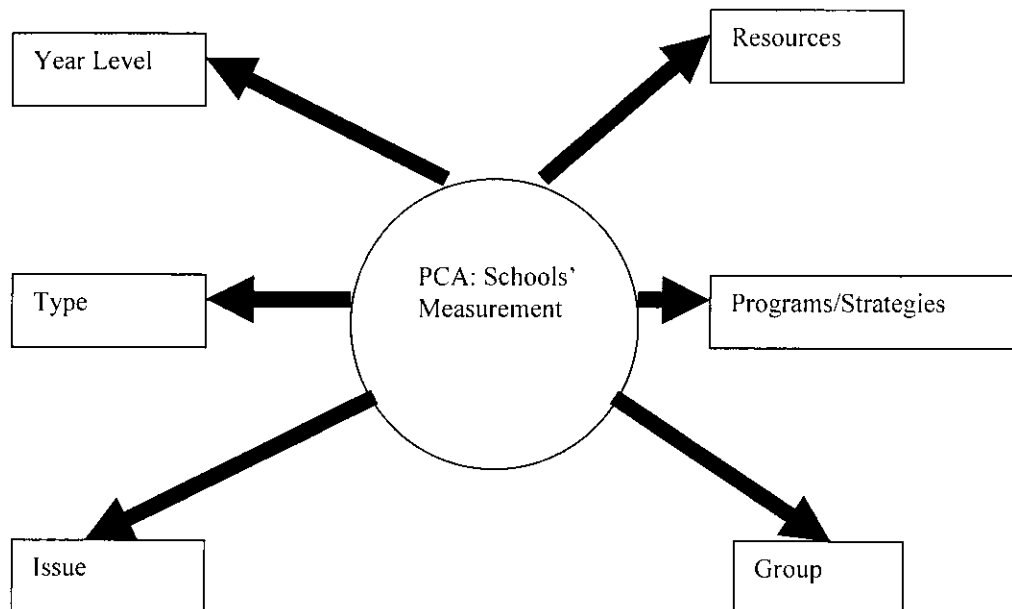
Figure 3.3. Parental Condoned Absenteeism Conceptual Model

Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) a theory attempts to explain some phenomenon in a systematic way and can provide a framework for research in a particular field. The theory identifies crucial variables, and how these variables interact (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, a theory can identify gaps in knowledge and suggest areas for extending existing knowledge (Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

Theories can also serve a synthesising function. By collecting empirical evidence from various research studies, theories summarise information through constructs that provide a deeper understanding, broader meaning and wider applicability (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Theories exist because they are accepted by the body of scholars who research in a particular field at a specific time. In recent years, researchers

have explored ways of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in educational research "by letting the two methods co exist in a single research endeavour" (Shaffer & Serlin, 2004, p. 14). Quantitative theories are based on empirical research findings that are observed data in the form of numbers that can be collected, tested, or tabulated: that is, *positivistic* (Burns, 2000). Qualitative theories employ empirical data which include text, visual images, sound and objects in general: that is, *interpretive* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Both paradigms employ concepts and constructs to explain cognitive, constructivist, and metacongnitive dimensions of epistemology and ontology, with reference to events, people and societies (Dorman & Zajda, 2001).

According to Neuman (2006) there are three broad competing paradigms in relation to educational research. These paradigms can be characterised in the following way:

1. *A positivistic social research approach* views social science research as an organised method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations so that causal laws can be established. This approach to research is quantitative in nature.

2. *An interpretive social research approach* emphasises an understanding of how people create and maintain their social worlds. This approach to research is usually qualitative in nature.

3. *Critical social research* attempts to reveal underlying structures and conflicts in social relations as a way to empowering people.

Dorman and Zajda (2001) use similar paradigms. Their theoretical approaches are presented in Table 3.1 overleaf.

Table 3.1

Three Theoretical Approaches to Educational Research

Research Issue	Positivist Approach	Interpretive Approach	Critical Approach
Approach to knowledge	Deterministic	Interactive Contextual	Political Ideological
Origins of knowledge	Observation Experimentation	Shared experience Negotiation	Differential access
Method of reasoning	Hypothetico-deductive	Inductive	Dialectical
Goals	Prediction Control	Interpretation	Emancipation
Focus	Observed behaviour	Elicited meanings	Hidden meaning power structures
Role of researcher	Detached observer	Participant observer	Active participant
Role of researched	Subject of observation	Collaborator	Active learner/teacher
Role of individual	Part of sample	Key informant/participant	Educative/activist
Archetypical procedure	Experimentation	Interactive observation	Political action
Data summary	Mainly quantitative	Mainly qualitative/thick description	Mainly qualitative
Definition of terms	Researcher	Subject	Researcher and subject
Classification/ Codification	Researcher	Researcher/subject checks	Researcher/subject checks
Verification	Replication	Triangulation	
Role of theory	Explanation	Grounded in observation	Starting point for ideology

(Dorman & Zajda, 2001)

The above paradigms reflect how the researcher views the world. Importantly the researchers direct research methodology including considering quantitative, qualitative, or a multiple method approach, design issues and, usually, data collection methods. Johnson and Onwegbuzie (2004), Shaffer and Serlin (2004), and Tashakkori and Teddlie, (2003) have suggested that there is no logical reason why quantitative and qualitative, that is, multiple methods data collection methods cannot be employed in the one research study.

Humanistic Psychology

The origins of humanistic psychology can be traced as far back as the Middle Ages, and, in particular, the Renaissance, when the philosophy of humanism was born. The basic belief of this philosophy is that every person has worth and the right to achieve self-realisation through reason and rational thought (Rogers, 1983). Modern humanistic psychology emerged in the 1950s as a reaction by clinical psychologists, social workers, and counsellors against behaviourism and psychoanalysis (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Humanistic psychology complements behaviourism and psychoanalysis with its focus on the individual as a whole person (Gage & Berliner, 1998). Bugental (1965. p. 35) put forward five basic concepts for understanding human behaviour. All are relevant to the present study. These concepts are enumerated as follows:

1.   Humans, as humans, supersede the sum of their parts.
2.   Humans have their beings in a human context.
3.   Humans are aware.
4.   Humans have choice.
5.   Humans are intentional.

The concept of choice is particularly relevant to the present study. In relation to PSRA students have a choice whether or not they arrive at school on time, attend classes, and obey school rules. When the wrong choice is made, that is, failing to attend school without a valid excuse they must suffer the consequences such as receiving a detention. Parents, whether wealthy or poor, have the same legal obligation to ensure that their children attend school according to the relevant legislation. If they make the wrong choice and allow a child not to attend school, for any reason, without a valid excuse then they too must suffer the consequences such as receiving a fine. Rogers (1983) and Rogers and Freiberg (1974) believed that teachers who were more highly facilitative tended to provide more response to students' feelings: using student ideas in ongoing instructional interactions; engaging in effective dialogue with students; praising students; indulging in less ritualistic teacher talk; and creating learning environments to fit the immediate needs of students. Therefore personalising and humanising evaluation are particularly important for education, and development effects that are based on

humanistic values. Patton (2002) notes that: "where people in a program, organization, or community hold these kinds of values, qualitative enquiry is likely to feel particularly appropriate" (p. 176). Further, Patton (2002) points out those qualitative methods may be perceived as more personal because of their inductive nature; imply openness by avoiding numbers, evaluate close contact with study, and in-depth interviewing. The common principles underpinning qualitative inquiry and humanistic values as outlined by Patton are presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Common Principles Underpinning Qualitative Inquiry and Humanistic Values

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1. Each person or community is unique.

2. Each person or community deserves respect.

3. Equity, fairness, and mutual respect should be foundations of human interactions.

4. Change processes (and research) should be negotiated, agreed to, and mutually understood – not imposed, forced, or required.

5. One expresses respect for and concern about others by learning about them, their perspective and their world -- and by being personally involved.

6. Change processes should be centred, attentive to the effects on real people as individuals with their own unique needs and interests.

7. Emotion, feeling and affect are normal, healthy dimensions of human experience.

8. The change agent, therapist, or researcher is nonjudgmental, accepting, and supportive in respecting others' right to make their own decisions and live as they choose. The point is empowerment of others, not control or judgment.

9. People and communities should be understood in context and holistically.

10. The process (how things are done) is as important as the outcome (what is achieved).

11. Action and responsibility are shared; unilateral action is avoided.

12. Information should be openly shared and honestly communicated as a matter of mutual respect and in support of openness as a value.

(Patton, 2002)

Grounded Theory

In the present study, the grounded theory approach underpins the theoretical framework. The grounded theory approach provides a theoretical framework to assist researchers in their progress to expand and enhance the concept an understanding of empirical phenomenon. Maxwell (2005) explains that:

> This theory is "grounded" in the actual data collected, in contrast to theory that is developed conceptually and then simply tested against empirical data. In qualitative research, both existing theory and grounded theory are legitimate and valuable. (p. 43)

Grounded theory methods consist of flexible strategies and can be applied to may different professional fields, for example, to psychology and psychiatry in counselling (Murphy, 2005); to education in the role of affect in classroom discussions (Do & Schallert, 2004); to health and disease (Gregory, Gibson & Robinson, 2005); to medicine in childbirth and early parenting (Rolls, 2002); to nursing (Stern & Screiber, 2003; Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005); and to schizophrenia (Browne & Courtney, 2005). In the present study, the primary objective of grounded theory is to expand upon an explanation of a phenomenon, namely PSRA, by identifying the key elements such as categories and risk factors and their interrelationship. As Glaser (1992) points out, "The aim is to go from the general to the specific without losing sight of what makes the subject of the study unique" (p. 15).

Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) point out those critics such as Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) have questioned whether grounded theory methods provide a more rigorous means of processing information into ideas than other qualitative approaches. Post-modern critics such as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) question the positivistic methodological underpinnings and scientific writing style in many grounded theory works.

In the present study, the process of grounded theory building incorporates the following:

1.   Basic elements of grounded theory.

2.   Collective case studies as a primary source of data.

3.   Role of literature as a secondary source of data.

4.   Data analysis via Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Basic Elements of Grounded Theory

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the three basic elements of grounded theory are concepts, categories, and hypotheses.

The first basic elements, namely concepts, are the basic units of analysis as it is from the *conception* of data, not the actual data, that theory is developed. Glaser (1978) defines grounded theory as:

> A detailed grounding by systematically analyzing data sentence by sentence by constant comparison as it is coded until a theory results.   The result is that all data is conceptualized into categories and integrated into a theory. Data is used to illustrate the resulting theory. (p. 16)

The second basic elements of grounded theory, namely categories, are defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) in the following way:

> Categories are higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent. They are generated through the same analytical process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences that are used to produce lower level concepts.   Categories are the "cornerstones" of developing theory.   They provide the means by which the theory can be integrated. (p. 7)

The third basic elements of grounded theory, namely hypotheses, noted by Glaser and Strauss (1967), indicate the generalised relationships between a category and its concepts, and between differing categories. Whetten (1989) argues that a grounded approach produces conceptual data whereas hypotheses require measured relationships. Burns (2000) prefers the use of the term propositions in lieu of hypotheses[1] (p. 390). Therefore, the generation and development of concepts, categories and propositions can be seen as an iterative process in grounded theory building.

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[1] The term 'propositions' is employed in this thesis in lieu of the term 'hypotheses'.

Grounded Theory Building

When researchers use the ideas and methods of grounded theory, the explanations emerge gradually from the data as the study proceeds. In the early stages, the theory consists primarily of themes and becomes more elaborated as the research develops (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In relation to a model outlined by Pandit (1996) the phases in grounded theory building consist of research design, data collection, data ordering, data analysis, and literature comparison. In the present study five phases listed above incorporate nine stages, namely, literature and document review, sampling, collection protocol, entering the field, data ordering, data analysis in relation to preliminary testing, theoretical sampling, research closure, and comparison of emergent theory with extant literature. Grounded theory building is presented in Figure 3.4.
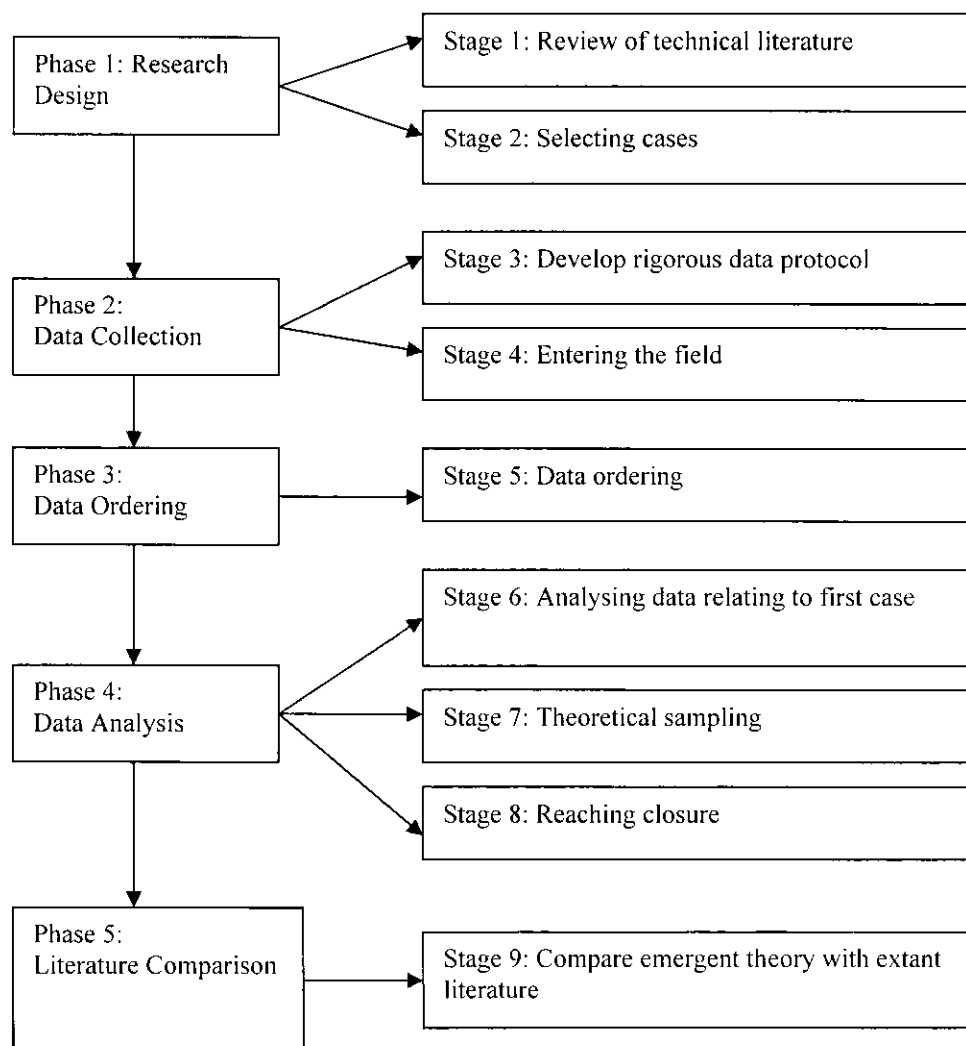
Figure 3.4. Grounded Theory Building

In the present study, the cycle of grounded theory building was undertaken employing theoretical sampling, data collection, data ordering, data analysis, theory saturation, and theory development.

Theoretical sampling gathered data by merging concepts by following the trial of concepts looking for sites, persons or events that enable further comparisons of data, thereby extending knowledge about the properties, dimensions, and relationships between concepts (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The importance of integrating data collection with analysis cannot be overemphasised. Concepts are identified from distinct events in the data that may be actions and interactions, or meanings given to events or emotions that are expressed about certain events.

According to Glasser (1992) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) saturation denotes the point in the research process when no new concepts emerge from the data. Memo writing is an especially important component of theory development because it enables the researcher to keep track of ever-evolving concepts and more and more complex ideas. Memo writing begins with the first analytical sessions and continues through the writing phase. Corbin and Holt (2005) note that, "Developing a grounded theory is a lengthy and time consuming process and a researcher must be willing to live with ambiguity until the analytical story falls into place" (p. 50). In the present study, multiple cases were described in depth. Students offered feedback on how school life affected their experiences in relation to PSRA. These events were coded and counted.

These progressions led to an insight regarding PSRA, and ultimately produced descriptive statistics on the frequency and affect the pattern produced. Moreover, ISSA provides a justification for researchers to use a technique that enables them to support claims that a particular pattern provides a meaningful explanation of a collection of observations about a given set of events.

Collective Case Studies

In the present study, case study profile centred on controlled studies of adolescent students experiencing PSRA. As stated by Yin (1994):

> In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when
> "how" and "why" questions are being posed, when the
> investigator has little control over events, and when the focus

is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life
context. (p. 13)

A case study may be simple or complex and usually concentrates on a single
unit (Stake, 2005). Stark and Torrance (2005) argue that the strength of case study
methodology is that it can take an example of an activity and use multiple methods and
data sources to explore it and interrogate it. Stark and Torrance (2005) maintain that
case studies can produce new policies "using testing to drive the reform of schooling"
(p. 33) from the participants' perspective, as well as to hold policy to account in terms
of the complex realities of implementation and the unintended consequences of policy
in action. However, the weakness of case study is that it is not possible to generalise
statistically from a small number of cases to the population of a whole, even though
many case studies imply that their findings are generalisable (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that characteristics of high-quality case study
research are intense contact with the subjects and data collection from multiple sources.
Case study research involves a detailed and in-depth study of a "single group,
individual, situation or site" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 163). According to Bogdan and
Biklen (2007), Stake (1995), Stark and Torrence (2005), and Wiersma and Jurs (2005)
case-study research involves the following four major stages, namely:

1.   Sampling regarding phenomenon.

2.   Planning data collection employing observations, questionnaires, and open
       interviews.

3.   Planning data analysis assigning meanings to data and devising relevant
       concepts.

4.   Interpreting and reporting utilising data analysis.

Software Packages for the Social Sciences

In the present study data were analysed employing the Software Package for the
Social Sciences (SPSS Version 14, 2005). SPSS facilitated the construction of the case
study databases. The principle advantage of using this program is that it simplifies and
speeds the mechanical aspects of data analysis without sacrificing flexibility thereby
freeing the researcher to concentrate to a greater extent on the more creative aspects of

theory building (Pallant, 2001; Sirkin, 2006). A feature of SPSS is that there are two methods of writing data analysis. First, the textual level focuses on the raw data and includes activities such as text segmentation, coding, and memo writing. Secondly, the conceptual level focuses on framework building activities such as interrelating codes, concepts and categories to form theoretical networks (Antonius, 2003).

The Role of Literature

The proponents of grounded theory have a different perspective on building a theory from other research approaches Maxwell (2005). Punch (2005) states that, "The difference lies in how the literature is dealt with, and when it is introduced, and follows from the stress that grounded theory places on theory generation" (p. 167). If a satisfactory theory exists on a particular topic, there is little point in proposing a study to generate a new theory about that topic. The rationale for undertaking a grounded theory study is that, in some studies, researchers have no satisfactory theory on the topic, or else do not understand enough about the issue to begin theorising. In that case, the researcher will want to approach the data as open-mindedly as possible, guided by the research questions. The problem with reviewing the literature in advance of such a study is that such early reading can strongly influence researchers when they begin working with the data.

Therefore, the starting point of the study is the analytical process undertaken in order to find categories and concepts implicit in the data, rather than not by bringing them to the data from the literature or any other source. Consequently, it makes sense to delay the literature review until conceptual directions within the data have become clear. That is a key concept in the use of the literature in grounded theory: the literature is seen as further data to be fed into the analysis, but at a stage in the data analysis when theoretical directions have become clear. This use of the literature is consistent with the overall logic of grounded theory research: that the theory developed will be grounded in the data (Maxwell, 2005; Pandit, 1996; Punch, 2005).

Hypothesis Testing versus Emergence of Theory

According to Glaser (1992), the distinction between emergence and forcing is fundamental to understanding the theoretical framework in that employing grounded

theory approach. The research may need to unlearn some of what has been taught or has acquired through either quantitative or qualitative approaches. Glaser (1992) suggests two main criteria for judging the adequacy of the emerging theory given: that it fits the situation and that it works; and that it helps the people in a situation to make sense of their experience and manage their situation better. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have labeled grounded theory as post-positivistic, but the method has evolved beyond this labeling. It acknowledges that there is no one truth or one theory in the data and that the theory is a construction from data. Grounded theory is a method in flux and a method that has different meanings to different people (Corbin & Holt, 2005, p. 50). Glaser and Strauss (1967) did not define grounded theory as a research method *per se*, but provided the guidelines that allowed grounded theory as a research method to evolve over time.

Methodological Framework of the Present Study

The relevant literature (see Chapter 2 of the present work.), particularly in reference to the measurement of PSRA, has consistently commented on the lack of consensus on this topic. As has already been noted, the reviews have routinely found not only theoretical shortcomings and definitional issues, but also methodological deficiencies in measuring instruments (Burns, 2000), improper use of statistical tests (Neuman, 2006), and a lack of rigour in the interpretation of data (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). It follows that, in order to draw valid conclusions about the phenomenon under study, it is necessary to observe and measure the variables in order to establish reliably and validly. A researcher may conclude that a theoretical model is invalid when, in fact, the reason for rejecting the model was based on an unreliable or invalid measurement of variables. As Somekh and Lewin (2005) have pointed out:

> Methodology in its narrowest sense is the collection of
> methods or rules by which a particular piece of research is
> undertaken. However, it is generally used in a broader sense
> to mean the whole system of principles, theories and values
> that underpin a particular approach to research. (pp. 346-347)

Research investigating the phenomenon of PSRA and its relationships with other variables needs to ensure that certain methodological issues are addressed. These include an analysis to demonstrate causal links and clarification of the temporal

ordering of the variables. Other explanations of cause and effect also need to be taken into account.

First, studies purporting to demonstrate causal links must first demonstrate that there is co-variation between the variables under study. As has been shown, the relationship between PSRA and correlates such as academic, social, and emotional wellbeing is significant and meaningful. For instance, previous research (Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Mocan et al., 2002; Oman et al., 2002; Pearson, 1990; Wheatley & Spillane, 2001; Yates, 2003) has shown that constitutional variables namely, school classification, year level, and gender, do not have a significant moderating impact on the phenomenon of PSRA, while moderate to strong influence has been shown when evaluating school-specific aspects of PSRA such as curriculum delivery.

Secondly, in causal modeling the temporal ordering of the variables needs to be clarified.

Thirdly, other explanations of cause and effect relationship need to be taken into account. That is, a causal model needs to allow for intervening variables that may lead to an increase or decrease in the manifest and latent measures of the variables under consideration.

Multiple Methods Approach

Quantitative and qualitative research paradigms are frequently portrayed as distinct and incompatible approaches in relation to educational research. The present study has combined both quantitative and qualitative methods to build a theoretical framework, and thus illuminate the relationship between method and interpretation within the framework of accepted research traditions. This study has employed the merits of both quantitative and qualitative research as emphasised by Johnson and Christensen (2000). The quite distinct emphases of qualitative and quantitative research are presented in Table 3.3 overleaf. Still regarded as a relatively new wave of thought, multi-method approaches are facing many challenges. For instance, criteria and procedures for judging the quality of multi-method social inquiry remain problematic when the studies include stances from different methodological traditions, different methods of relatively equal importance and efforts at integration (Greene, Kreider, & Mayer, 2005).

Table 3.3

Emphases of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Scientific method	Deductive method used to test hypotheses and theory	Inductive method used to generate hypotheses and theory
View of human behaviour	Behaviour is law like	Behaviour is fluid and dynamic
Most common research objective	Explanatory	Exploratory
Focus	Narrow-angle lens	Wide-angle lens
Nature of observation	Study behaviour under tightly controlled conditions	Study behaviour naturalistically; Study the context of behaviour
Nature of reality	Objective	Socially constructed
Form of data collected	Collect quantitative data based on precise measurement (e.g. rating scales, response time)	Collect qualitative data (interviews, observations, field notes); researcher is the principal data collection instrument
Nature of data	Numbers	Words
Data analysis	Statistical relationships	Search for themes, patterns, holism
Form of final report	Statistical report	Narrative report

(Johnson & Christensen, 2000)

In the present study; quantitative data analysis was employed to underpin qualitative research in relation to case study profiles. Scholars such as Chi (1997), Johnson and Onwegbuzie (2004), and Thomas (2003) put forward the proposition that research needs to take the direction of developing a new paradigm regarding educational research. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) there are three areas in which multiple methods are superior to single approach designs.

First, a multiple method approach can answer research questions that other methodologies cannot in that it enables the researcher to simultaneously answer confirmatory and exploratory questions, and therefore verify and generate theory in the same study. Secondly, a multiple method approach can provide better answers and, or, inferences. Thirdly, a multiple method approach can provide the opportunity for presenting a greater diversity of divergent views. Kumar (2005) supports a multiple

method approach whereby a researcher has an obligation to use appropriate methodology in conducting a study by affirming that "It is unethical to use a method or procedure you know to be inappropriate (e.g. selecting a highly biased sample, using an invalid instrument or drawing wrong conclusions)" (p. 215). Further, Greene et al., (2005) point out that:

> Beyond the purpose and paradigm stance, the practicalities of employing a multiple methods approach are still being developed. This is because practice is so much more complicated than theory, it is unlikely that a single prescriptive guide can ever capture the myriad combinations and facets of multi methods design, analysis, quality considerations, and write up. (p. 276)

Intra-Sample Statistical Analysis Technique

Shaffer and Serlin (2004) developed a methodological approach to combining quantitative and qualitative paradigms in relation to statistical analysis namely, Intra-sample Statistical Analysis (ISSA) regarding research education. ISSA is a general technique for using quantitative tools to support qualitative inquiry allowing the methods to co-exist independently within a single research study. Shaffer and Serlin (2004) state that ISSA "can be employed as a tool for qualitative research because it illuminates the relationship between method and interpretation" (p. 14). ISSA makes it possible to modify the requirements that individual participants be treated as the unit of analysis in statistical models, and this provides justification for coding qualitative observations and drawing statistically based conclusions about observations in a qualitative context. According to Shaffer and Serlin (2004) ISSA "can be employed as a tool for qualitative research, and because it illuminates the relationship between method and interpretation that it bridges" (p. 14).

In the present study, ISSA was employed to integrate qualitative data of any kind, including observations and interviews as well as case study profiles. More importantly ISSA provides a theoretical justification for the use of statistical analysis to support qualitative inference, and thus an occasion to examine the assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research traditions themselves (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

ISSA and Grounded Theory

In relation to grounded theory, the key issues, processes, and assumptions of ISSA in relation to the present study are outlined. The elements of grounded theory were developed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in relation to the processes of students' perceptions of PSRA. For instance, pattern of students' perceptions involves key research ideas underpinning the present study such as school-related absenteeism, middle school transition, and parental condoned absenteeism. These events in relation to grounded theory can be explored in a number of ways using qualitative techniques.

Although Shaffer and Serlin (2004) state that *"qualitative research* and *quantitative research* are really collections of loosely related methods and associated techniques rather than natural categories, substantive differences do exist between them" (pp. 14-15), in practical terms, ISSA may be of limited utility in the quantitative tradition, where generalisation to a larger population of individuals is the measure of utility. Qualitative inquiry, on the other hand, is not focused on generalisation in this sense. As Geertz (1993) so aptly explained, "The essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract irregularities, but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases, but to generalize within them" (p. 26).

Thus, as Shaffer and Serlin (2004) have argued, ISSA potentially provides support for a wider variety of qualitative claims than traditional quantitative analyses. In doing so, ISSA makes it possible for researchers to frame questions that are more closely aligned with the qualitative claims they are investigating. It may also assist them avoid generating statistical anomalies that can produce ambiguous or even contradictory results when data are collected from individual students are summarized for the purpose of analysis.

Research Propositions

As a result of an extensive literature review (see Chapter 2 of the present work.), the following research propositions are put forward to build on the present theoretical underpinnings of the key research terms. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) These terms are namely, school-related absenteeism, middle school transition, and parental condoned absenteeism. In the present study, the research propositions are:

1.   that school-related absenteeism is problematic in Catholic, Government, and Independent schools.

2.   that middle school, in particular, Year 9 students more likely to experience PSRA.

3.   that parental condoned absenteeism is a growing problem across Catholic, Government, and Independent schools.

The conceptual models presented in Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 underpin the following research questions as outlined in Chapter 1 of the present work:

Phenomenon

1.   In relation to problematic school-related absenteeism, are there any emergent trends or patterns highlighted in the analysis of data concerning school classification, namely, Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, Catholic Girls, Government, and Independent within the Victorian secondary school system? (see Figure 3.1, p. 77.)

2.   What are Year 9 students' perceptions in relation to PSRA? (see Figure 3.2, p. 78.)

3.   Is parental condoned absenteeism a widespread concern within the Victorian secondary school system? (see Figure 3.3, p. 79.)

Conceptual

4.   What are the main categories of PSRA? (see Figure 3.1, p. 77.)

5.   Can the risk factors associated with each category of PSRA be readily identified? (see Figure 3.1, p. 77.)

Summary

In the present study, the development of the conceptual framework arises out of and is an ongoing part of the theory building which then identifies the research questions and research design. Information provided by the literature has strongly influenced the formation of the methodology of this study. Literature reviews about PSRA have consistently commented on the lack of consensus about this topic. As has already been noted, the reviews have routinely found not only theoretical shortcomings and definitional issues, but also methodological deficiencies in measuring instruments, improper use of statistical test, and a lack of rigour in the interpretation of data. Hence, the present research has a sound theoretical framework on which to build further knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon associated with PSRA. Three conceptual models, namely, student absenteeism, middle school transition, and parental condoned absenteeism form the basis for this investigation.

The design of any relevant research study must be derived from sound theoretical and methodological considerations. In the present study, elements of humanistic psychology and grounded theory approach are employed. What differentiates grounded theory from much other research is that the methodology is explicitly emergent. The researcher does not test hypotheses, but rather sets out to discover what theory accounts best for the research situation under investigation. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to discover the theory implicit in the data. Research is a process that attempts to identify important variables to study, measuring those variables, establishing relationships among variables, and drawing conclusions based on these relationships.

In the present study, ISSA was employed to integrate qualitative data, namely, observations and interviews to construct case study profiles. However, more importantly ISSA provided a theoretical justification for the use of statistical analysis to support qualitative inference, and thus an occasion to examine the assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research traditions themselves.

The conceptual framework will be examined further in the following chapters which describe the methods employed to investigate the research questions identified in Chapter 1 of the present work.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

"Quantitative research is empirical research where the data are in the form of numbers. Qualitative research is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers."
(Punch, 2005, p. 4)

Introduction

This chapter presents the rationale of the research design and outlines the framework for employing a multiple method approach namely, quantitative and qualitative paradigms, in relation to the collection of data. The reasons for selecting the research site, sample and data sources are examined. The development, validation and reliability of the research instruments employed in the process of data collection, including preliminary testing to refine the research instruments, is described. The strategies utilised in relation to the recruitment of participants, including the stages in the development of the interview structure, is discussed. The method in relation to case study is profiled and presented.

Research Design

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) the term "research design" (p. 22) can be defined as a process of creating an empirical test to support or refute a knowledge claim. In relation to this process a combination of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms was employed in the process regarding the collection and analysis of data. In the present study a multiple methods approach was deemed appropriate given the complexity of the research focus and the multiple variables. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) note that, "Multiple methods research as the third research paradigm can also help bridge the schism between quantitative and qualitative research" (p. 15). In the present study, the phenomenon under investigation, namely, problematic school-related absenteeism was associated with a number of variables such as school classification, year level, gender, and local demographic area that would have been too difficult to observe if other methods had been selected.

Quantitative Paradigms

Quantitative research is rooted in the positivist paradigm which holds that the purpose of research is to develop a confidence about "whether some particular knowledge or a claim whether a proposition is true or false" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Further, quantitative research is primarily concerned with collecting and analysing data that focus upon numbers and frequencies rather than on meaning and experience (Thomas, 2003). Hence, it is often referred to as "number crunching" (Ogier, 1998, p. 57.). In the present study, the main objective of the quantitative research was to make valid and objective descriptions by manipulating the variables in relation to the phenomenon of PSRA. It is evident that this type of research is mainly associated with experimental designs involved with the study of samples and populations, and relies heavily on numerical data and statistical analysis. For instance, quantitative methods include historical, descriptive, correctional, causal comparative, experimental, and action research (Mertler & Charles, 2005). As this research study is intended to describe and interpret the present situation, as well as analyse developing trends, it is classified as descriptive research (Burns, 2000).

Qualitative Paradigms

Qualitative research is primarily descriptive and involves the collection and analysis of data concerned with meanings, attitudes and beliefs rather than data that results in numerical counts from which statistical inferences can be drawn (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In the present study, the collection of a variety of empirical materials was employed, for instance, case studies, personal experiences, perceptions, and interviews. Mertens (2005) points out that many different types of qualitative research are practised in educational research. Richardson (2001) notes that methods of qualitative research and quantitative research are complementary and researchers who use a combination of both types of methods can give the most complete picture of phenomenon such as PSRA. Creswell (2007) argues that one method is no better than another, but what is important is that the particular method selected by the researcher is relevant to the aim of the study. In the present study, qualitative collection procedures such as open-ended questions and in-depth interviews were employed. Merriam (1990) supports the notion that the analysis of data is an ongoing activity by noting that, "A qualitative design is emergent: one does not

know whom to interview, what to ask, or where to look without analyzing data as they are collected" (p. 123).

In the present study, the research design was deemed to be useful in both a positivist and an interpretive approach. The primary focus of study sought to obtain and examine data regarding a defined concentration on the effects of PSRA as a whole, with particular reference to middle school students a group which is emerging as a critical priority within the Victorian secondary school system (Cameron, 2004). The second focus was to ascertain the impact of parental condoned absenteeism on students, parents, schools, and community and society in general, in an overall attempt to manage and minimise PSRA.

Site Selection

The present research was conducted with the assistance of secondary school administrators, namely, principals, assistant principals, year level coordinators, and student welfare officers who identified rates of, and reasons for, students experiencing PSRA. The sites were not selected because of different or distinctive systems or types of students, but rather because access to the sites was made easier by prior personal contact on behalf of the researcher. Further, case studies selected from secondary school students experiencing PSRA were proposed by the researcher and accepted by the schools. The schools at the centre of the present study support the proposition that PSRA is a high priority issue. Moreover, this research complemented strategies that may further enhance schools' efforts in the implementation of intervention programs relevant to the management and minimisation of PSRA.

Sample

The research under investigation constituted a bounded study comprising of 73 secondary schools and 164 students from within the Victorian secondary school system.

Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) point out that the target population is defined as all the members of a group of people whom the researcher wishes to use in order to generalise the results of the research. Those individuals from whom data were collected are called a sample. It may not always be possible for the researcher to study the entire population. The larger the sample the better, as a larger sample tends to a have a lesser

rate of generalising results (Flick, 2004; Neuman, 2006). However, this is not to say that a large sample is sufficient to guarantee accuracy of results. Fogelman (2002) points out:

> Much more commonly, resources and other practical restraints mean that we cannot study the entire population. Therefore we must study a sample of that population, preferably one that can be shown to be representative of the relevant population and which therefore allows us to be reasonably confident about the validity of whatever generalizations we make. (p. 98)

In relation to school-related absenteeism, middle school transition, and parental condoned absenteeism, convenience sampling was employed because this technique produces research data that can be generalised to a large population, within the margins of error that can be determined statistically (Sampath, 2005). Moreover, it yields the use of inferential statistics for group comparisons.

In relation to a case study profile, this non-probability sampling is termed purposive, purposeful or criterion based sampling. For instance, a case is selected because it serves the real purpose and objectives of discovering, gaining insight into and understanding a particularly chosen phenomenon (Burns, 2000).

Data Sources

The evaluation of data collection was underpinned by the methods of observation, document search and literature review, survey, interview, and case study. The main form of data collection was via questionnaires, both from students and schools.

Another important source of data was the school attendance records. The primary school instrument employed in this study was the student attendance register. School attendance was the yardstick of successful outcomes in the management of PSRA. The school attendance register constituted a simple yet reliable method of gauging the students' school attendance (King, Tonge, Heyne, Pritchard, Rollings, Young, Myerson, & Ollendick, 1998). According to government policy student absence reports must be maintained and submitted by schools (DET Victoria, 2004). These reports constituted a reliable source from which to ascertain the percentage of PSRA experienced by students.

The secondary school attendance data were stored and monitored through extensive employment of school computerised administrative systems such as MAZE and CASES21. (see Chapter 2 of the present work.) Absences were recorded according to type of absence

such as sick, note, truant, unexplained, excursion, late, and a total number of half day absences. Lists of absences are presented in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. In addition to the analysis of attendance records, the referred Year 8, 9, and 10 students were invited to complete the SRA questionnaire and Year 9 students only the MST questionnaire. Both questionnaires were designed to elicit perceptions of PSRA. Further, the invited CSP students participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher.

From the data source, categories of PSRA were highlighted and risk factors associated with each category identified, isolated, investigated, and discussed. Important sources of data emerged during the course of the present study that allowed for an extensive examination of the concept of parental condoned absenteeism. Multiple method approaches incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques were employed to examine the context of the study from different perspectives in order to determine the research findings.

Observation

The researcher having had some experience as a secondary school teacher was in a position to observe first hand the phenomenon associated with PSRA and its effect on students. From these observations, it appeared that PSRA was a multi-causal phenomenon displaying different categories with the possibility of one category affecting another. Further, the risk factors associated with PSRA included personal, familial, school-based, communal and societal orientated, and demographic.

The scope of this phenomenon was demonstrated by several cases that occurred in the researcher's Year 10 English class in 2003. For example:

1. Susan suffered PSRA due to a prolonged illness. Although her illness was explained, her work rate dropped and she barely did enough class work to pass. Susan changed schools at the end of the year.

2. Linda moved to the school the previous year from a school where older students had been bullying her. She was aggressive towards other students and some of the teachers. She was caught smoking several times. Linda kept falling behind with assessments. Even with the extra assistance offered to her in class, it was apparent

she had given up. During the early part of the second semester, Linda dropped out of school.

3.   Eleanor was an older student who missed more class time than other students due to a long-term illness that was unexplained. Much of her assessment work was not handed in. Eleanor left school at the end of the year to attend TAFE.

4.   Jeremy, after repeating Year 9 English during Semester One, was promoted to Year 10 English in Semester Two. Jeremy displayed PSRA through irregular attendance with his parents' approval. He would attend one class, but often missed the next.

5.   Jasmine displayed chronic lateness to class on a regular basis, that is, she missed five to ten minutes per period. There were eight fifty-minute periods per cycle. Overall, Jasmine missed one period per cycle. She appreciated the social side of school life and was too talkative in class.

6.   Richard was an 'A' grade student, but constantly disrupted the class with inappropriate behaviour. He showed spasmodic absenteeism particularly when assessments were due. He often stayed at home, with his mother's permission, to ensure his assessment work was completed and handed in on time.

In summary, these informal observations of a single middle school class conducted over a semester showed that PSRA included different categories that may be attributed to a single risk factor such as bullying. However, it could also be multi-causal such as falling behind with school work and becoming ill as a result. Observations of categories and risk factors associated with PSRA among these students are presented in Table 4.1 overleaf.

Table 4.1

Observations of Categories and Risk Factors Associated with PSRA

Student	Category	Risk Factors	Outcomes
1. Susan	Explained/Truancy	Family problems	Changed school
2. Linda	Unexplained/Early Withdrawal	Bullying	Workforce
3. Eleanor	Unexplained/School Refusal	Academically weak	Transfer to TAFE
4. Jeremy	Explained/Delinquency	Family problems	Apprenticeship
5. Jasmine	Fractional Truancy	Social	Discipline
6. Richard	Explained/Parental Condoned	Boredom	No action taken

In 1985, Reid suggested that PSRA might be affected by a number of risk factors, namely:

- boredom in lessons as a result of inactivity;
- falling behind in school work and not being assisted to catch up;
- an unsuitable curriculum;
- perceived bullying, extortion, or internal classroom rift;
- alleged teacher-pupil conflicts;
- inadequate pastoral care or counselling;
- feelings that school was less rewarding place for them than their more able peers; and
- being unable to comply with school rules and regulations (for example, wearing school and sports uniforms).

The aim of early identification of PSRA, including its categories and risk factors in conjunction with implementation of school-based management programs may be a positive step towards achieving an improved rate of school attendance, thereby enhancing the educational, employment, and social success of students. Bimler and Kirkland (2001) ranked the applicability of 73 motives and causes for absence from school. (73 motives and causes are presented in Appendix J.)

Document Search

In order to investigate the research questions (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) an extensive document search was conducted that served to place the findings from other aspects of this study within a firm theoretical framework. (see Chapter 3 of the present work.) Data banks were developed from document searches conducted to ascertain the extent of PSRA within the participating schools.

Survey

The rationale behind the survey was to ascertain and obtain detailed information from students. The strategy employed included posing questionnaires that elicited feedback to establish a pattern for their PSRA. In relation to surveys, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) stated:

> Typically, surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of (a) describing the nature of certain conditions, or (b) identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or (c) determining the relationships that exist between specific events. Thus, surveys may vary in their levels of complexity from those that provide simple frequency counts to those which present rational analysis. (p. 97)

In the present study, the Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST) was employed to gather general data from Year 9 students to evaluate their perceptions of middle school transition, peer group, PSRA, curriculum, future aspirations, risk factors, and citizenship in order to categorise PSRA and to identify risk factors attributed with each category.

Interview

The main advantage of interviews is their adaptability. For instance, if the participant makes an interesting comment, the researcher can ask a follow-up question immediately. This means the questions emerge as the researcher is sensitised to the meanings that the participants bring to the situation (Mertens, 2005).

Wragg (2002) points out that interviews allow the researcher to enquire into such matters as factors influencing the outcomes of teaching and learning, and the impact of decisions on members of institutions. The semi-structured interview is one data collection method employed in the present study. This allows a more flexible approach where the researcher may note headings or points to be covered in the interview, but not necessarily carry out the interview according to a strict format.

Patton (2002) defines a semi-structured interview as "questions worded and organised in the same way so that each respondent experiences essentially the same question with the same words" (p. 213). Further, Patton (2002) suggested that when a researcher performs in an interview the following principles be adhered to: "Avoid leading and dichotomous questions, use singular questions, use neutral questions, use prefatory and transitional statements, use probe and follow-up questions, and utilise support and recognition responses by the interviewer" (p. 243).

Case Study Profile

The Case Study profile (CSP) approach to the research was characteristic of research conducted within the naturalistic paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that characteristics of high-quality case study research are intense contact with the subject and data collection from multiple sources. Case study research involves a detailed and in-depth study of a "single group, individual, situation or site" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 163). Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that a case study is:

> a bounded context in which one is studying events, processes and outcomes. Note that a "case" could include a wide range of settings; a school, a program, a specific project, a network, a family, a community, and even the behaviour of an individual over time in a specified environment. (p. 28)

The CSP approach promoted an in-depth investigation of a single case to identify factors, and the relationship among factors influencing the situation, namely, PSRA. Arisian and Gay (2003) and Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) added to this definition by highlighting the importance of isolating factors within the case for further discussion. Marshall and Rossman (1999) and Stake (1995) argued that case studies are significant, further supporting this notion to illuminate larger contextual complexities. The major

characteristic of the CSP is its intense focus on a single context in order to explain the various interactions that have contributed to certain outcomes. This definition was confirmed by Yin (1994) who stated that: "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Merriam (1990) supported Yin's definition and added the following statement in relation to case studies:

> focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon ... the end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study ... case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study ... for the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning. (p. 13)

In relation to case study research, Burns (2000) stated, "In probability sampling one can specify the probability of including an element of the population of the sample, make estimates of the representatives of the shape, and generalize the result back to the population" (p. 465). To further assist in making the data collection manageable, the surveys were completed within school hours. The sample could be described as purposeful (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005) as neither the site nor the sample was chosen randomly.

School and Student Participation

In the present study, 164 students and 73 schools participated. (School And Student Participation: Table 1.A: Invited students by zone and school classification and Table 1.B: Participating students by zone and school classification are presented in Appendix K.)

Student Participation: School-Related Absenteeism

One hundred and ninety-eight students experiencing PSRA were selected by their school. One hundred and fifty-five students through their parents/guardians refused to participate, or were absent from school and either were not given forms or failed to return forms within the time frame. In sum, seven schools out of 33 referred a total of 43 students to complete the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA). This total was made up of 15 students from Year 8: six males and nine females; 15 students from Year 9: eight males and seven females; and 13 students from Year 10: four males

and nine females. (School And Student Participation: Table 2.A: SRA invited students by zone and school classification and Table 2.B: SRA participating students by zone and school classification are presented in Appendix K.)

Student Participation: Middle School Transition

Five classification of schools, namely, Catholic Boys; Catholic Co-educational; Catholic Girls; Government; and Independent were invited and agreed to participate in the study. The process involved one Year 9 class from each school with a total of 109 Year 9 students completing the MST questionnaire. (School And Student Participation: Table 3.A: MST invited students by zone and school classification and Table 3.B: MST participating students by zone and school classification are presented in Appendix K.)

School Participation: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

Of the 205 schools that were invited to participate in the study regarding PCA, a total of 51 schools agreed: 32 Metropolitan and 19 Regional, consisting of 29 Catholic, 19 Government, and three Independent schools completed the School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism (PCA). (School And Student Participation: Table 4.A: PCA invited schools by zone and school and Table 4.B: PCA participating schools by zone and school classification are presented in Appendix K.)

Student Participation: Case Study Profile

In the present study, it was deemed important to have Year 9 students involved in the Case Study Profile (CSP) to determine patterns of school life within the context of school attendance policies and support mechanisms. Twelve students nominated by the researcher agreed to participate in the CSP. There were two students from Catholic Boys; two students from Catholic Co-educational (1 female and 1 male);, two students from Catholic Girls; and six students from Government (3 females and 3 males). (School And Student Participation: Table 5.A: CSP invited students by zone and school classification and Table 5.B: CSP participating students by zone and school classification are presented in Appendix K.) All students involved in the study were given permission to do so by both their parents/guardians and their school.

Recruitment of Schools

The schools participating in the study were selected from within the Victorian secondary school system. These included schools under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Office, and members of the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria. The collection of data was conducted during the 2004 school year and involved 73 secondary schools and 164 middle school students. (see Appendix K for further details.) In order to recruit schools, names, addresses, and contacts of all Catholic secondary schools were obtained from the Catholic Education Office (2004) (see Appendix B for further details.); Government school information was obtained via the DET, Victoria, (2004) website (see Appendix B for further details.); and Independent schools via the AISV (2004) website. From these listings extensive databases were created.

The Victorian Catholic secondary school system consists of four independent Archdioceses, namely, Ballarat, Melbourne, Sandhurst, and Sale each of which are subdivided into zones. (see Appendix B for further details.) A similar system applies to DET with nine regional offices: Barwon South Western Region; Central Highlands Wimmera Region; Eastern Metropolitan Region; Gippsland Region; Goulburn North Eastern Region; Loddon Campaspe-Mallee Region; Northern Metropolitan Region; Southern Metropolitan Region; and Western Metropolitan Region. These regions further subdivide into networks. (see Appendix B for further details.) Independent schools are listed in alphabetical order on the AISV website; there are 271 member schools.

The recruitment of schools was conducted employing a three-step procedure. First, secondary schools were classified as Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, Catholic Girls, Government, and Independent. Second, schools were organised according to geographical area: Metropolitan and Regional. Third, schools within these geographical areas were sub-divided into zones. The Metropolitan Area was sub-divided into four zones: Eastern Metropolitan Zone (EMZ); Northern Metropolitan Zone (NMZ); Southern Metropolitan Zone (SMZ); and Western Metropolitan Zone (WMZ). Conversely, the Regional Area was sub-divided into four zones: Ballarat Zone (BAZ); Bendigo Zone (BEZ); Geelong Zone (GEZ); and Gippsland Zone (GLZ).

In order to obtain a wide sample from within the Victorian secondary school system, at least one school classification (that is, Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational,

Catholic Girls, Government, and Independent) within each zone was randomly selected and invited to participate in this study.

Recruitment of Students

Once schools agreed to participate and appropriate school consent was secured, students were selected via the school and invited to participate in the study. If students indicated a willingness to participate in the study, the appropriate parent and guardian information and consent forms, and student participation and assent forms were sent home with students in order that parents and guardians could confirm participation in the study, or otherwise. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) The focus on middle school students was important in an effort to gather data through observations, questionnaires, and case study profiles of students experiencing PSRA, perceptions of school life, and future aspirations.

Schedule of Data Collection

The schedule of data collection is set as follows:

2004, May 15	Invitation: School Participation sent
2004, June 7	Deadline for return of Consent: School Participation
2004, June 15	Information Letter To Parents/Guardians sent
2004, July 7	Deadline for return of Consent: Parents/Guardians Of Participant
2004, July 15	Invitation: Student Participation sent
2004, August 7	Deadline for return of Assent: Participants Aged Under 18 Years
2004, August 15	Distribution of SQ: SRA
2004, September 7	Deadline of return of SQ: SRA
2004, September 15	Distribution of SQ: MST
2004, October 7	Deadline of return of SQ: MST
2004, October 15	Interviews: CSP commence
2004, November 7	Deadline for completion of Interviews CSP
2005, July 15	Distribution of SQ: PCA
2005, August 7	Deadline for return of SQ: PCA

Management of Data

The issue of data storage was critical. As the data were represented as either paper records or computerised records, a decision was necessary as to which method of storage would be used to during the duration of the research. As per the ethics guidelines in relation to the safe keeping of records, the paper records were stored in the Research Services Office of the ACU. The decision was made to use the data base currently in use at the ACU and computer records were stored on the ACU computer banks. Back-up data were kept at the researcher's premises.

Research Framework

In this study, five main components comprised the research framework: initial case study questions; study proposition; unit of analysis; linking data; and preliminary test.

Initial Case Study Questions

According to Burns (2000) the initial case study questions why? who? what? where? when? and how? must be clarified and stated succinctly. In the present study, the question was posed, "What are the different categories of absenteeism and what are the risk factors associated with each category?" This was the initial question the case study sought to answer and which provided a focus for the study.

Study Proposition

Each proposition directs attention at something that should be examined within the scope of the study. For example, the how and why of questions initially in the MST questionnaire were modified from 35 items to 20 items to support the initial case study questions. The propositions needed to be succinctly explained to direct the researcher to seek specific evidence.

Unit of Analysis

This unit of analysis is concerned with defining what constitutes a case. While the

proposition has narrowed down the focus and provided something to tackle, the actual context, person or event needs explicit explanation. Once the cases have been established then other units of analysis become apparent. For instance, in the present study, there was a joint venture between Catholic, Government, and Independent schools, and further, a venture between Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, and Catholic Girls schools.

Linking Data

Linking data to propositions and criteria for interpreting findings relates to the data analysis step.

Preliminary Test

In relation to fieldwork, the preliminary test was conducted at five selected schools within the Victorian secondary school system from a spread across Metropolitan Melbourne, that is, Catholic Boys from SMZ, Catholic Co-educational from NMZ, Catholic Girls from WMZ, Government from EMZ, and Independent from SMZ. In the first instance the SQ: SRA was presented to a number of students and school staff including Assistant Principals, Year Level Coordinators, and Welfare Coordinators for feedback regarding the various aspects of the questionnaire.

The preliminary test helped refine the study procedures and gauge the level of disclosure that could be expected from participants. Five schools were informally selected by the researcher to provide feedback on the structure and format of the SRA and MST questionnaires respectively. Initially, the questionnaires were presented to a number of staff to ascertain their views as to the validity and appropriateness of the content of the questionnaires. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), considering participant characteristics in some detail is important to discern the degree to which interpretations based on a single case have a basis for generalisation to other subjects.

In the present study, participant history involved obtaining knowledge through questionnaires and interviews that were concerned with students' perceptions of PSRA. Personal information regarding students included physical and/or psychological problems, previous schooling problems, social behaviour, and issues with peers or family. All information was treated in the strictest confidence.

The feedback from the schools participating in the preliminary test led to a number of improvements, for instance, the appropriateness of the questions and the length of the questionnaire. One hundred and seventy-eight students out of 700 returned the appropriate consent and assent forms. This was a success rate of 25%.

The questionnaires were examined for missing data, clarity of wording, and time constraints. Further, the teachers administering the questionnaires were asked for feedback as to the ease or difficulty experienced in understanding the instruction sheet. Problems that hindered the administering of questionnaires included school routines, time-tabling, time of day, availability of staff, sports days, excursions, holidays, parental approval, student assent, and school approval. This testing process indicated that both the SRA and MST questionnaires were appropriate and students and schools should be able to answer questions with little difficulty. Preliminary testing of the SRA and MST questionnaires was carried out in the term prior to that in which the main surveys were conducted.

Research Instruments

The key research instruments employed in the present study were the questionnaires. On the basis of information gained from an extensive review of literature, the researcher developed three questionnaires: the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA); Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST); and School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism (SQ: PCA) formed on the SRA, MST, and PCA conceptual models. (see Chapter 3 of the present work.) Fogelman (2002) explained that the questionnaire is the most common method of data collection in a survey.

In the present study, the SQ: SRA, SQ: MST, and SQ: PCA were employed to obtain factual information, attitudinal information, or a mixture of both. Oppenheim (1996) asserted that a questionnaire is not just a set of questions casually jotted down without much thought. In fact, the questionnaire is an important instrument of research, that is, a tool for data collection. The primary function of the questionnaire is measurement. Mertens (2005) has noted:

> In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument for data
> collection. Unlike a printed questionnaire or test that might be
> used in a quantitative study, the researcher is the instrument for

collecting data. The researcher decides which questions to ask and in what order, what to observe, what to write down. (p. 175)

Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism

The Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA) was semi-structured and coding of the items occurred at the end of the data collection phase. The students from Years 8, 9, and 10, who were experiencing persistent problematic school-related absenteeism, achieving less than 85% attendance at school, were referred to the researcher from the participating schools in order to complete the SQ: SRA.

The students were invited to participate on the understanding that they could withdraw at any time or decline to answer any questions during the conduct of this research. Further, the participants were assured that information gathered would be treated in the strictest confidence thus ensuring complete confidentially and anonymity. (School Instructions: Student Questionnaire: School Related Absenteeism is presented in Appendix L.)

The SQ: SRA incorporated a 1-5 point Likert Scale, underpinned by information obtained from the literature and which was developed by the researcher to assess students' perceptions of their ability to cope with specific situations occurring in their life, and in particular, regarding PSRA. The style of the questionnaire was such that students were given a choice of response ranging from "Strongly Disagree"; "Disagree"; "Unsure"; "Agree"; to "Strongly Agree". The complexity of the SQ: SRA was minmised by focusing on and highlighting specific information relevant to the categories and risk factors associated with each category of PSRA. Bell (2002) noted:

> Likert scales ask respondents to indicate rank order of agreement or disagreement with a statement, which is generally on a three-, five-, or seven-point range though researchers prefer an even number of items, mainly to avoid the neutral central point. (p. 165)

The SPSS was employed to code and sort data from the student sample according to the prearranged categories and sub-categories implicit in the data. In addition the SQ: SRA data were analysed regarding frequency and type of response. (Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism is presented in Appendix M.)

Identification of Categories and Sub-Categories

The purpose of the SQ: SRA was to ascertain information about middle school students with particular reference to Years 8, 9, and 10 to establish an emerging pattern, that is, categories and risk factors associated with each category regarding students experiencing PSRA. This included posing questions that elicited responses about student perspectives that the researcher could examine and analyse. The 15 item questionnaire was divided into three categories: knowledge; skills; and values.

Item analysis of SQ: SRA

Data were subjected to a rigorous item analysis that involved coding the 15 questions and sorting them into three categories. A further sorting of the raw data categories into sub-categories was undertaken to identify typical and atypical student responses. The significant features are the identification of conversant or positive and divergent or negative responses contributed by the students. The following section presents an item analysis of the SQ: SRA.

Category 1: Knowledge

In order to examine the ways whereby students' participation and inclusion are related to their perceptions of themselves, the quality of their relationships in school, and their feelings regarding the culture of the classroom, items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the SQ: SRA were underpinned by past research regarding the student's knowledge in relation to self-esteem (De Kalb, 1999; Kinder et al., 1995; Reid, 2005); school rules (Bell et al., 1994; Scott & Dinham, 2005); and curriculum (Reid, 1983; Wallace et al., 2005).

Category 2: Skills

Items 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the SQ: SRA were based on past research regarding the student's cognitive, emotional, and academic skills in coping with all facets of school life such as teacher conflict (Kearney, 2001; Rothman, 2001; Wheatley & Spillane, 2001); familial problems (Butler, 2003; Reid, 2002; Woodward & Fergusson, 2002); parental

attitudes to education Bucci, 2002; Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 2005); and psychological problems (Brandibas et al., 2004; Egger et al., 2003; Lauchlan, 2003).

Category 3: Values

Items 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of the SQ: SRA were based on previous research in relation to the student's inherent value system in relation to the value of school attendance underpinned by: truancy (Atkinson et al, 2000; Malcolm et al., 2003,: Reid, 2005); school refusal (Kearney & Bates, 2005; Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006; Aschenbrand & Kendall, 2005); delinquency (Baker et al., 2001; McCluskey et al., 2004; White et al., 2001); early school withdrawal (Barack, 2006; Bonveja, 1998; Brown et al., 2003; Suhyun & Jingyo, 2006; Van Dorn et al., 2006); and parental condoned absenteeism (Hallam & Roaf, 1997; Malcolm et al., 2003; Sheppard, 2005).

These categories were further subdivided into a series of items that related to the purpose both of the SQ: SRA and that highlighted specific issues such as risk factors relevant to the present study, for example: personal; familial; school; communal and societal; and demographic. SQ: SRA items sorted by categories and sub-categories are presented in Table 4.2 overleaf.

Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition

The Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST) was based on an instrument developed by the researcher to examine students' perceptions regarding their school life in Year 9. The final format consisted of 20 items.

The SQ: MST was semi-structured and coding of the items occurred at the end of the data collection phase. The students were invited to participate on the understanding that they could withdraw at any time or decline to answer any questions during the conduct of this research. Further, the participants were assured that information gathered would be treated in the strictest confidence thus ensuring complete confidentially and anonymity. (Student Instructions: Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition is presented in Appendix N.)

Table 4.2

SQ: SRA items sorted by categories and sub-categories

Items	Categories	Sub-Categories
Item 1 "I reckon I'm not a good student."	Knowledge	self-esteem
Item 2 "Most subjects are boring."	Knowledge	curriculum/teaching style
Item 3 "School rules are unfair."	Knowledge	school-based
Item 4 "The world is against me – I just can't seem to do anything right."	Knowledge	self-esteem
Item 5 "Sometimes I feel scared about going to school."	Knowledge	bullying
Item 6 "I stay away from school because I keep falling behind with my homework."	Skills	low academic achiever
Item 7 "Other students always pick on me."	Skills	bullying
Item 8 "Some teachers are okay, but others don't like me because they are always picking on me."	Skills	teacher conflict
Item 9 "I have no one to talk to when I have a problem."	Skills	psychological
Item 10 "I often feel angry when no one listens to me."	Skills	psychological
Item 11 "I miss school because I always feel sick."	Values	school refusal
Item 12 "Even when I'm not sick I like to take days off school."	Values	truancy
Item 13 "School is just a waste of time." withdrawal/parental condoned	Values	early school
Item 14 "I like to sneak away from school to be with my mates."	Values	truancy/delinquency
Item 15 "Being with mum at home is better than being at school."	Values	school refusal/parental condoned

The researcher considered it important not to overburden the participants with too many items as this might have threatened the quality of responses received. Further, in the construction of items, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) suggested that the researcher should avoid questions that may be psychologically threatening to the respondents. For instance, a question aimed at Year 9 students may be considered threatening if personal questions regarding health or family problems were asked, such as physical and or psychological abuse. Gall, et al. (2005) noted: "Paper-and-pencil tests and scales measure one or two

variables, such as knowledge of vocabulary or attitude toward school. Unlike tests, questionnaires typically measure many variables" (p. 130).

The SQ: MST was structured to enable students to respond freely to issues that may affect them within their year level. The SQ: MST was undertaken within school hours under the direction and supervision of the researcher.

The responses of Year 9 students to the items listed in SQ: MST were coded and sorted according to the categories implicit in the data itself and assigned closely to the conceptual framework of the present study. Further, the SQ: MST data were analysed employing SPSS in terms of frequency and type of response. (Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition is presented in Appendix O.)

Identification of Categories and Sub-Categories

Questions were designed around seven categories, namely, middle school transition, peer group, PSRA, curriculum issues, future aspirations, risk factors, and concept of citizenship. The categories were further refined into a series of questions underpinned by the research questions that related to the purpose of both the questionnaire and the categories, and further highlighted specific issues related to this study. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the following information:

- why students miss school;
- history - when chronic absenteeism began;
- parents' role or influence on attendance;
- peer influence on attendance;
- where students go and what they do when they miss school;
- which subjects students least or most prefer;
- how success or failure influences attendance;
- students' perceptions of the value of school; and
- students' long term goals .

SQ: MST sorted by categories and sub-categories is presented in Table 4.3 overleaf.

Table 4.3

SQ: MST sorted by categories and sub-categories

Items	Categories	Sub-Categories
Item 1 "How did you feel about entering Year 9?"	Middle School Transition	School
Item 2 "On a scale of 1-10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program."	Middle School Transition	School
Item 3 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Homeroom?"	Middle School Transition	School
Item 4 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Year Level?"	Middle School Transition	School
Item 5 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your School Community?"	Middle School Transition	School
Item 6 "Do you enjoy school life?"	Peer Group	Personal
Item 7 "Is the core of your friendship group made up of your primary school friends?"	Peer Group	Personal
Item 8 "Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"	Peer Group	Personal
Item 9 "Do you find it easy to make new friends?"	Peer Group	Personal
Item 10 "On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"	Middle School Transition	School
Item 11 "Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"	PSRA	Personal
Item 12 "Do you miss school with your friends?"	PSRA	Personal
Item 13 "What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example: 1 Day(s) before and after a weekend; 2 Day(s) after part time work; 3 Extended holiday time with the family; 4 Day(s) on exams or tests; 5 Day(s) when assignments or homework are due; 6 Any particular subjects; 7 Often late for school."	PSRA	Personal
Item 14 "Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"	Curriculum	School
Item 15 "Did you choose your subjects because: 1 You were interested in them; 2 Your friends were doing them; 3 Your parents/teachers guided you; 4 You know what you want to do when you leave school;	Curriculum	School

Table 4.3 (Continued)

SQ: MST sorted by categories and sub-categories

Items	Categories	Sub-Categories
5 You had no choice; 6 Peer pressure; 7 You really didn't care?"		
Item 16 "Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"	Future Aspirations	Personal/ Communal & Societal
Item 17 "Do you intend to complete Year 12?"	Future Aspirations	Personal/ Community & Society
Item 18 "Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"	Future Aspirations	Personal/ Communal & Societal
Item 19 "Are you having problems? For example: 1 Boring lessons; 2 Falling behind with homework; 3 Being bullied; 4 Unhappy with school rules; 6 Teacher conflict; 7 No one to talk to about problems; 8 Don't like subject choice; 9 Family problems; 10 School is not for me."	Risk Factors	Personal/Familial/ School
Item 20 "Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"	Citizenship	Communal & Societal

Item Analysis: SQ: MST

Data were subjected to a rigorous item analysis that involved coding the 20 questions and sorting them into seven categories. A further sorting of the raw data categories into sub-categories was undertaken to identify typical and atypical student responses. The significant features are the identification of conversant or positive and divergent or negative responses contributed by the students. The following section presents an item analysis of the SQ: MST.

Category 1: Middle School Transition

According to Cameron (2004) and DET, Victoria (2003) middle school students and, in particular, Year 9 students experience the highest rate of PSRA within the Victorian government secondary school system. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) The SQ: MST items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10 were structured to ascertain if this higher rate of PSRA was consistent with other classes of schools within the Victorian secondary school system, that is, Catholic Boys, Catholic Girls, Catholic Co-educational, Government, and Independent.

Category 2: Peer Group

Previous research (Aitkinson et al., 2000; Kinder et al., 1996; Payne et al., 2003; Reid, 2000; Vermeiren et al., 2004) found that peers played a significant part in the school life of students. Items 6, 7, 8, and 9 were structured to ascertain the types of relationships that exist between peers and if this impacts on PSRA.

Category 3: PSRA

According to Bimler & Kirkland (2001), Kinder et al., (1996), and Reid (1985) a number of risk factors can be associated with PSRA such as personal, familial, and school. Items 11, 12, and 13 were structured to ascertain the frequency of absenteeism, whether or not peers were involved, and the days and time of day when absenteeism occurred being:

- day(s) before and after a weekend;
- day(s) after part time work;
- extended holiday time with the family;
- day(s) on exams or tests;
- day(s) when assignments or homework are due;
- any particular subjects; and
- often late for school.

Category 4: Curriculum

Research conducted by Kinder et al., 1996; Reid, 1995; Wheatley & Spillane, 2001) found that students experiencing PSRA were bored with classes.   Items 14 and 15 were structured to ascertain if students found particular classes more interesting than others and if subject choice was a contributing factor, namely:

- you were interested in them;
- your friends were doing them;
- your parents/teachers guided you;
- you know what you want to do when you leave school;
- you had no choice; and
- you really didn't care.

Category 5: Future Aspirations

Research reporting by Fitzgibbon (1996) found that students who were persistent absentees from school experienced poor academic achievement, social skills, and employment prospects. Items 16, 17, and 18 were structured to ascertain the points of view of Year 9 students in relation to obtaining good results, achieving completion of Year 12, about whether school could assist in achieving their future aspirations.

Category 6: Risk Factors

Item 19 was structured to ascertain the main risk factors in relation to PSRA. This item was based on previous research (Kinder et al., 1996; Reid, 1995) which had found that the main causes attributed to PSRA were:

- influence of peers and friends;
- relationships with teachers;
- content and delivery of curriculum;
- familial factors such as parents attitude and domestic problems;
- bullying;
- classroom context such as lack of teacher control and pupils' learning difficulties;

- falling behind in school work and not being assisted to catch up;

- inadequate pastoral care or counselling;

- feelings that school was less rewarding place for them than their more able peers; and

- being unable to comply with school rules and regulations, such as wearing school and sports uniforms.

Category 7: Citizenship

Educationalists such as Barker et al. (2005), Carey (2004), and Olser & Starkey (2005) promote the changing of understanding of citizenship in a global environment and of the role of students in decision making and creation of a new vision of citizenship in our multicultural society. Item 20 was structured to ascertain if Year 9 students understood the meaning of citizenship in light of their future roles as citizens in society. (see Chapter 2 of the present work.)

School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

The purpose of the School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism (SQ: PCA) was to ascertain information from secondary schools regarding a widespread concern in relation to parental condoned absenteeism within the Victorian secondary school system. (School Invitation: Parental Condoned Absenteeism is presented in Appendix P.)

Identification of Categories and Sub-Categories

Questions were structured around six categories, namely: year level; type; issue; group; programs/strategies; and resources. The main focus of the questions was to investigate the issue of parents choosing to allow their children to absent themselves from school without a valid excuse, and the strategies implemented by schools to combat this widespread problem. Further, the SQ: PCA data were analysed employing SPSS in terms of frequency and type of response. (School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism is presented in Appendix Q.) A further sorting of the raw data categories into

sub-categories was undertaken to identify atypical and typical student responses. SQ: PCA items sorted by categories and sub-categories are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

SQ: PCA items sorted by categories and sub-categories

Items	Categories	Sub-Categories
Item 1 "What is the highest year level of absenteeism experienced at your school?: (a) Year 7; (b) Year 8; (c) Year 9; (d) Year 10; (e) Year 11; (f) Year 12."	Year Level	School
Item 2 "What is the greatest type of absenteeism experienced at your school?: (a) Illness (supported with a medical certificate); (b) Explained absence (other than parental condoned); (c) Unexplained absence; (d) Parental condoned; (e) Other".	Type	Personal
Item 3 "Do you consider parental condoned absenteeism is an escalating issue within your school? "	Issue	Familial
Item 4 "Is there a specific group particular to parental condoned absenteeism associated with your school? For example: (a) Socio-economic; (b) Gender; (c) Multi-cultural; (d) Family Dynamics; (e) Personal/psychological; (f) Indigenous; (g) Other."	Group	Communal & Societal
Item 5 "What programs/strategies do you think are appropriate to combat parental condoned absenteeism, if any? For example: (a) Parental education; (b) Community programs; (c) Government legislation; (d) Attendance officer; (e) Other."	Programs/Strategies	School
Item 6 "In your view should the appropriate authorities provide more resources to combat parental condoned absenteeism?"	Resources	School Communal & Societal

Item Analysis: SQ: PCA

Data were subjected to a rigorous item analysis that involved coding the six questions and sorting them into six categories. A further sorting of the raw data categories into sub-categories was undertaken to identify typical and atypical student responses. The significant features are the identification of conversant or positive and divergent or negative responses contributed by the students. The following section presents an item analysis of the SQ: PCA.

Category 1: Year Level

According to Cameron (2004) and DET, Victoria (2003) middle school students, and, in particular, Year 9 students experience the highest rate of PSRA within the Victorian government secondary school system. Item 1 was structured to ascertain if this higher rate of PSRA was consistent with other classes of schools within the Victorian secondary school system, that is, Catholic Boys, Catholic Girls, Catholic Co-educational, Government and Independent.

Category 2: Type

According to classified information obtained by accessing Government school records (CASES21) and Catholic school records (MAZE). Item 2 was structured to ascertain the most prevalent type of absenteeism experienced within the Victorian secondary school system. The main classifications regarding PSRA were:

- illness (supported with a medical certificate);
- explained absence (other than parental condoned);
- unexplained absence;
- parental condoned; and
- other.

Category 3: Issue

Based on previous research (Hallam & Roaf, 1997; Malcolm et al., 2003; Sheppard, 2005) Item 3 was structured to ascertain if parental condoned absenteeism was a widespread concern within the Victorian secondary school system.

Category 4: Group

In relation to PCA, Item 4 was structured, according to previous research, to ascertain if there was particular group, namely: socio-economic (Reid, 2000; Woodward & Fergusson, 2000); gender (Ireson & Hallam, 2001;Yates, 2003); multi-cultural (Rothman, 2001); family dynamics (Butler, 2003; Reid, 2002; Wheatley & Spillane, 2001); personal/psychological (Brandibas et al., 2004; Kinder et al., 1995; Payne et al., 2003); indigenous (DET, Northern Territory, 2004); and other.

Category 5: Programs/Strategies

DET, Victoria, (2004) offers a multitude of programs and strategies to combat PSRA; (see Chapter 2 of the present work.) for example, "It's Not Okay To Be Away". Item 5 was structured to ascertain what programs/strategies schools within the Victorian secondary system believed were appropriate in order to combat parental condoned absenteeism. The types of programs/strategies considered included:

- parental education;
- community programs;
- government legislation; and
- employment of attendance officers.

Category 6: Resources

According to confidential information the researcher received from schools involved in the preliminary testing of research instruments, lack of resources was a major problem in combating PSRA. Item 6 was structured to ascertain if the lack of resources in

relation to the problem of PSRA was a problem across the Victorian secondary school system.

Development of Research Instruments

The procedure adopted to develop the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism, the Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition, and the School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism included identifying the categories and sub-categories, item writing, field testing, and item analysis.

Preliminary discussions with key school personnel including Principals, Assistant Principals, Year Level Coordinators, and Welfare Coordinators, identified a number of issues relevant to PSRA. This information was used to frame the initial versions of the questionnaires.

In the schools, administrators and teachers were given the opportunity to give general comments on the clarity, design and approach of the questionnaire as well as their feelings when responding to the questionnaires. Feedback from schools included comments with respect to their complexity and the possibilities for misinterpretation. After all comments had been considered, some items were refined.

Researchers are required to adhere to appropriate ethical principles to ensure that the rights of respondents are protected. Jones (2000) notes that overlooking the ethical dimensions of a research may be a significant weakness in a study. Busher (2002) suggests that it is a duty of a researcher to avoid causing harm to the socio-political environments in which, and with which, they work as well as to the participants. It is a matter of protecting the rights of the participants: maintaining privacy, anonymity, and avoiding harm, betrayal, and deception. Researchers prepare explanatory letters and/or pre-interview explanations in order to gain informed consent from potential participants.

According to Cohen et al., (2000) the grounds on which informed consent may be established are such that "Participants must be in a position, or old enough, to understand the choice that they are making – children need to have parental or guardian consent to participate, disclosure of purposes of research, disclosure of any risks to participants, and a provision allowing participants to withdraw at any time" (p. 51).

Validation of Research Instruments

The subject of validity is complex, controversial, and peculiarly important to research. It is possible to study reliability without inquiring into the measuring of the variables, but it is not possible to study validity, however, without sooner or later inquiring into the nature and meaning of one's variables. Burns (2000) states that, "Validity assesses whether the rest measures what it claims to measure" (p. 360), whilst Neuman (2006) notes that validity means "truthful" (p. 171). Validity refers to the bridge between a construct and the data.

Oppenheim (1996), commenting on the development of a research instrument, has stated that questionnaires that in order to meet a reliable standard, they have to be created, fashioned and developed to maturity after many trials. As Bell (2002) suggests:

> You may have consulted everybody about everything, but it is only when a group similar to your main population completes your questionnaire and provides feedback that you know for sure that all is well. (p. 167)

Gall et al. (2005) asserts that it is impossible to predict how respondents will interpret the items unless the researcher tries out the questionnaire and analyses the responses of a small sample of individuals before starting the main study. Results of the early small-scale study should be used to refine the questionnaire and locate any problems in the interpretation or analysis of the data. If the preliminary testing is carried out with care, the researcher can have more confidence that the findings reported in the main study will be valid.

Reliability of Research Instruments

Burns (2000) regards reliability, along with validity and relevance, as one of the key tests in judging the adequacy of research. Sapsford and Evans (1984) noted that reliability applies to the instruments as well as to the participants involved in research. Burns comments:

> Reliability is the consistency of the results obtained when using a measure in research. It is a word used of measuring instruments, including the human observer and refers to the basic scientific requirement that it should be possible for another

worker to duplicate one's results or produce comparable evidence, at least in principle. (p. 259)

Burns (2000) emphasised that an important point a researcher should keep in mind when considering the use of any research tool is its reliability. Oppenheim (1996) suggested that researchers should think of questions as measures. In endeavouring to assess how well each question or group of questions, does its job, a researcher needs to use the concept of reliability. Neuman (2006) notes:

> Reliability can be improved by using a pilot version of a measure first. The principle of using pilot studies replicates the measure other researchers have used – as employed in the present study. Also a literature review may built upon and enhance measures. "In this way the quality of the measure can be improved as long as the same definition is used." (pp.166-167)

In the present study, preliminary testing at selected schools identified problems in the choice of the research instruments, the differences were streamlined and refined, and eventually reliable research instruments were developed for data collection.

Triangulation

The collection of data employed a multiple methods approach, that is, quantitative and qualitative. The data were collected and analysed independently using techniques outlined earlier in this chapter. The combination of the quantitative and qualitative techniques can be referred to as triangulation. Cohen et al. (2000) state that: "Triangulation may be defined as *the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour*" (p. 269).

In the present study, multiple sources of evidence including documentation, records, interviews and questionnaires, were analysed to provide multiple measures, and convergence of information, on the same phenomenon (Yin, 1994).

Additional control of the quality and accuracy of the quantitative data was ensured through the extensive use of the SPSS, a computer program designed to analyse data on the basis of highlighting degrees of significance and correlation of the key variables identified in this study.

Case study research is frequently based on the notion of naturalistic generalisabilty (Yin, 1994). Hence, the context and setting of the present study has transfer value. Therefore, individual schools with a similar context and setting whether involved in this study or not, can benefit from this transfer value.

Case Study Profile

The qualitative method employed in the present study was the face-to-face interview. Wragg (2002) notes that a semi-structured interview schedule tends to be the most popular in educational research. That is because it allows participants to express themselves at length yet it offers enough structure to prevent the participants becoming irrelevant as they respond.

In the present study, a semi-structured interview was designed to encourage maximum participation by respondents. The questions asked by the researcher in the interviews were based on issues raised in the SQ: MST. The final format of the interview was developed as a result of many factors including objectives, research questions, theoretical and conceptual framework and an extensive document search and review of literature. Both misleading and leading questions were avoided. The researcher used some headings covered during the interviews, without being too restrictive. The interview format also enabled the researcher to ask many follow-up questions. The follow-up questions allowed further probing when the participants had made some interesting comments in relation to the issues raised.

All interviews took place within the participants' school. This was more convenient for both the interviewer and interviewee. Each interview took around ten to fifteen minutes, and the interviewees participated in the research quite freely. Wragg (2002) suggests that in educational settings, the face-to-face interview is still the most frequent form of research-based discourse.

In the present study, multi-case designs were considered advantageous in that the evidence would be more compelling, although time consuming. As Burns (2000) states, "The conduct of multiple case studies requires more time and effort than most investigators can spend" (p. 464). Twelve students were selected for case study profiles. The decision to undertake case study profiles was made to ascertain if the students' responses were typical of the perceptions of the Year 9 cohort, and if PSRA had any impact on their future academic, social, and employment prospects.

The interview elaborated on the purpose of the questionnaire and sought to collect more specific and detailed responses that were particular to the perceptions of the Year 9 students involved in this study. These elaborations were expected to help illuminate factors that may have contributed to PSRA and provide a stronger basis from which generalisations could be drawn in relation to similar Year 9 students throughout the Victorian secondary school system.

Although the interview subject matter was designed around the SQ: MST, the questions were not asked in any specific order and additional questions were posed as necessary. The intention of the interview was to allow students' responses to reveal issues that they considered relevant and important.

Questions included in the interview centred on seven themes: middle school transition, peer group, PSRA, curriculum, future aspirations, risk factors, and citizenship. The researcher relied on accurate note taking during each interview to ensure the answers to questions were not reformatted to suit research questions at a later date. The interviews provided first-hand information from the students on their perceptions of both PSRA and the effect of non-attendance might have on their future prospects following the compulsory years of schooling. A cross case analysis was conducted in an effort to identify any emergent themes common to individual interviews. (see Chapter 6 of the present work.)

Summary

In this chapter, the method, sample, and research design for the study have been described and justified. The multiple methods approach, employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection through the SQ: SRA, SQ: MST, SQ: PCA, and CSP, and analysis techniques were also examined.

The identification and adaptation of the instruments for the research and preliminary test were discussed, and an analysis of the program and reliability of the research instruments were described. The main research including characteristics of schools and participants and stages in the development of the interview structure were presented. The broad context of the study profile was identified within the Victorian secondary school system from which the CSP was identified and taken through a number of processes to establish the final number of students. The process enabled 164 students to be assessed against a number of criteria for inclusion in this research with 12 students comprising the CSP.

In the present study, the five preliminary tests endeavored to replicate the ultimate data collection separately. The preliminary tests were carried out prior to finalisation of specific instruments for the final data collection, and to provide final articulation of the study's theoretical propositions. Thus the preliminary tests provided considerable insight into the basic issues being researched. This information was used with an ongoing review of recent literature, so that the final research design was informed both by prevailing theories and by a fresh set of empirical observations. In the following chapters quantitative and qualitative data are analysed and key research findings are presented.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUANTATIVE DATA

"Statistical techniques are like the excavation tools and building blocks: they help us to 'dig' into the data and mine them for precious findings. " (Oppenheim, 1996, p. 285)

Introduction

Researchers use data analysis procedures to construe the collected data as part of the research process. That is because research studies often involve a large amount of numerical data. Statistics are tools for data reduction that quantitatively sum up particular characteristics or performance information to appease and construe the results of research (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). Without statistical tools to summarise the research data, researchers may find it hard to determine that conclusions based on the numerical data for a sample can be generalised to the population, which the sample aims to depict (Gall et al., 2005). This chapter presents the analysis of quantitative data. The first two sections explain the reasons for using the type of statistics selected to analyse the quantitative data, and examines the data collection process of the main research and descriptive statistics of the SQ: SRA, SQ: MST, and SQ: PCA.

Computer Programs for Statistical Data Analysis

According to Burns (2000) since computers and software packages for statistical analysis are so prevalent that everyone has access to statistics, it has become more important than ever before to teach the correct use of statistics. Theory-building software seeks to facilitate theoretical development by treating codes as building blocks for the production of interrelated conceptual categories that focus on relationships between the categories applied to data as well as on relationships between data and category. Such relationships may subsume one category under a more general category, or subdivide one category into several, more refined sub-categories. For instance, NVivo (Version 7.0, 2007) provides extensive features supporting the hierarchical construction of code categories and sub-categories whilst Atlas/ti supports the building of non- hierarchical networks. They assist researchers to make connections between codes, develop more abstract, formal classifications and categories, or test propositions that imply a concept

which fits the data (Fielding, 2001; Gibbs, 2002). However, there is a concern among some researchers that computer methods may discourage intimate acquaintance with the data and therefore lead to superficial analysis.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Since 1992, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences has become the first major statistical software developer to offer a product for Microsoft Windows. This was followed by the release of Windows 95 (Pallant, 2001). Throughout this time, SPSS expanded internationally, and began offering certain products in local-language versions with the idea of using statistics to turn raw data into information essential for decision-making (Sirkin, 2006). In light of these developments, data could be organised, synthesised and analysed from the desktop more time efficiently. (Kinnear & Gray, 2006) expound that this software package may be used to analyse a variety of statistical data and only minimum computer skills are needed. Moreover, data fields are large enough to permit both small and massive amounts of data to be analysed Taylor (2000).

In designing the database for the present study it was important to implement a coding strategy for the input of the descriptive and anecdotal data so that data could be downloaded onto SPSS. The process involved the researcher liaising with the principal supervisor at the ACU, who was familiar with the SPSS and able to explain the context of the research, identify key variables, and assist in the development of data. The key variables were conformed, coded, and cross-checked by the researcher and principal supervisor. Further discussions highlighted minor concerns regarding several of the variables and suggestions were offered for the improvement of the selected variables and subsequent codes. The coding system was amended and codes were inputted into the database in preparation for the statistical analysis.

Preliminary Data Analysis

This section is concerned with the exploratory phase of data analysis and is divided into three areas based on the measuring instruments employed in this study, that is, the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA), Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST), and School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism (SQ: PCA). The aim of this section is to explore and describe research data

and to understand the relations that may exist among the measured variables. The particular emphasis in this data exploration is to describe differences, if any, that may exist between Catholic, Government, and Independent secondary schools.

Coding of Data

Data were subjected to a comprehensive item analysis that involved the coding of the 15 item SQ: SRA, 20 item SQ: MST, and 6 item SQ: PCA and sorting the items according to the categories mentioned previously in this chapter. A further sort of the raw data categories into sub-categories was undertaken to identify typical and atypical student and school responses. The data base was created using the facilities available within SPSS which had the added advantage of allowing fields to be added or modified at any stage. The manual entry of data required the creation of data entry screens for the SQ: SRA, SQ: MST, and SQ: PCA. The data characteristics of each file were produced in order that individual schools and students could be identified. Additionally, the database had the capacity to separate students into demographic characteristics such as school classification, year level, and gender. The statistical reports were written and modified in keeping with the identification of the significant data essential to the context of the study. The reports included flexibility to extract data and format the output in terms of frequency and cumulative frequency representative of the key variables. This process is inherent in SPSS.

Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism

The Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA) consists of 15 items measuring three hypothetical constructs, namely, knowledge, skills, and values underpinned by a number of PSRA categories and risk factors. Cross tabulation, chi-square tests, and symmetric measures were employed in order to assess the associations among demographic factors such as school classification, year level, and gender. SQ: SRA coding and measurement of variables are presented in Table 5.1 overleaf.

Table 5.1

SQ: SRA Coding and Measurement of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Label	Measurement
Year of Administration	YEAR	2004
Student Identification	STU_ID	1-43
School Number	SCH_NUM	1-13
Year Level	YR_LEVEL	8 = Year 8 9 = Year 9 10 = Year 10
Gender	GENDER	F = Female M = Male
School Classification	SCH_CLAS	CB = Catholic Boys CC = Catholic Co-ed CG = Catholic Girls GS = Government IS = Independent
School Area	SCH_AREA	M = Metropolitan R = Regional
School Zone	SCH_ZONE	EMZ = Eastern Metropolitan Zone NMZ = Northern Metropolitan Zone SMZ = Southern Metropolitan Zone WMZ = Western Metropolitan Zone
Item 1 "I reckon I'm not a good student."	SRAA1	A1 = Knowledge
Item 2 "Most subjects are boring."	SRAA2	A1 = Knowledge
Item 3 "School rules are unfair."	SRAA3	A1 = Knowledge
Item 4 "The world is against me – I just can't seem to do anything right."	SRAA4	A1 = Knowledge
Item 5 "Sometimes I feel scared about going to school."	SRAA5	A1 = Knowledge
Item 6 "I stay away from school because I keep falling behind with my homework."	SRAB6	B6 = Skills
Item 7 "Other students always pick on me."	SRAB7	B7 = Skills
Item 8 "Some teachers are okay, but others don't like me because they are always picking on me."	SRAB8	B8 = Skills
Item 9 "I have no one to talk to when I have a problem."	SRAB9	B9 = Skills

Table 5.1 (Continued)

SQ: SRA Coding and Measurement of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Label	Measurement
Item 10 "I often feel angry when no one listens to me."	SRAB10	B10 = Skills
Item 11 "I miss school because I always feel sick."	SRAC11	C11 = Values
Item 12 "Even when I'm not sick I like to take days off school."	SRAC12	C12 = Values
Item 13 "School is just a waste of time."	SRAC13	C13 = Values
Item 14 "I like to sneak away from school to be with my mates."	SRAC14	C14 = Values
Item 15 "Being with mum at home is better than being at school."	SRAC15	C15 = Values

Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition

The Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST) consists of 20 items measuring seven hypothetical constructs, namely, middle school transition, peer group, PSRA, curriculum issues, future aspirations, risk factors, and citizenship. Cross tabulation was employed in order to assess the association between demographic factors such as school classification, year level, and gender. SQ: MST coding and measurement of variables are presented in Table 5.2 overleaf.

Table 5.2

SQ: MST Coding and Measurement of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Label	Measurement
Year of Administration	YEAR	2004
Student Identification	STU_ID	1-109
School Number	SCH_NUM	1-14
Year Level	YR_LEVEL	9 = Year 9
Gender	GENDER	F = Female M = Male
School Classification	SCH_CLAS	CB = Catholic Boys CC = Catholic Co-ed CG = Catholic Girls GS = Government IS = Independent
School Area	SCH_AREA	M = Metropolitan R = Regional
School Zone	SCH_ZONE	EMZ = Eastern Metropolitan Zone NMZ = Northern Metropolitan Zone SMZ = Southern Metropolitan Zone WMZ = Western Metropolitan Zone
Item 1 "How did you feel about entering Year 9?"	MSTA1	A1 = Middle School Transition
Item 2 "On a scale of 1-10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program."	MSTA2	A2 = Middle School Transition
Item 3 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Homeroom?"	MSTA3	A3 = Middle School Transition
Item 4 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Year Level?"	MSTA4	A4 = Middle School Transition
Item 5 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your School Community?"	MSTA5	A5 = Middle School Transition
Item 6 "Do you enjoy school life?"	MSTA6	A6 = Peer Group
Item 7 "Is the core of your friendship group made up of your primary school friends?"	MSTA7	A7 = Peer Group
Item 8 "Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"	MSTA8	A8 = Peer Group

Table 5.2 (Continued)

SQ: MST Coding and Measurement of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Label	Measurement
Item 9 "Do you find it easy to make new friends?"	MSTA9	A9 = Peer Group
Item 10 "On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"	MSTA10	A10 = Middle School Transition
Item 11 "Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"	MSTA11	A11 = PSRA
Item 12 "Do you miss school with your friends?"	MSTA12	A12 = PSRA
Item 13 "What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example: 1 Day(s) before and after a weekend; 2 Day(s) after part time work; 3 Extended holiday time with the family; 4 Day(s) on exams or tests; 5 Day(s) when assignments or homework are due; 6 Any particular subjects; 7 Often late for school."	MSTA13	A13 = PSRA
Item 14 "Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"	MSTA14	A14 = Curriculum
Item 15 "Did you choose your subjects because: 1 You were interested in them; 2 Your friends were doing them; 3 Your parents/teachers guided you; 4 You know what you want to do when you leave school; 5 You had no choice; 6 You really didn't care?"	MSTA15	A15 = Curriculum
Item 16 "Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"	MSTA16	A16 = Future Aspirations
Item 17 "Do you intend to complete Year 12?"	MSTA17	A17 = Future Aspirations
Item 18 "Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"	MSTA18	A18 = Future Aspirations
Item 19 "Are you having problems? For example: 1 Boring lessons; 2 Falling behind with homework; 3 Being bullied; 4 Unhappy with school rules; 5 Peer pressure; 6 Teacher conflict; 7 No one to talk to about problems; 8 Don't like subject choice; 9 Family problems; 10 School is not for me."	MSTA19	A19 = Risk Factors

Table 5.2 (Continued)

SQ: MST Coding and Measurement of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Label	Measurement
Item 20 "Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"	MSTA20	A20 = Citizenship

School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

The School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism (SQ: PCA) consists of 6 items measuring six hypothetical constructs, namely, year level, type, issue, group, strategies/programs, and resources in relation to parental condoned absenteeism as reported by secondary schools. Cross tabulation was employed in order to assess the association between demographic factors such as school classification, year level, and gender. SQ: PCA coding and measurement of variables are presented in Table 5.3 overleaf.

Frequency

Pallant (2001) explains that frequency can show how many people provided responses to each of the issues raised. Further, frequency can calculate the number of respondents into percentages, which makes it easier and clearer to visualise and understand the perspectives of numerical data and the frequency of occurrences. It helps to increase definition of the data shown in both words and numbers (Elmore & Woehlke, 1997; Harris, 1995; Huck & Cormier, 1996; Taylor, 2000). It also allows researchers to be more certain about formulating hypotheses from the data collected (Borg & Gall, 1989; Taylor, 2000). Oppenheim (1996) notes that:

> Statistical techniques are like the excavation tools and building blocks: they help us to 'dig' into the data and mine them for precious findings, and enable us to summarize and compose these into meaningful structures, but depending on the nature of the data, different statistical tools will have to be used for different purposes. (p. 285)

Table 5.3

SQ: PCA Coding and Measurement of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Label	Measurement
Year of Administration	YEAR	2004
School Number	SCH_NUM	1-51
School Classification	SCH_CLAS	CB = Catholic Boys CC = Catholic Co-ed CG = Catholic Girls GS = Government IS = Independent
School Area	SCH_AREA	M = Metropolitan R = Regional
School Zone		SCH_ZONE BAZ = Ballarat Zone BEZ = Bendigo Zone EMZ = Eastern Metropolitan Zone GEZ = Geelong Zone GLZ = Gippsland Zone NMZ = Northern Metropolitan Zone SMZ = Southern Metropolitan Zone WMZ = Western Metropolitan Zone
Item1 "What is the highest year level of absenteeism experienced at your school?: (a) Year 7; (b) Year 8; (c) Year 9; (d) Year 10; (e) Year 11; (f) Year 12."	PCAA1	A1 = Year Level
Item 2 "What is the greatest type of absenteeism experienced at your school?: (a) Illness (supported with a medical certificate); (b) Explained absence (other than parental condoned); (c) Unexplained absence; (d) Parental condoned; (e) Other".	PCAA2	A2 = Type
Item 3 "Do you consider parental condoned absenteeism is an escalating issue within your school? "	PCAA3	A3 = Issue
Item 4 "Is there a specific group particular to parental condoned absenteeism associated with your school? For example: (a) Socio-economic; (b) Gender; (c) Multi-cultural;	PCAA4	A4 = Group

Table 5.3 (Continued)

SQ: PCA Coding and Measurement of Variables

Variable Name	Variable Label	Measurement
(d) Family Dynamics; (e) Personal/psychological; (f) Indigenous; (g) Other."		
Item 5 "What programs/strategies do you think are appropriate to combat parental condoned absenteeism, if any? For example: (a) Parental education; (b) Community programs; (c) Government legislation; (d) Attendance officer; (e) Other."	PCAA5	A5 = Programs/Strategies
Item 6 "In your view should the appropriate authorities provide more resources to combat parental condoned absenteeism?"	PCAA6	A6 = Resources

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics describe patterns and general trends in a data set. In most cases, descriptive statistics are used to examine or explore one variable at a time. However, the relationship between two variables can also be described as with correlation and regression. Inferential statistics test hypotheses about differences or relationships in populations on the basis of measurements made on samples. Inferential statistics may assist if a difference or relationship can be considered real or just a chance fluctuation.

One of the inherent aims of the present study is to understand human behaviour. However, before it can be understood, the researcher must be able to describe it. In some sense, descriptive statistics is one of the bridges between measurement and understanding. A data set and array of research questions usually interest the researcher in both describing and making inferences about the results. The first phase of data analysis involves the placing of some order into raw conformation. Typically the data are reduced down to one or two descriptive summaries like the mean and standard deviation or correlation, or by visualisation of the data through various representations such as graphic histograms, frequency distributions, and scatter plots.

Non-parametric tests were employed in the present study. For instance, the SQ: SRA was concerned with the phenomena of PSRA. The data were obtained via a questionnaire where respondents were asked a number of questions about their knowledge, skills, and values in relation to PSRA. The variable examined was school classification.[1] Forty three students provided data on this variable. (see Appendix M for further details.)

Non-Parametric Tests

Non-parametric tests are concerned with a branch of statistical inference which makes no assumptions about the underlying distributional form of variables. Whilst parametric statistics are based upon an ideal hypothetical mathematical form for the data, usually the normal distribution, some statistics claim that for the social science data the assumptions required do this are hardly ever justified, and consequently that it is always preferable to use non-parametric statistics. SPSS procedures called NPAR TESTS enable the calculation of certain of these statistics. For instance, well-known significance tests of this type include cross tabulation, chi-square, and symmetric measures (Conover, 1980; Siegel & Castellan, 1998).

Cross Tabulation

Cross tabulation is one of the simplest and most frequently used ways of demonstrating the presence or absence of a relationship and can be simply created employing SPSS (Bryman & Cramer, 2005). Cross tabulations are tables of counts which describe and analyse the relationship between two or more variables in a data set (Rose & Sullivan, 1996). The investigation of relationships is an important step in finding explanations and consequently contributes to the building of theories about the nature of the phenomena studied (Bryman and Cramer, 2001). In the present study, the problem of considerable concern is to establish whether there really is a relationship between the two variables, that is, item response and school classification or whether the relationship has arisen by chance.

In response to research question one of the present study, the relationship between school classification was examined against the item response to the SQ: SRA. An example of cross tabulation of school classification difference is presented in Table 5.4 overleaf.

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[1] Variables such as year level and gender were not investigated in the SQ: SRA.

Table 5.4

Cross Tabulation: School Classification Difference

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	6	4	2	12
Expected Count	6.4	3.1	2.5	12.0
%	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	10	1	2	13
Expected Count	7.0	3.3	2.7	13.0
%	76.9%	7.7%	15.4%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	3	3	2	8
Expected Count	4.3	2.0	1.7	8.0
%	37.5%	37.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Government Count	3	3	2	8
Expected Count	4.3	2.0	1.7	8.0
%	37.5%	37.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	1	0	1	2
Expected Count	1.1	.5	.4	2.0
%	50.0%	.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	23	11	9	43
Expected Count	23.0	11.0	9.0	43.0
%	53.5%	25.6%	20.9%	100.0%

Chi-Square

The Pearson chi-squared test compares the observed frequency of cases against the expected frequency for two or more unrelated samples on a variable which may have two or more categories. According to Cramer (1994) calculating chi-square involves the following four steps:

1. Subtract the expected frequency from the observed frequency for each cell.

2. Square the difference (to remove any minus values).

3. Divide the squared difference by the expected frequency of that cell (to take account of the expected size of that cell).

4. Add together the results for all the cells.

The starting point for the administration of a chi-square test, as with tests of significance in general, is a null hypothesis of no relationship between the two variables being examined. In seeking to discern whether a relationship exists within the population from which a random sample has been selected, the null hypothesis would need to be rejected. If the null hypothesis is confirmed, the proposition that there is a relationship must be rejected. The chi square statistic is then calculated. The statistic is calculated by

comparing the observed frequencies in each cell in a contingency table with those that would occur if the values associated with each of the two variables were randomly distributed in relation to each other (Cramer, 1994). In other words, the chi-square test entails a comparison of frequencies with those that would be expected to occur on the basis of chance alone, often referred to as the actual frequencies. The greater the difference between the observed and expected frequencies, the larger the ensuing chi-square value will be; if the observed frequencies are very close to the expected frequencies, a small value is likely to occur. An example of chi-square test of school classification difference is presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

Chi-Square Tests: School Classification Difference

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.669a	8	.573
Likelihood Ratio	7.386	8	.496
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .42.

Symmetric Measures

Phi Coefficient

Phi is related to chi-square. The phi coefficient is employed when the two variables are both true dichotomies (Burns, 2000). Although true dichotomies are rare in educational research, nevertheless, in the present study, it was deemed appropriate to correlate responses made between two agree or disagree response type items. However, in cases where tables are larger than 2 x 2 a measure called Cramer's phi is employed (Connor-Linton, 2006). In the present study the general rule of thumb for the interpretation of the Phi coefficient is listed as follows:

- -1.0 to -0.7 strong negative association
- -0.7 to -0.3 weak negative association
- -0.3 to +0.3 little or no association
- +0.3 to +0.7 weak positive association
- +0.7 to +1.0 strong positive association

An example of symmetric measures of school classification difference is presented in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6

Symmetric Measures: School Classification Difference

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.070	.901
Nominal Cramer's V	.070	.901
N of valid cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis

Quantitative Data Analysis

The following section presents an analysis of quantitative data in relation to the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA), the Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST), and the School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism (SQ: PCA).

SQ: SRA Data Analysis

The SQ: SRA is a 15 item questionnaire designed for Year 8, 9, and 10 students and was employed to obtain information regarding school-related absenteeism. This included posing questions designed to elicit responses that may show any emergent trends or patterns through in the analysis of data concerning school classification, namely, Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, Catholic Girls, Government, and Independent within the Victorian secondary school system. This questionnaire also sought to identify the main categories and major risk factors associated with PSRA. Questions were structured around three categories, namely, knowledge, skills, and values. (Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: SRA is presented in Appendix R.) An analysis of the data was measured employing cross tabulation supported by chi-square tests and symmetric measures. SQ: SRA data analysis is presented in Table 5.7 overleaf.

Table 5.7

SQ: SRA Data Analysis

Item	Category	Disagree %	Agree %	Difference %
Item 1 "I reckon I'm not a good student."	Knowledge	53.5	20.9	32.6
Item 2 "Most subjects are boring."	Knowledge	46.7	37.2	9.5
Item 3 "School rules are unfair."	Knowledge	67.4	14.0	53.4
Item 4 "The world is against me – I just can't seem to do anything right."	Knowledge	72.1	7.0	65.1
Item 5 "Sometimes I feel scared about going to school."	Knowledge	60.5	25.6	34.9
Item 6 "I stay away from school because I keep falling behind with my homework."	Skills	72.1	20.9	51.2
Item 7 "Other students always pick on me."	Skills	83.7	7.0	76.7
Item 8 "Some teachers are okay, but others don't like me because they are always picking on me."	Skills	53.5	27.9	25.6
Item 9 "I have no one to talk to when I have a problem."	Skills	79.1	9.3	69.8
Item 10 "I often feel angry when no one listens to me."	Skills	32.6	53.5	20.9
Item 11 "I miss school because I always feel sick."	Values	46.5	27.9	18.6
Item 12 "Even when I'm not sick I like to take days off school."	Values	53.5	37.2	16.3
Item 13 "School is just a waste of time."	Values	76.7	9.3	67.4
Item 14 "I like to sneak away from school to be with my mates."	Values	76.7	16.3	60.4
Item 15 "Being with mum at home is better than being at school."	Values	46.5	37.2	9.3

The SQ: SRA item responses "Strongly Disagreed" and "Disagreed" were collapsed to "Disagreed" and "Strongly Agreed" and "Agreed" to "Agreed" only.

SQ: MST Data Analysis

The SQ: MST is a 20 item questionnaire designed for Year 9 students and was employed to discern information about middle school transition. This included posing questions that elicited responses in order to analysis students' perceptions of problematic

school-related absenteeism. Questions were structured around seven categories, namely, middle school transition, peer group, PSRA, curriculum, future aspirations, risk factors, and citizenship. (Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: MST is presented in Appendix S.) An analysis of the data was measured employing cross tabulation. SQ: MST data analysis is presented in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

SQ: MST Data Analysis

Item	Category	Significant Response	%
Item 1 "How did you feel about entering Year 9?"	Middle School Transition	Excited	41
Item 2 "On a scale of 1-10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program."	Middle School Transition	5 and above	75
Item 3 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Homeroom?"	Middle School Transition	5 and above	83
Item 4 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Year Level?"	Middle School Transition	5 and above	89
Item 5 "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your School Community?"	Middle School Transition	5 and above	82
Item 6 "Do you enjoy school life?"	Peer Group	Yes	84
Item 7 "Is the core of your friendship group made up of your primary school friends?"	Peer Group	No	81
Item 8 "Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"	Peer Group	Yes	82
Item 9 "Do you find it easy to make new friends?"	Peer Group	Yes	79
Item 10 "On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"	Middle School Transition	5 and above	88
Item 11 "Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"	PSRA	No	64
Item 12 "Do you miss school with your friends?"	PSRA	No	74
Item 13 "What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:	PSRA		
1 Day(s) before and after a weekend;		Yes	12
2 Day(s) after part time work;		Yes	2
3 Extended holiday time with the family;		Yes	36
4 Day(s) on exams or tests;		Yes	22
5 Day(s) when assignments or homework are due;		Yes	47
6 Any particular subjects;		Yes	17
7 Often late for school."		Yes	23

Table 5.8 (Continued)

SQ: MST Data Analysis

Item	Category	Significant Response	%
Item 14 "Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"	Curriculum	Yes	97
Item 15 "Did you choose your subjects because:	Curriculum		
1 You were interested in them;		Yes	85
2 Your friends were doing them;		Yes	43
3 Your parents/teachers guided you;		Yes	39
4 You know what you want to do when you leave school;		Yes	7
5 You had no choice;		Yes	12
6 You really didn't care?"		Yes	1
Item 16 "Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"	Future Aspirations	Yes	79
Item 17 "Do you intend to complete Year 12?"	Future Aspirations	Yes	93
Item 18 "Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"	Future Aspirations	Yes	90
Item 19 "Are you having problems? For example:	Risk Factors		
1 Boring lessons;		Yes	79
2 Falling behind with homework;		Yes	29
3 Being bullied;		Yes	10
4 Unhappy with school rules;		Yes	39
5 Peer pressure;		Yes	6
6 Teacher conflict;		Yes	27
7 No one to talk to about problems;		Yes	9
8 Don't like subject choice;		Yes	18
9 Family problems;		Yes	10
10 School is not for me."		Yes	8
Item 20 "Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"	Citizenship	Yes	67

SQ: PCA Data Analysis

The SQ: PCA is a 6 item questionnaire designed for secondary schools and was employed to gather information about parental condoned absenteeism. This included posing questions designed to elicit responses that would indicate if parental condoned absenteeism is a widespread concern within the Victorian secondary school system. (Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: PCA is presented in Appendix T.) Questions were structured around six categories, namely, year level, type, issue, group,

programs/strategies, and resources that related to both the purpose of the questionnaire and the categories, and further highlighted specific issues of this study. An analysis of the data was measured employing cross tabulation. SQ: PCA data analysis is presented in table 5.9.

Table 5.9

SQ: PCA Data Analysis

Item	Category	Catholic %	Govt %	Total
Item1 "What is the highest year level of absenteeism experienced at your school?: (f) Year 7; (g) Year 8; (h) Year 9; (i) Year 10; (j) Year 11; (f) Year 12."	Year Level	20	20	40
Item 2 "What is the greatest type of absenteeism experienced at your school?: (e) Illness (supported with a medical certificate); (f) (b) Explained absence (other than parental condoned); (g) Unexplained absence; (h) Parental condoned; (e) Other".	Type	14	17	31
Item 3 "Do you consider parental condoned absenteeism is an escalating issue within your school? "	Issue	35	34	69
Item 4 "Is there a specific group particular to parental condoned absenteeism associated with your school? For example: (a) Socio-economic; (b) Gender; (c) Multi-cultural; (d) Family Dynamics; (e) Personal/psychological; (f) Indigenous; (g) Other."	Group	19 0 8 19 19 4 0	12 6 4 22 10 4 2	31 6 12 41 29 8 2
Item 5 "What programs/strategies do you think are appropriate to combat parental condoned absenteeism, if any? For example: (a) Parental education; (b) Community programs; (c) Government legislation; (d) Attendance officer; (e) Other."	Programs/Strategies	39 0 2 12 4	24 10 4 16 2	63 10 6 28 6
Item 6 "In your view should the appropriate authorities provide more resources to combat parental condoned absenteeism?"	Resources	33	32	63

Reference is made to Catholic and Government schools only as the sample from the Independent schools was too small to obtain a comparative analysis.

Research Findings

In relation to School-Related Absenteeism, Middle School Transition, and Parental Condoned Absenteeism the key findings are presented in the following sections.

Key Findings: School-Related Absenteeism

Category One: Knowledge Items 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5

The knowledge-based category indicates that, although schools selected students experiencing risk factors associated with PSRA, 61% of the participants offered feedback about their self-esteem, school rules, and curriculum. However, in relation to item 2 "Most subjects are boring," 37% of respondents agreed with the statement.

Category Two: Skills Items 6, 7, 8, 9, & 10

The skills-based category indicates that, although schools selected students experiencing risk factors associated with PSRA, 64% of the participants offered positive feedback about cognitive, emotional, and academic skills in coping with all facets of school life such as teacher conflict, familial problems, parental attitudes to education, and psychological problems. However, in relation to item 10 "I often feel angry when no one listens to me," 54% of respondents agreed with the statement.

Category Three: Values Items 11, 12, 13, 14, & 15

The values-based category indicate that, although schools selected students experiencing risk factors associated with PSRA, 61% of the participants offered positive feedback about the value of school attendance underpinned by truancy, school refusal, delinquency, early school withdrawal, and parental condoned absenteeism. However; in relation to item 15 "Being at home with mum is better than being at school," 37% of respondents agreed with the statement.

Key Findings: Middle School Transition

Category One: Middle School Transition Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 10

The middle school transition-based category indicates that a number of students, 41%, were excited about entering Year 9, and a significant number of students, 75%, were satisfied with their Year 9 Transition Program. The majority of participants' transition to Year 9 was successful giving a ranking of 5 and above out of 10 for their connection to: the Homeroom, 83%; the Year Level, 89%; and the School Community, 82%. Overall, the majority of respondents, 88%, indicated that they were generally happy at school,

Category Two: Peer Group Items 6, 7, 8, & 9

The peer group-based category indicates that, generally, the Year 9 cohorts enjoyed attending school and placed a high value on their friendships with their peers. A significant number of students, 81%, did not have friends from previous primary schools. This is understandable as primary school students may choose alternative secondary schools. Although a majority of participants, 82%, had friendship groups there was flexibility for other students to move in and out of friendship circles. The peer group-based category emphasised the strong social aspect of the school life of Year 9 students as a majority of respondents, 79%, found it easy to make friends.

Category Three: PSRA Items 11, 12, & 13

The PSRA-based category indicates that a significant number of students, 36%, admitted to being absent from school. Typical responses given for absences were: days of exams, tests, or assignments due, 35%; extended holiday with the family, 36%; and often late for school or classes, 23%. Quite surprisingly, only 24% of students missed school in the company of their friends.

Category Four: Curriculum Items 14 & 15

The curriculum-based category indicates a majority of participants, 97%, considered that some classes were more interesting than others. This is not surprising as

students, 85%, had a final say in selecting the subjects of their choice.

Category Five: Future Aspirations Items 16, 17, & 18

The future aspirations-based category indicates that a significant of participants, 79%, believed that missing school would affect their results. This is evidenced by a majority of respondents, 93%, who wanted to complete Year 12. Ninety per cent of students believed that school would assist in their academic endeavours.

Category Six: Risk Factors Item 19

The risk factors-based category indicates that a significant number of participants, 79%, found lessons boring. Typical response such as falling behind with homework, 29%, and teacher conflict, 27%, were other significant risk factors. Quite surprisingly, only a few students indicted that familial problems, bullying, and peer pressure caused them to absent from school.

Category Seven: Citizenship Item 20

The citizenship-based category indicates that a significant number of students, 67%, understood the meaning of citizenship.

Key Findings: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

Category One:Year Level Item 1

The year level-based category indicates that a number of Year 9 students, 40%, display the highest rates of absenteeism. Government rates of absenteeism tended to peak at Year 9 whilst some Catholic school rates peaked at Year 10.

Category Two: Type Item 2

The type-based category indicates that unexplained absence is ranked first at 31%. PCA is ranked third at 24%, only one per cent behind illness with a medical certificate.

Category Three: Issue Item 3

The issue-based category indicates that a significant number of schools, 69%, agree that PCA is of widespread concern within their school.

Category Four: Group Item 4

The group-based category indicates that a number of schools, 41%, consider that family dynamics is an important risk factor that contributes greatly to PCA. Socio-economic factors, 31%, and student problems, 29%, appeared to be significant factors associated with PCA.

Category Five: Programs/Strategies Item 5

The programs/strategies-based category indicates that a significant number of schools, 63%, believe that parental education is a major strategy to combat PCA whilst government legislation, 6%, was not significantly supported.

Category Six: Resources Item 6

The resources-based category indicates that a significant number of schools, 65%, agree that additional resources are needed to combat PCA. Quite surprisingly, many Catholic schools responded in the negative regarding the provision of further resources to combat PCA.

Summary

This chapter emphasizes the integral role of computer software programs in the the research process. In the present study SPSS, was considered to be a highly functional, easy to use statistical software package that provided a wide range of basic and advanced capabilities for data analysis capabilities and organisation for the reporting of statistical analysis.

An analysis of data was undertaken to describe the distributions among 164 secondary students and 73 schools students from Catholic, Government, and Independent

schooling systems that participated in this study. Data were coded via SPSS into three main categories, namely, school-related absenteeism, middle school transition, and parental condoned absenteeism.

This chapter presented the research findings that resulted from a quantitative approach. The data were obtained via questionnaires responded to by students and schools respectively and were analysed using descriptive statistics via the SPSS employing cross tabulation, chi-square, and symmetrical measures.

The key findings indicate that in relation to the SQ: SRA it was apparent there was no evidence to suggest that there were clear categories or risk factors that could be associated with PSRA for any school classification, year level, or gender in relation to secondary school students. However, a significant pattern was emerging that was consistent throughout the overall study that factors such as boring lessons, fractional truancy, and parental condoned absenteeism were contributing to PSRA.

Responses to the SQ; MST student's perception of school life showed that a significant number of students had few problems with the transition into Year 9 and that most students had formed friendship groups and generally enjoyed coming to school. Further, most students had few problems with the curriculum, but a majority found lessons boring. Homework and teacher conflict were the major issues, but bullying was not a significant issue.

A significant number of students admitted to "wagging" school on days when homework, or exams, or tests were due; many were late for school during the first period; and many took extended family holidays, but only few missed school with their peers. However, the majority of students indicated that they wanted to achieve Year 12 standard and believed the school would assist in achieving their future aspirations. Most students believed that they understood the concept of citizenship.

In relation to the SQ: PCA a significant finding in relation to the many schools spread across the Victorian school secondary system agreed that parental condoned absenteeism was of widespread concern and that additional Government resources should be directed towards parental education. Further, it was found that the middle school years, that is, Year 9 and 10 students had the greatest rate of absenteeism.

The research findings are discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE DATA

"In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context." (Yin, 1994, p. 13)

Introduction

Individual case studies form an integral part of this study and were constructed employing qualitative research methods. The framework for the interviews was underpinned by the Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition completed by participating Year 9 students. Detailed transcripts from the case study profiles provide the researcher with vicarious experiences of students experiencing PSRA so that answers to the research questions may be presented. (Case Study Profile Transcripts are presented in Appendix U.)

Qualitative Data Analysis

The following section presents the analysis of qualitative data in relation to the Case Study Profiles.

Cross Case Analysis

Initial data in this study was collected via the SQ: MST that was responded to by twelve Year 9 students. A cross case analysis was undertaken to elucidate emerging issues, patterns, and interrelationships of PSRA from within the Victorian secondary school system. A cross case analysis developed seven broad-based themes underlying the related research question, *"What are Year 9 students' perceptions regarding PSRA?"* These broad-based themes are: school life; general absenteeism; fractional truancy; curriculum issues; school-based issues; future aspirations; and meaning of citizenship. In the cross case analysis it was possible to compare data from the twelve case study profiles and to discern patterns and themes.

CSP Data Analysis

CSP Interview Item 1: "How did you feel about entering Year Nine?"

In relation to item 1, each participant was given a choice of response: "excited"; "nervous"; "overwhelmed"; "challenged"; or "unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 59%, students 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12, were "unsure" about entering Year 9. Twenty-five per cent of respondents, students 1, 3, and 6, were "excited"; student 10 was "challenged"; and student 8 believed it was "just another year". When the same participants were asked the follow-up question, "How do you feel now about entering Year 10?", 59% of participants, students 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 11, responded positively about entering Year 10. The response elicited from student 1 was typical, "Every year is a new challenge. It will be good being head of the Middle School." Student 7 commented, "I wasn't sure of what to expect going from the Junior School to the middle school, but now I am adjusted and feel I can meet the challenges such as subject choice with Year Ten". Twenty-five per cent of respondents, students 3, 5, and 10, gave negative responses. Student 10 expressed an opinion, "I am unsure about entering Year Ten. Sometimes I don't feel confident about choosing new subjects. Sixteen per cent of participants, students 8 and 12, were non-committal with their responses. Student 12 commented, "I just keep going, it's just another year."

CSP Interview Item 2: "On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"

An analysis of the data in relation to item 2 indicates that a significant number of participants, 58%, students 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, and 12, gave a satisfaction ranking of 5 and above for the Transition Program. When asked the follow-up question, "Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?", students 2, 6, 9, 11, and 12 responded positively whilst students 1 and 4 believed there should be more sessions. Twenty-five per cent of respondents, students 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10 gave a satisfaction ranking of under 5 whilst 17%, students 7 and 8, did not respond. When asked the follow-up question, "Was there a problem with the Transition Program?", students 3, 7, and 8 indicated that the school did not have a Transition Program whilst student 5 remarked, "I don't know, the information is pretty useless."

CSP Interview Item 3: "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Homeroom?"

An analysis of the data in relation to item 3 indicates that a significant number of participants, 58%, students 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, and 12, gave a connectedness ranking of 5 and above with their Homeroom. Forty-two per cent of respondents, students 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8, gave a connectedness ranking of under 5.

CSP Interview Item 4: "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your Year Level?"

An analysis of the data in relation to item 4 indicates that all participants gave a connectedness ranking of 5 and above with their Year Level.

CSP Interview Item 5: "On a scale of 1-10 how connected do you feel to your School Community?"

An analysis of the in relation to item 5 indicates that a significant number of participants, 75%, students 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12, gave a connectedness ranking of 5 and above with their School Community. Twenty-five per cent, students 3, 5, and 8, gave a connectedness ranking of under 5.

CSP Interview Item 6: "Do you enjoy school life?"

Each participant was given a choice of response in relation to item 6: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 75%, students 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12, enjoyed school life. Twenty-five per cent of respondents, students 5, 6, and 10, indicated that they did not enjoy school life. When asked the follow-up question, "What aspects of school do you dislike?", student 5 responded, "Because of classes, homework and assignments". Student 6 remarked, "Only some classes, but otherwise it's great!" whilst student 10 replied, "It's boring, too much homework and not enough holidays."

CSP Interview Item 7: "Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"

In relation to item 7, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that all students responded that the core of their group was not made up of their primary school friends.

CSP Interview Item 8: "Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"

In relation to item 8, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that an equal number of participants, 50%, students 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, and 12, agreed that others can move in and out of their friendship circle easily whilst 50%, students 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, disagreed.

CSP Interview Item 9: "Do you find it easy to make friends?"

In relation to item 9, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 92%, students 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, agreed they found it easy to make friends whilst 8%, student 12, disagreed. Follow-up questions were posed to student 12:

Researcher:	"Why?"
Student 12:	*I find a lot of people annoying and I don't have a lot in common with most people.*
Researcher:	"So who do you hang around with at school?"
Student 12:	*Kids that I do sport with'*
Researcher:	"What sports?"
Student 12:	*Swimming.*
Researcher:	"Any in your classes?"
Student 12:	*No.*

CSP Interview Item 10: "On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"

An analysis of the data in relation to item 10 indicates that all participants gave a ranking of 5 and above about feeling generally happy at school.

CSP Interview Item 11: "Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"

In relation to item 11, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 92%, students 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12, had deliberately missed school or skipped classes whilst 8%, student 11, stayed at home or went to work with mum when ill. When asked the follow-up questions: "How often?"; "Why did you miss school?"; "When did you start missing school?"; and "When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"; the overall responses elicited from participants varied. Students 5, 6, and 10 were typical of the majority of responses to this set of follow-up questions.

Researcher:	"How often?"
Student 5:	*Three sometimes four periods a week.*
Student 6:	*Not very. One class a month or two months.*
Student 10:	*Six to seven days a term.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student 5:	*Classes are boring.*
Student 6:	*Because something may be due or I dislike the class.*
Student 10:	*Sleep in, or didn't want to go to school that day.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student 5:	*Start of Year Nine.*
Student 6:	*This year. I was new to the school in Year Eight, but now I know the system. I go to school but just don't go to a certain class.*
Student 10:	*When I started school.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student 5:	*Glen, Knox, Chadstone shopping centres.*
Student 6:	*I walk around.*
Student 10:	*I just stay home and finish uncompleted homework. Watch T.V.*

CSP Interview Item 12: "Do you miss school with your friends?"

In relation to item 12, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that an equal number of participants, 50%, students 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9, agreed that they do miss school with their friends whilst 50%, students 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, and 12, disagreed.

CSP Interview Item 13: "What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example: 1. Day(s) before and after a weekend; 2. Day(s) after part time work; 3. Extended holiday time with the family; 4. Day(s) of exams or tests; 5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due; 6. Any particular subjects; 7. Often late for school or classes."

In relation to item 13, the participants were given the option of answering each statement. The student responses are set out as follows:

- Item 13:1   33% missed school on (days) before and after a weekend: students 3, 7, 8, 9, and 11.
- Item 13:2   8% failed to attend school on day(s) after part time work: student 3.
- Item 13:3   17% took extended holiday time with the family: student 3 and 8.
- Item 13:4   42% stayed away from school during day(s) when exams and tests were held: students 2, 3, 5, 7, and 12.
- Item 13:5   58% elected to absent themselves from school on day(s) when assignments or homework were due: students 2, 3, 5, 8, 11, and 12.
- Item 13:6   50% missed particular subjects: students 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 11.
- Item 13:7   42% were often late for school or classes: students 2, 3, 7, 8, and 12.

Thirty-three per cent of respondents, students 1, 4, 6, and 10, indicated that they did not deliberately miss school or skip classes.

An analysis of the data indicates that:

1.   In relation to items 13:1, 13:2, and 13:3, students failed to attend school because of personal or familial related issues. When student 11 was asked the follow-up question "Why do you particularly stay at home during days either before or after a weekend?", the response was "I like to rest. Monday is the best day".

2.   In relation to items 13:4, 13:5, 13:6, and 13:7, a significant number of students failed to attend classes as a result of school-related work. When asked the follow-up question "Why?", the answers of students 2, 7, and 8 summed up the overall responses:

Researcher:	"Why do you miss classes when you have exams/tests and when homework is due or don't like subjects?"
Student 2:	*Because I don't feel like going. There is not enough social interaction.*
Researcher:	"Why are you late for school?"
Student 2:	*I get the bus at seven thirty so I can arrive at school on time but I'm not bothered with the first period so I go to the Glen shopping centre.*
Researcher:	"You said that you started missing school last year halfway through Year Eight, days before and after a weekend, days of exams or tests, days when homework is due, for particular subjects, and you're often late for classes, why?"
Student 7:	Can't deal with all the stress school puts on you. Sometimes heaps of things are due in one week
Researcher:	"Why do you miss school or skip classes on days of exams and tests, or when assignments and homework are due"
Student 8:	*'Cos I was sick of school.*

Student 3 responded to all seven choices and was asked the follow-up questions:

Researcher:	"You say that you have missed classes when exams or tests and when homework or assignments are due".
Student 3:	*Cos I'm lazy.*
Researcher:	"In what way?"
Student 3:	*I can't be bothered. I do other things.*
Researcher:	"Such as?"
Student 3:	*Playing computer games or watching TV.*
Researcher:	"And when you don't like subjects?"
Student 3:	*I skip the beginning of classes or take an extended toilet break sometimes ten or fifteen minutes.*

When asked the follow-up question: "Are there any issues concerning you at this year level?", the participants responses varied, for instance, getting into trouble, teacher conflict, bullying, and subjects. Students 4 and 8 were concerned about attaining good grades whilst student 3 thought that issues relating to sex or gender were of some concern. Students 1 and 11 believed there were no issues of concern. Further follow-up questions were posed to respondents in relation to missing school, skipping classes, or arriving late for classes.

1.   "What does the school do?"

An analysis of the data in relation to the above indicates that a significant number of participants, 50%, students 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, responded that the school

follows up with parents. Forty-two per cent, students 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, didn't know if the school takes any action whilst 8%, student 1, is disciplined by the school. Students 2 and 6 were asked:

Researcher:	"What does the school do when they know you've been wagging?"
Student 2:	*They don't. I know the system. I just sign in late. The school checks rolls at every second period.*
Student 6:	*They don't know.*

2.   "What do your parents say?"

An analysis of the data in relation to the above indicates that a significant number of participants, 67%, students 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 12, believed parents don't know or do nothing about their absence from school. Twenty-five per cent of respondents, students 7, 8, and 10, received a lecture whilst 8%, student 1, is punished. Students 4, 5, and 7 were asked:

Researcher:	"What did your parents say about not attending school?"
Student 4:	*They haven't found out. I just tell them I'm sick and they let me stay at home.*
Student 5:	*Nothing.*
Student 7:	*My mother gave me a talk, but I didn't take much notice.*

3.   "What do the teachers do?"

An analysis of the data in relation to the above indicates that all participants agreed that teachers "do nothing" or "not much" regarding their absences from class. However, student 9 remarked, "Some let me catch up. Some don't. Most do".

CSP Interview Item 14: "Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"

In relation to item 14, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 84%, students 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, think that some classes are more interesting than others are whilst 16%, students 3 and 7, disagreed. A follow-up question was posed to students 3 and 7 to ascertain what activities they liked:

Researcher:	"What activities do you like?"

Student 3:   *More of those games. Ya know the stupid ones.*
Student 7:   *More sport activities. This semester we only had one sport available for girls.*

CSP interview item 15: "Did you choose your subjects because: 1. You were interested in them; 2. Your friends were doing them; 3. Your parents/teachers guided you; 4. You know what you want to do when you leave school; 5. You had no choice; 6 You really didn't care?"

In relation to item 15, the participants were given the option of answering each question. The student responses are set as follows:

- Item 15:1   92% chose subjects they were interested in: students 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

- Item 15:2   50% chose subjects because their friends were doing them: students 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 12.

- Item 15:3   33% chose subjects with parental and/or teacher guidance: students 2, 6, 8, and 10.

- Item 15:4   67% chose their subjects because they knew what they wanted to do when they left school: students 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

- Item 15:5   8% had no choice in the selection of subjects: student 5.

- Item 15:6   25% really didn't care about their subject choice: students 3, 7, and 12.

An analysis of the data indicates that:

1.   In relation to items 15:1, 15:2, 15:3, and 15:4, a significant number of students were happy with their subject choice. When asked the follow-up question: "You seem to be happy with your subject choice," students 10 and 12 summed up the overall responses:

Researcher: "You seem to be happy with your subject choice".
Student 10:   *They're okay.*
Student 12:   *I am quite a career-orientated person; therefore subject selection is important to me.*

2.   In relation to items 15:5 and 15:6 students either had no choice or really didn't care about subject choice. Students 7 and 12 were asked follow-up questions:

Researcher: "You say you don't like your choice of subjects. Why?"
Student 7:   *My friend Melanie did it for me.*
Researcher: "Why did you choose your subjects?"
Student 12:   *Cos my friends were in these classes.*

Student 3 responded to all six choices and was asked a follow-up question:

Researcher: "You say you chose your subjects because your friends were doing them and you really didn't care; what subjects do you like?"
Student 3:   *There should be more History classes. I like History.*

CSP Interview Item 16: "Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"

In relation to item 16 each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 75%, students 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12, thought that missing school will affect their results whilst 17%, students 1 and 6, disagreed and 8%, student 8, was unsure.

CSP Interview Item 17: "Do you intend to complete Year 12?"

In relation to item 17, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 58%, students 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, intended to complete Year 12 whilst 42%, students 2, 3, 4, 5, and 12, did not want to finish Year 12. Each respondent was asked the follow up question: "What do you intend to do when you leave school?" The range of student responses expressed includes:

Student 1:   *Psychiatric nurse.*
Student 2:   *TAFE.*
Student 3:   *Coles Myer.*
Student 4:   *Marine biology.*
Student 5:   *Police or Army.*
Student 6:   *Not sure.*

Student 7:	*Behavioural scientist/Psych profiler.*
Student 8:	*Make-up artist.*
Student 9:	*Dentist.*
Student 10:	*Mechanic.*
Student 11:	*Music industry.*
Student 12:	*Fitness trainer/Physio.*

CSP Interview Item 18: Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"

In relation to item 18, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 75%, students 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12, thought that the school can help them achieve their goals. Seventeen per cent of respondents, students 3 and 5, disagreed whilst 8%, student 8, was unsure.

CSP Interview Item 19: "Are you having problems? For example: 1. Boring lessons; 2. Falling behind with homework; 3. Being bullied; 4. Unhappy with school rules; 5. Peer pressure; 6. Teacher conflict; 7. No one to talk to about problems; 8. Don't like subject choice; 9. Family problems; 10. School is not for me."

In relation to item 19 the participants were given the option of answering each statement. Their responses are set out as follows:

- Item 19:1   92% found that lessons were boring: students 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.
- Item 19:2   58% were falling behind with homework: students: 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 11.
- Item 19:3   17% were subject to bullying: students 3 and 5.
- Item 19:4   50% were unhappy with school rules: students 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 12.
- Item 19:5   17% were subject to peer pressure: students 3 and 5.
- Item 19:6.   67% had conflict with teachers: students 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12.
- Item 19:7   17% had no one to talk to about problems: students 3 and 5.
- Item 19:8   33% didn't like their subject choice: students 2, 3, 5, and 7.
- Item 19:9   42% experienced family problems: students 1, 3, 7, 11, and 12.
- Item 19:10   25% believed school is not for them: students: 2, 3, and 12.

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.1 indicates that an overwhelming number of students believed that teachers are responsible for delivering boring lessons. The range of reasons expressed includes:

- Boring theory;
- Lack of enthusiasm;
- Lack of class control;
- Favorite students; and
- More attention being paid to weaker students.

Student 7 summed up the overall feeling of responses in relation to item 19.1 remarking that, "Some teachers just talk too much. They are not professional; they don't mark hard enough and seem to have favourite students. They let the class talk too much."

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.2 indicates that a significant number of students considered they are falling behind with homework. The range of reasons expressed includes:

- Lack of interest;
- Laziness; and
- Lack of motivation.

Student 11 summed up the overall responses in relation to item 19.2 commenting that, "I know I can do the work, I just lack motivation." When asked the follow-up question, "Do you need assistance in this area?", a significant number of students replied "No".

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.3 indicates that bullying was not a major problem, with only two students indicating that they were subjected to bullying. When asked the follow-up question, "You say that you've been bullied, is this a reason why you miss school?", student 5 replied, "No. Just occasionally, it's no big deal."

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.4 indicates that a significant number of students stated that they were unhappy with school rules. Students 2, 7, and 12 were asked follow-up questions, they responded as follows:

Researcher: "What do dislike about school rules?"

Student 2:	*We should be allowed make-up and jewellery.*
Researcher:	"Are there any rules at home?'
Student 2:	*My mum says when I go out I should be home before dark and I'm not allowed sleep-overs during the term.*
Researcher:	"What do you think is unfair about school rules?"
Student 7:	*I'm not allowed to dye my hair...you can at other schools... this doesn't affect results.*
Researcher:	"Do you have rules at home?"
Student 7:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Then what does mum say about things?"
Student 7:	*She says I'm not allowed to kiss boys and there is no way I am to take drugs.*
Researcher:	"Do you think these rules are unfair".
Student 7:	(Pause...No response.)
Researcher:	"Now you think these rules are fair?"
Student 7:	(Pause...No response.)
Researcher:	"Are there any rules at home?"
Student 12:	*Yeah.*
Researcher:	"What happens if you disobey home rules?"
Student 12:	*Nothing much. Mum just yells at me...I don't take much notice.*

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.5 indicates that peer pressure was not a major problem, as only two students indicated that they were subjected to student pressure. When asked the follow-up question, "What sort of peer pressure are you for subject competition in class?", student 5 replied, "I am expected to do well in Science and Maths."

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.6 indicates that a significant number of students experienced conflict with teachers. The range of reasons expressed includes:

- particular subjects;
- talking in class; and
- uncompleted class work.

When student 2 was asked follow-up questions, the responses were noted as follows:

Researcher:	"How do you get into trouble with teachers?"
Student 2:	*Because I'm not a good student and talk in class. Teachers favour the good students.*

| Researcher: | "Are you talking about particular subjects you like or dislike?" |
| Student 2: | *It depends on the teacher. I like Media and Science.* |

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.7 indicates that a significant number of participants had someone to talk to about their problems. Only two students confirmed that they didn't have anyone to talk to about their problems. When asked the follow-up question, "You have raised some serious issues about school and you say you have no one to talk to about your problems. Have you tried?", student 5 replied, "I have talked to the school counsellor."

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.8 indicates that a number of students didn't like their subject choice. It is apparent that students 5 and 12 didn't like their subject choice because, as per item 15, student 5 "had no choice" whilst student 12 "didn't really care".

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.9 indicates that a significant number of students were experiencing family problems. Students 7, 11, and 12 were asked follow-up questions; their responses were noted as follows:

Researcher:	"You say that you are concerned about family problems - is there any one you talk to?"
Student 7:	*My sister.*
Researcher:	"Have you thought about talking to the school counsellor?"
Student 7:	*No. I talk to my friends. But sometimes I go to the school counsellor to get out of class.*
Researcher:	"You say that family problems are an issue in your absence from school".
Student 11:	*Preoccupation with personal issues affects my work habits.*
Researcher:	"Are you talking to anyone at school about these issues?"
Student 11:	*I was talking to the school counsellor, but I stopped.*
Researcher:	"Are family problems the reason why you stay away from school?"
Student 12:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Can you work these issues through with anyone?"
Student 12:	*The school counsellor.*
Researcher:	"Do you still see the school counsellor?"
Student 12:	*No.*

An analysis of the data in relation to item 19.10 indicates that a number of students believed that school is not for them. Student 3 who responded to all 10 items indicated an overwhelmingly negative attitude to school.

Researcher:	"You have raised a number of issues in relation to school".
Student 3:	*Yes...my older sister is in the same year level as me. She gives me the shits. I don't do home work because I'm lazy. It's not fair that teachers have mobile phones in class and kids are not allowed. In class some teachers have favourites and pick on other kids.*
Researcher:	"So if you have so many issues at school – have you talked to anyone?"
Student 3:	*No.*

CSP Interview Item 20: "Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"

In relation to item 20, each participant was given a choice of response: "Yes"; "No"; or "Unsure". An analysis of the data indicates that a significant number of participants, 50%, students 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, and 12, believed they understood the meaning of citizenship. Twenty-five per cent of respondents, students 1, 2, and 6, had no idea of the meaning of citizenship. Eight per cent of participants, student 9, was unsure whilst 17%, students 5 and 7, failed to offer a response. When asked the follow-up question, "Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?" students 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 9, still had no idea. However, when the same question was asked of those students who answered "Yes" to understanding the meaning of citizenship the following responses were recorded:

Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student 3:	*A ship that carries its citizens.*
Student 4:	*Willing to help others for any reason.*
Student 8:	*A word like any other.*
Student 10:	*To be Australian, to live in the country, to be part of the group.*
Student 11:	*When someone born in another country comes to Australia and is called Australian.*
Student 12:	*When you're part of a community or group.*

Research Findings

The case study profiles employed qualitative research methods to analyse data in the form of interviews to discern students' perceptions of Problematic School Related Absenteeism. A cross case analysis focused on seven broad-based themes underlying the case study profiles: school life; general absenteeism; fractional truancy; curriculum issues; school-based issues; future aspirations; and meaning of citizenship. In the cross case

analysis it was possible to compare data from the 12 case study profiles and to discern patterns and themes. These themes were further refined into a series of questions underpinned by the research question, *"What are Year 9 students' perceptions in relation to PSRA?"*, that related to specific issues in this study. The main focus of the questions was on school-related absenteeism: why students absent themselves from school without permission; when persistent absenteeism began; parents' role or influence on attendance; peer influence on attendance; where students go and what they do when they miss school; which subjects students least like or prefer the most, how success or failure influences attendance; students' perceptions of the value of education; students long-term goals; and the meaning of citizenship.

<div align="center">Key Findings: Case Study Profiles</div>

School Life

According to the responses obtained from the Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition items 1 and 2, most students had completed a successful transition to the middle school. The follow-up question was posed, "How do you feel about entering Year 10?" The response from a significant number of students, 59%, was typical, "Every year is a new challenge.", "It will be good to be head of middle school.", and "I wasn't sure of what to expect going from the junior school to the middle school, but now I am adjusted and I feel I can meet the challenges such as subject choice with Year 10." A significant number of students, 58%, were satisfied with their school's Transition Program. A majority of students felt well connected to their respective Homeroom, 58%; Year Level; 100%, and School Community, 75%. Seventy-five per cent of students indicated that they enjoyed school life. Typically the reasons given revolved around "friendships", "some classes are better than others", and "sport". However, typical responses from the 25% of students who did not like school included: "because of boring classes", "homework and assignments", and "it's boring, too much homework and not enough holidays".

General Absenteeism

A majority of students, 92%, admitted to having "wagged" school or missed classes in Year 9 ranging from three to four periods per week to six to seven days per term. The

typical responses included "once or twice" and "once every month" with the atypical responses: "every day", "last day of term", and "quite a bit". A significant number of students admitted they started to miss classes in Year 9. They cited "visiting shopping centres", "walking around school", or "staying at home" as the main reasons for their non-attendance. The response "anywhere but school" was synonymous with the Year 9 cohort. Although most students were capable of doing their homework, 58% resented this invasion of their own time and admitted that laziness and lack of interest were reasons.

In relation to the following up of school-related absenteeism by the school 50% of students indicated that parents were notified of their absence, and 67% indicated that they believed that parents did not know or did nothing about their absence. A typical response being "I just tell them I'm sick and they let me stay at home." Generally there was an expectation that parents required their children to attend school. Quite surprisingly, many of these students also stated their parents knew that they "wagged" school, and authorised their absence when contacted by the school. Only 8% of students said they had been disciplined by the school for their unauthorised absence.

Fractional Truancy

All the participants admitted to purposely missing classes. A majority of reasons were school-based: assignments and homework due, 58%; dislike of particular subjects, 50%; day(s) of exams or tests, 42%; and often late for class, 42%. Typical responses included, "Because I don't feel like going to class" and "I get the bus at 7:30 so I can arrive at school on time, but I'm not bothered with the first period so I go to the Glen Shopping Centre." Although students admitted that classroom teachers were aware of their absences, all students indicated that teachers took no action. A typical response was "they do nothing". According to the students most subject teachers allowed them to catch up on missed work.

School-Based Issues

The majority of students' issues regarding PSRA appeared to be school-based with teaching styles being one of the most important. Students stated that lessons were boring due to subject teachers' delivery of curriculum and that classroom management skills were a problem. A typical response was "Some teachers just talk too much". Conflicts with

teachers of particular subjects, talking in class, or uncompleted class work were major issues for 67% of students. Many girls were unhappy with school rules such as dyeing of hair, and wearing jewellery, and make-up. Bullying and peer pressure were not major issues. Very few students absent from school identified familial factors as a cause of their absenteeism. Only 17% of students who were experiencing family problems had been liaising with the school counselor or welfare officer.

Curriculum Issues

Curriculum issues did not appear to be a major problem among students. In relation to subject choice, on the whole the majority of students, 84%, were satisfied and viewed this is important. A typical response being "I am quite a career-orientated person; therefore subject choice is important to me." Of the 16% that disagreed with the curriculum the typical responses included a preference for more "games" and "sporting activities". These responses suggest that the school curriculum is not the reason why students skip classes or don't do well in particular subjects. Although 92% of the sample confirmed that lessons were boring, 31% of students admitted to having poor subject choice, 67% said they had problems with teachers; generally, there was no real significant dissatisfaction with the curriculum.

Future Aspirations

The CSP interviews confirmed that all students had their careers mapped out ranging from professions such as marine biologist to a Coles-Myer shop assistant. A significant number of students, 75%, believed school can assist with their career paths. A typical response given with reference to the most important part of school life was "to get an education". Fifty-eight per cent, 58%, of participants stated their intention was to complete Year 12 and, 75% of respondents believed that missing school would affect their results.

Meaning of Citizenship

Initially 67% of students said they knew what citizenship meant, but when asked the question "Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?", only 33% had any notion

of the concept of citizenship, for example, "When you're part of a community or group". Responses from those failing to understand the meaning of citizenship included "A ship that carries its citizens" and "A word like any other".

Summary

This chapter described twelve case studies which were conducted in an attempt to develop a typical profile of students experiencing PSRA. The present study found that there was no one significant category of PSRA or risk factors associated with PSRA to suggest that a single homogenous group experienced PSRA. The data were obtained via interviews undertaken by students underpinned by the SQ: MST. The CSP interviews highlighted typical responses given by Year 9 students regarding themes such as school life, general absenteeism, fractional truancy, curriculum issues, school-based issues, future aspirations, and the meaning of citizenship.

Fractional truancy was a major cause of PSRA experienced by students. The reasons included teaching styles resulting in boring lessons, conflict with teachers, wishing to avoid homework and days of tests or exams, and disinterest in some subjects. It was also apparent that parents, on many occasions, allowed their children to be absent or covered for their children when contacted by the school.

Generally, the Year 9 cohort enjoyed school life, placed a high value on their friendships and admitted that education plays an important role regarding their future educational and employment prospects. The students also indicated that there was an expectation from parents that they attend school to achieve their future aspirations.

A significant number of participants intended to attain VCE standard and achieve either a university or TAFE education; however, the majority of students did not understand the concept of citizenship.

The research findings are discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

"Two children may play truant from the same class in the same school at the same time, but their homes, their personalities and the reasons for playing truant may be very different. Every truant is unique."
(Tyerman, 1958, p. 104).

Introduction

The present study focussed on the human factor in relation to middle school absenteeism, and in particular, on fractional truancy and parental condoned absenteeism. Year 9 students overwhelmingly reported that pedagogical teaching styles were boring resulting in considerable fractional truancy whilst parental condoned absenteeism was found to be a widespread concern within the Victorian secondary school system.

In summary of the findings, this research confirms that the phenomenon of problematic school-related absenteeism is complex. In this study, the majority of students were absent from school on several occasions, but only a relatively small number of students surveyed displayed persistent PSRA. However, this research confirmed that students experiencing PSRA did not constitute a homogenous group, as each risk factor may in fact be a discrete cause in certain circumstances. Further, it was found that these risk factors are often interrelated so intricately that real causality is hard to determine. This chapter presents a discussion and conclusions related to the present study.

A summary of the findings related to the five research questions is presented. These questions focused on the students who appeared to be most at risk in relation to their future academic, social, and employment prospects due to PSRA.

The significance of the research instruments, namely, the SQ: SRA, SQ: MST, and SQ: PCA, and the CSP is discussed. The benefits of employing a multiple method approach, that is, quantitative and qualitative collection of data and analysis in providing the opportunity for presenting a greater diversity of views are outlined.

The fundamental role of the researcher, to inform and improve educational research, is explained. A number of perceived limitations and delimitations of the study are identified.

Finally, there are suggested directions for future research including on the cost, the impact of fractional truancy and parental condoned absenteeism, the increasing rate of Year 8 level absenteeism, and the long-term effects of PSRA.

Overview of Research Questions

Research Question 1: "In relation to problematic school-related absenteeism, are there any emergent trends or patterns highlighted in the analysis of data concerning school classification, namely, Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, Catholic Girls, Government, and Independent within the Victorian secondary school system?"

As discussed in previous chapters, 43 Year 8, 9, and 10 students were surveyed and data were analysed to establish if there were any emergent trends and patterns highlighted in relation to PSRA. The analysis of data in relation to the SQ: SRA found that there was no evidence to suggest any significant trends or patterns attributed to school classification regarding students experiencing PSRA within the Victorian secondary school system.

Research Question 2: "What are the main categories of PSRA?"

The major aim of this research is to define the categories of PSRA. A review of previous research showed the lack of standard terminology employed to describe PSRA. (see pp. 22-25 in Chapter 1 of the present work.) This definitional problem is also apparent within the Victorian secondary school system. The present research redefined the main categories of PSRA as: truancy that includes fractional truancy; school refusal; delinquency; early school withdrawal; and parental condoned absenteeism. Additionally, there appears to be some confusion when it comes to distinguishing between "authorized" and "unauthorized" absences. As a result schools may apply non-standard criteria to assist them to categorise absenteeism.

Research Question 3: "Can the major risk factors associated with each category of PSRA be readily identified?"

The major risk factors associated with PSRA identified in the researcher's review of literature were personal, familial, school, communal and societal, and demographic. An analysis of the data indicated that there were no identifiable major risk factors attributable to any particular category. Rather, a combination of risk factors contributed to each individual's situation. There was no evidence to suggest that a significant pattern of risk factors could be attributed to school classification, year level or gender.

Research Question 4: "What are Year 9 students' perceptions in relation to PSRA?"

A significant number of Year 9 students surveyed enjoyed school life and placed a high value on their friendships. Further, most students had few problems with the curriculum, but a majority, 92%, found lessons boring. Homework and teacher conflict were major concerns, but bullying was not a significant issue. The majority of students admitted to missing school on days when homework, exams, or tests were due. Many students were late for school during the first period, or took extended family holidays, but only a few students "wagged" school with their peers. Very few students absent from school identified familial factors as a cause of absenteeism. Most students indicated that they wanted to complete Year 12 and believed the school would assist in achieving their future aspirations. Most students had a poor understanding of the meaning of citizenship.

Research Question 5: "Is parental condoned absenteeism a widespread concern within the Victorian secondary school system?"

A significant finding of the present study indicated that many schools across the Victorian school secondary system, namely, Catholic, Government, and Independent agreed that parental condoned absenteeism was a widespread concern. It was found that a majority of secondary schools believed that more Government resources should be allocated to parental education.

<div align="center">Significance of Research Instruments</div>

Research instruments that allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data were employed to examine PSRA from different perspectives to determine the research findings. The measuring instruments were: the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism (SQ: SRA) (see Appendix M for further details.); the Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition (SQ: MST) (see Appendix O for further details.); and the School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism (SQ: PCA). (see Appendix Q for further details.)

Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism

The SQ: SRA measured categories and risk factors in relation to 43 Year 8, 9, and 10 students experiencing PSRA. The SQ: SRA was significant in that it enabled major categories of PSRA to be redefined and major risk factors to be identified. While no definitive pattern emerged in the behaviour of students experiencing PSRA it was found that combinations of risk factors were particular to each student.

Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition

The SQ: MST measured the perceptions of 109 Year 9 students regarding the middle years of schooling. A significant finding from this study is that students experiencing PSRA do not form a homogenous group. As suggested by this research there are different categories of PSRA with multiple risk factors associated with these categories. Further, in relation to the Year 9 cohort, the vast majority of students missed school or skipped classes occasionally and only a small number of students experienced persistent PSRA.

School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

The SQ: PCA measured data from 51 secondary schools regarding parental condoned absenteeism. A significant finding was that a considerable number of schools across the Victorian school secondary system agreed that parental condoned absenteeism was a widespread concern. The majority of schools indicated that more Government resources should be directed towards parental education. Further, it was found that the middle school students in both Years 9 and 10 experienced the greatest rate of absenteeism.

Case Study Profiles

The CSP was significant as individual case study profiles employing qualitative research methods underpin this research. Initial data for this study were collected via the SQ: MST. Twelve students chosen by the researcher and with the consent of the school, agreed to participate in the CSP. (see Appendix U for further details.) In the present study,

it was deemed important to build case study profiles of Year 9 students involved in the CSP to determine patterns of school life within the context of school attendance policies and support mechanisms. The case study profiles provided the researcher with reported experiences that were given in answer to the research questions. Typical and atypical student responses translated into useful feedback that could help form the basis for future research directions. Most students admitted to experiencing some form of PSRA. A vast majority of students stated that teachers' pedagogical styles were boring. This resulted in missing classes and teacher conflict. Most students admitted that homework was an issue as it impinged upon their leisure time. Quite surprisingly bullying was not noted as a significant issue.

The Role of the Researcher

The fundamental purpose of educational research is to inform and improve educational practice. Educational research makes contributions to knowledge about education and educational practices. According to Walberg (1986), the impact of educational research on schools and policymakers may be seen as a process.

Research is undertaken as the result of a perceived need to address an outcome such as the management and minimization of problematic school-related absenteeism. Such research is based on practice, theoretical understandings, previous research, and methodological advancements. Researchers conduct empirical studies which are usually followed by replication studies which can increase confidence in the original findings. By relating research to the literature, which includes theory and previous research, new research is synthesised to form a knowledge base. This new knowledge base is adopted by other researchers, teachers, and administrators until evidence comes to light that challenges its acceptance. Different stakeholders usually have different outcomes in mind when research is conducted. For the researcher, the aim might be to examine or refute a theory. The classroom practitioner might want a focus to practical outcomes that will enhance the classroom learning environment. The key point is that all stakeholders should benefit from educational research. Therefore, it can be seen that, in many ways, research influences the roles of educators. Educators are frequently unaware that they have used the results of educational research or have even performed some part of the research process in their professional lives. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993, p. 25) the activities

listed below illustrate the more common uses of educational research in educational programs and institutions. These activities include:

- acquiring a new or different perspective about education or an educational process that generates ideas on how to approach a practical problem;

- using research results to aid in policy and decision-making and to justify decisions between alternatives;

- adopting programs identified from a research literature review that have a greater likelihood of producing desirable effects;

- testing an assumption or a hypothesis deducted from a theory or a claim to provide more reliable knowledge for new educational practices;

- to interpreting standardised group or individual tests results of students in a program; and

- administering standardised group or individual tests in such a manner as to increase the validity and reliability of the research data.

The researcher endeavours to examine, explore and explain patterns of social life to inform and improve educational practice (Burns, 2000). In this study, a key role of the researcher was to analyse critically the strengths and limitations regarding the employment of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms through the systematic collection and analysis of empirical data. For a researcher to produce valid results the research methodology must be credible. Therefore, a prudent researcher is obliged to put the necessary checks and balances into place to ensure the truth is reflected in the findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).

<center>Limitations and Delimitations</center>

In the present study there were a number of perceived methodological limitations that warranted consideration. The present study employed convenience sampling. The major disadvantage of this type of sampling is that in real terms the researcher has little idea of how much the data collected is a representation of the sample as a whole. Walford (2001) states that, "the method requires a focus on a very small number of sites, yet there is often a desire to draw conclusions which have a wider applicability than just those single cases" (p. 15). Therefore, the argument here is that one cannot generalise from a single

case study unless one makes unwarranted assumptions about the wider population. Conversley, Stake (1995) argues that if researchers give full and detailed descriptions of the particular issue studied, they can make informed decisions about the applicability of the findings to their own or other situations. However, in the present study, the researcher believes that data collected provide some significant insights regarding the phenomena of problematic school-related absenteeism.

It should be noted that generalisation of the results of this research, for instance, to cases of students experiencing school refusal behaviour because of anxiety disorder may not be appropriate. In these cases it may well be found that different school-based interventions may need to be developed (Heyne, King, Tonge, Rollings, Pritchard, Young, & Myerson, 1998). Therefore, different school-based interventions may be needed for different categories of student within the larger concept of PSRA.

However, in relation to the number of case study profiles undertaken at various secondary schools, it may be prudent to accept that the strategies and outcome measures relative to the school-based management programs regarding PSRA are adequate. With an effective follow-up, it will be possible to have more confidence in the current results. In relation to this research, however, it is important to bear in mind that circumstances may prevent the assessment of longer-term functioning through follow-ups at greater intervals. It is possible that further changes may occur over a longer period of time. It is also possible that the present lack of a united systematic approach to school-based management programs in Catholic, Government, and Independent schools means the focus of this research is narrow in that results are particular to individual schools. It must be acknowledged that on one hand, the role of the researcher may be seen as delimitating the scope of the research due to preconceived ideas of PSRA. The researcher believes, however, that valuable insights have been gained into PSRA that should enhance our knowledge regarding this important topic.

Educational research is constrained by ethical and legal considerations in conducting research on human beings, the public nature of education, and the complexity of educational practices. Further, it is possible that some researchers feel that ethical considerations that attempt to define limits may be too rigid thereby limiting the effectiveness of research (Burns, 2000). Knowledge acquired through research is limited by the nature of both educational practice and research.

In relation to the theoretical framework, no matter how strongly grounded in theory or how well established the methodology to be implemented, one isolated study cannot

evaluate assumptions regarding all relevant variables and their interrelations. Inferences regarding proposed casual hypotheses or propositions are always conditional. There is no absolute truth in any casual model framework put forward. What is required is a pragmatic hypothesis-proposition testing approach that is characterised by openness to continually testing proposed hypotheses or propositions against new experiences and revisiting proposed models that do not conform. At the most, evidence supporting proposed hypotheses or propositions demonstrate only that the hypotheses or propositions fit the data well.

<div align="center">Impact of Present Research</div>

Since the advent of compulsory education in the nineteenth century, PSRA has been a perennial issue and an international problem within secondary schooling systems. Research outlined in the preceding chapters has highlighted how increasingly complex the research into PSRA has become. The present study has contributed to the field of problematic school-related absenteeism by identifying and addressing two increasing issues associated with PSRA, namely, fractional truancy and parental condoned absenteeism which accounts for more than 50% of PSRA. This research should be particularly helpful to support Federal Government policy in relation to the re-writing of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* to incorporate parents' responsibilities in relation to their child's attendance at school. There needs to be standard criteria for absence reporting in order to encourage State and Territory Governments to better resource schools to combat the escalating concern regarding parental condoned absenteeism. Moreover, this recent research should be helpful for parents, politicians, pedagogues, psychologists and other interested practitioners in relation to the implementation of strategies regarding the management and minimisation of PSRA. However, in order for these strategies to be successful, a holistic approach is required, that is, the involvement of the individual, the school, the family and the community and society, and governments.

It is prudent to suggest that although, each school is in the best position to implement strategies to manage and minimise PSRA, some schools have systems that are more effective than others. For instance, the Catholic Boy's school uses the MAZE reporting system and employs a full time attendance officer. The Catholic Co-educational school employs the MAZE reporting system and relies on Year Level Coordinators and the School Welfare Officer to control absenteeism. The Catholic Girl's school employs the MAZE system and Year Level Coordinators follow up absenteeism. The Government

school uses CASES21 and Year Level Coordinators who are responsible for following up absenteeism. The Government school with an indigenous population employs CASES21 and is supported by government welfare workers to follow up absenteeism. The absentee average days per pupil per year level 2004 is presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1

Absentee Average Days per Pupil per Year Level 2004

Year Level	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
School Classification			
Catholic Boys	8.9%	9.9%	8.0%
Catholic Co-ed	8.4%	11.9 %	10.6 %
Catholic Girls	12.0%	13.0%	15.0%
Government	11.2%	11.7%	12.3%
Indigenous	42.6%	35.5%	19.6%

It is interesting to note that the Catholic Boy's school employing a full time attendance office has a significantly lower rate of absenteeism at the Year 9 level. However, the present study found that no single factor makes one school more effective than another. The Catholic Boy's school, as well as employing an attendance officer, has a successful pastoral care policy in place to further manage and mimimise PSRA. The value of this multi-faceted approach has also been demonstrated by other schools with similar structural and administrative characteristics and similar intakes of students having different rates of absenteeism.

Recommendations

Recommendations in relation to the management and minimisation regarding PSRA at the federal government, state government, and secondary school levels are:

At the Federal Government Level

1.   Establish a central reporting system for absenteeism by each state and territory within the Commonwealth of Australia.

2. Re-draft the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* to clarify guidelines on parents' responsibilities for their children's school attendance.

At the State Government Level

1. Establish a central state office to control absenteeism reporting within the Victorian secondary school system.

2. Standardise criteria for absence reports within the Victorian secondary school system.

3. Increase government funding to assist disadvantaged or under-resourced schools to combat parental condoned absenteeism.

At the Secondary School Level

1. Develop strategies to educate parents about their legal and moral obligations regarding their children's school attendance.

2. Identify good models of teaching practice to encourage school attendance such as alternative curricula, pastoral care, positive teacher attitudes, sound teacher-student relationships, and cooperative home-school relationships.

3. Utilise electronic reporting procedures for speedy reporting of absenteeism with particular reference to fractional truancy.

4. Implement procedures to follow up persistent absentees in transition from primary to secondary school.

5. Employ either a part time or full time school-based attendance officer.

6.   Implement alternative learning opportunities such as distance education, home education, homework classes, and on line education for students who do not return to school.

Directions for Future Research

Several of the strongest themes emerging from this study that may give rise to future research in the field of student absenteeism include the cost of PSRA in both time and money, the masked impact of fractional truancy, the widespread concern about parental condoned absenteeism, the increase in the rate of Year 8 level of absenteeism, and the long-term effects of PSRA on students' future prospects

Questions of value for money and sustainability inevitably arise and need to be addressed in future research. Although the proportion of persistent absentees is low in the majority of schools and often confined to a limited number of families, many resources are spent on the management and minimisation of PSRA. For instance, a disproportionate amount time staff spend implementing procedures such as; scanning attendance data to identify those students who are absent, following up parents, helping absentees catch up on missed school work, parent interviews, contacting appropriate agencies for support, referral to support staff within school.

Although the long-term effects of PSRA are beyond the scope of this study, there is growing evidence of a connection between youth employment prospects and self-esteem, social isolation, and dissatisfaction. However, in the long-term, the community bears the social and economic costs. These costs are likely to escalate if any trends to increased non-compliance with the laws of compulsory school attendance are not noticed and acted upon.

Given that most of the students taking part in this study admitted to some form of PSRA, the case for pro-active strategies in lieu of reactive measures regarding early intervention is very strong, and in particular, should be implemented in relation to parental condoned absenteeism and fractional truancy.

According to government figures, an emerging trend is an increase in school-related absenteeism at the Year 8 level. Therefore, a focus on early intervention is of paramount importance to avoid further increase in this trend.

Conclusions

The striking fact of this research was the annual incremental creep of student absences resulting from school-based factors (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) and in particular, the alarming rate of fractional truancy and parental condoned absenteeism particularly in the middle years of schooling

The middle years of schooling are difficult years for adolescents as they experience changes in physical, psychosocial, and psycho-cognitive development. These changes may explain the marked increase in PSRA. This research found that many students are simply unable to cope with the increased workloads, because of either cognitive inadequacy or boredom with teachers' pedagogical styles. The students fail to meet deadlines and fall behind with their studies. Many parents also choose to condone their children's absenteeism.

Problematic school-related absenteeism represents different sets of difficulties and challenges for the student, the home, the school, and the wider community and therefore, needs a clear definition of the problem. However, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, global definition has not been developed. Hence, schools are disadvantaged in their reporting by not having a concise working definition of absenteeism. This study has endeavoured to standardise the major categories and risk factors associated with PSRA with the view that reporting systems, strategies, and future research will be further empowered to combat PSRA. Moreover, unless schools apply criteria equally, little credibility can be placed on the measurements of the extent of PSRA or the efficacy of the methods employed to combat it.

In the present study, the main research findings indicated that fractional truancy appeared to be widespread across the Victorian secondary school system, but was not accounted for in school-based figures or government reports. In particular, fractional truancy was found to be a major cause of absenteeism that included among other things, boring lessons, problems with teachers, days when homework is due, days of test or exams, and disinterest in subjects. The schools participating in this research acknowledged the increasing problem of parental condoned absenteeism within the Victorian secondary school system. They were keen to know the magnitude, nature, and extent of this phenomenon. This research has found the magnitude of the problem to be in excess of 50% of all school-related absenteeism. Procedures and initiatives are constantly activated in the school to address the issue of non-attendance. The sheer volume of student absences

causes difficulties in the distribution of resources. For each day a student is absent from school terms several days may be spent on establishing the reason. Generally, resources in the school do not allow for this time factor. The *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* must be rewritten to clearly outline parents' responsibilities for the attendance of their children at school.

According to the latest figures released by state and territory DET offices within the Commonwealth of Australia, PSRA is increasing annually. (see Chapter 1 of the present work.) However, some encouragement can be found from recent government initiatives to combat PSRA. The Department of Education and Training within each state and territory, in conjunction with secondary schools, allocates a high priority to managing and minimising PSRA through their respective management programs. (see Chapter 2 of the present work.) It is apparent that the expectation of the governments is that schools serve as a conduit to control and become accountable for their students' irregular attendance. Although schools can make a difference there is no prescriptive strategy to control absenteeism. Procedures are in place to monitor and manage attendance, counsel students and liaise with parents. However, schools' non-attendance procedures have, at best, achieved minimal success. Therefore, the only option for secondary schools is continue with a broad range of strategies to manage and minimise PSRA on an individual, case by case basis. Moreover, schools need to be aware that higher rates of PSRA are connected to, according to Year 9 students surveyed in this study, because they are bored by the delivery of some subject teachers. More investigation is needed to assess pedagogical behaviours and teaching styles in light of middle school students' perceived learning needs to ensure the curriculum is relevant, culturally inclusive and focussed to sustain students' interest.

The concept of choice underpins PSRA. Students have a choice whether or not they arrive at school on time, attend classes, and obey school rules. When the wrong choice is made, and, students fail to attend school without a valid excuse, they must suffer the consequences, such as receiving a detention. Parents choose whether their children should attend school. If they make the wrong choice and allow a child not to attend school without a valid excuse, then they too must suffer the consequences prescribed under the law, such as receiving a fine. However, punitive measures implemented through the *Education Act 1958* are not necessarily the only way to ensure parents send their children to school. Rather, educating parents through school literature or encouraging a basic understanding responsible citizenship would be a more appropriate intervention strategy.

There appears to be a consensus among some researchers for those who dropout of the school there is a socio-economic cost not just to these young people, but to the wider Australian community. These costs include: long-term unemployment, homelessness, poverty, and juvenile crime. There are no definitive research studies to suggest that all early school leavers are likely to fail to become valued members of society in terms of social and economic worth. However, there is evidence to suggest that these are the young people most at risk of not achieving the transition to responsible adulthood and citizenship.

Although the major federal political parties present differing solutions to PSRA, there appears to be a common agreement that parents are ultimately responsible for their child's regular attendance at school. In other words, there is a strong suggestion that citizenship starts in the home, and is reinforced at school by civics and citizenship education at school.

In order to combat PSRA, definitions that have ultimately led to some confusion are redefined, major risk factors are identified and isolated, criteria reporting are standardised, and fractional truancy and parental condoned absenteeism are identified as two major causes of PSRA.

Moreover, this research presents the important finding that parental condoned absenteeism is a widespread concern within the Victorian secondary school system. The following suggestions and strategies are presented that may assist schools in the management and minimisation of PSRA at the ground roots level:

- promote consistent communication with parents to establish their choices about the future prospects of their children;

- liaise with persistent absentees to point out the ramifications regarding their future academic, social, and employment prospects;

- implement pastoral care programs in combination with strategies to encourage attendance in order to combat PSRA;

- re-evaluate teaching styles and implement professional development programs designed to assist teachers to combat perceived student boredom within the classroom; and

- involve school community groups in programs designed to assist with persistent absentees returning to school.

In the short term, the issues related to problematic school-related absenteeism identified in this study are the combined responsibility of the students, their parents, schools, and the community and society. However, in the long term, both Federal and State governments must accept the main responsibility for implementing policy initiatives to manage and minimise problematic school-related absenteeism.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Human Research Ethics Committee:

Committee Approval Form

⊕ ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Ken Smith   Melbourne Campus

Co-Investigators: Dr Joseph Zajda   Melbourne Campus

Student Researcher: Robert Rennie   Melbourne Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
School related absenteeism

for the period: 15.5.2004 - 31.3.2006 (subject to annual renewal)

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: V 2003.04-81

The following <u>standard</u> conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

(i)   that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: .... Date: 19.4.2004
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

APPENDIX B

Secondary Schools Listings

Secondary Schools Listing

Table 1

CEO Secondary Schools Listing

Melbourne Archdiocese	Ballarat Archdiocese	Sandhurst Archdiocese	Sale Archdiocese
Zone	Zone	Zone	Zone
East Central	Ballarat Central	Benalla	Sale
Geelong	Ballarat Northern	Bendigo	
North Central	Ballarat Southern		
North Eastern			
North Western			
Outer Eastern			
Outer North Western			
Peninsula			
South Central			
South Eastern			
Western			

Table 2

DET Secondary Schools Listing

Barwon South Western Region Network	Central Highlands Wimmera Region Network	Eastern Metropolitan Region Network
Barwon South	Ararat	Boroondara
Geelong Bellarine	Arch	Dandenong Ranges
Geelong North	Bacchus Marsh	Knox
Colac	Eureka	Manningham
Corangamite	Goldfields	Maroondah
Hamilton	Horsham	Monash
Portland	Southern	Whitehorse
Warrnambool	Stawell	Yarra Valley
	University	
	Warracknabeal	
	Wendouree	

Gippsland Region Network	Goulburn North Eastern Region Network	Loddon Campaspe-Mallee Region Network
East Gippsland	Seymour	Central Goldfields
Latrobe Valley	Shepparton	Central Murray
South Gippsland	Wangaratta	Echuca-Rochester-Cohuna
Wellington	Wodonga	Greater Bendigo
West Gippsland		North Central
		Southern Ranges
		Sunraysia Mallee

Northern Metropolitan Region Network	Southern Metropolitan Region Network	Western Metropolitan Region Network
Banyule	Bayside	Harvester
Broadmeadows	Berwick	Hobsons Bay
Inner City	Cranbourne	Keilor
Moreland	Dandenong	Maribyrnong
Nillumbik	Frankston	Melbourne
Northcote	Glen Eira	Melton
Somerton	Inner South	Moonee Valley
Yarra	Kingston	Wyndham
Sunbury	Mornington	
Whittlesea	Springvale	

APPENDIX C

Invitation: School Participation

Invitation: School Participation

TITLE OF PROJECT: THE PHENOMEA OF PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL-RELATED ABSENTEEISM

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ASSOC PROF KEN SMITH

PhD CANDIDATE: MR ROBERT RENNIE

ENROLMENT PROGRAM: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dear Principal,

The purpose of this study seeks to:
- investigate the phenomena of problematic school-related absenteeism;
- categorise the different types of problematic school-related absenteeism;
- identify the risk factors associated with each category of problematic school-related absenteeism; and
- analyse outcomes relevant to strategies employed in the management of school-based programs regarding problematic school-related absenteeism;

The methodology will employ two approaches towards data collection, that is, quantitative and qualitative. In order to obtain a wide cross-section of responses two samples will be involved in the study, namely, secondary schools representing metropolitan and regional areas, and students representing Catholic Boys, Catholic Co-educational, Catholic Girls, Government Co-educational, and Independent Co-educational at different year levels.

It is envisaged that there will be little or no possible risk, discomforts, or inconvenience to the participants. There will be minimal contact with students and teaching staff, and liaison with administration staff, year level coordinators and welfare coordinators.

The overall time frame for the study is (3) three years and will focus on:
- assessment of problematic school-related absenteeism in participating schools such as: determining categories of problematic school-related absenteeism and risk factors associated with each category;
- surveying Year 8, 9, and 10 students to determine their perceptions regarding problematic school-related absenteeism; and
- analysis of case studies of students referred to researcher regarding problematic school-related absenteeism.

The benefits associated with this research will provide valuable insights into the phenomena of problematic school-related absenteeism. The risk factors associated with this multi-causal phenomenon may be more readily identified and managed during early onset thereby minimising serious implications affecting adolescents' future education, social and employment prospects.

It is envisaged that successful outcomes may be offered for publication in professional educational and psychological journals in order to provide information to schools, governments and other practitioners interested in the minimisation of school-related absenteeism.

Confidentiality will be ensured throughout the conduct of this research as participating schools will remain anonymous and any reference to students will involve pseudonyms. The participants involved in this study will be known only to the PhD Candidate and supervisor(s). It is a policy of this research undertaken that all outcomes and results will be presented to each participating school.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the PhD Candidate:
Mr Robert Rennie
C/- Assoc Prof Ken Smith
Trescowthick School of Education (Victoria)
Telephone: 9953 3257
E-mail: k.smith@patrick.acu.edu.au
Postal address: 115 Victoria, Parade, Fitzroy. Vic. 3065.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the manner you have been treated during the study, or if you have any enquiry that the PhD Candidate or Supervisor(s) have not been able to satisfy, you may write to:
The Chair, the Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Locked bag 4115
Fitzroy. Vic. 3065.
Telephone: 9953 3157
Facsimile: 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University has approved this study. Participation is on a voluntary basis and if the need arises participation may be withdrawn from the study without providing any reason.

Should you wish to participate in this study please complete the Consent: School Participation **(PINK)** and return to the PhD Candidate.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Rennie   Assoc Prof Ken Smith
PhD Candidate   Principal Supervisor

APPENDIX D

Consent: School Participation

Consent: School Participation

TITLE OF PROJECT:	THE PHENOMEA OF PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL-RELATED ABSENTEEISM
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:	ASSOC PROF KEN SMITH
STUDENT RESEARCHER:	MR ROBERT RENNIE
ENROLMENT PROGRAM:	DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

I .... have read and understood the information provided in the *Invitation: School Participation*. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study, realising that I can withdraw at any given time. I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or be provided to other interested parties in a format that does not identify the college in any way.

NAME OF PARTICPATING SCHOOL: ....
                                        (BLOCK LETTERS)

SIGNATURE: ....   **DATE:** ....

SIGNATURE OF PhD CANDIDATE: ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ....

DATE: ....

RETURN THIS FORM TO THE PhD CANDIDATE

APPENDIX E

Information Letter To Parents/Guardians

Information Letter To Parents/Guardians

TITLE OF PROJECT: THE PHENOMEA OF PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL-RELATED ABSENTEEISM

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ASSOC PROF KEN SMITH

PhD CANDIDATE: MR ROBERT RENNIE

ENROLMENT PROGRAM: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dear Parent/Guardian,

On any given school day thousands of students are absent from classrooms. In the majority of cases these absences are authorised, either by you or by the school. In most cases absences are short-term, for example, being unprepared for an exam, lack of interest in a sporting event, uncompleted homework, or being unwell. However, if your child is frequently absent from school without a valid excuse they may face an emotional crisis that will be detrimental to their future educational, employment and social success. Moreover, this failure to meet legal obligations regarding school attendance represents a challenge to you, to educational systems and to society in general.

The benefits associated with your child's participation in this research will provide valuable insights into the phenomena of problematic school-related absenteeism. The risk factors associated with this multi-causal phenomenon may be more readily identified and managed during early onset thereby minimising serious implications that may affect you child's future education, social and employment prospects.

It is envisaged that successful outcomes may be offered for publication in professional educational and psychological journals in order to provide information to schools, governments and other practitioners interested in the minimisation of school-related absenteeism.

Your child's confidentiality will be ensured throughout the conduct of this research as any reference to your child will involve the use of pseudonyms. Your child's participation in this study will only be known to the student researcher and supervisor(s). It is a policy of this research that all outcomes and results will be presented to your school.

Any questions you may have regarding your child's participation in this project should be directed to the PhD Candidate:
Mr Robert Rennie
C/- Assoc Prof Ken Smith
Trescowthick School of Education (Victoria)
Telephone: 9953 3257
E-mail: k.smith@patrick.acu.edu.au
Postal address: 115 Victoria, Parade, Fitzroy. Vic. 3065.

In the event that you have any complaint(s) or concern(s) about the manner in which your child has been treated during the study, or if you have any enquiries that the PhD Candidate or Supervisor(s) have not been able to satisfy regarding your child's participation you may write to:

The Chair, the Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Locked bag 4115
Fitzroy. Vic. 3065.
Telephone: 9953 3157
Facsimile: 9953 3315

In relation to this study the following provisions will be made available for students to access school counselling services.
1. Students may seek direction from the school Welfare Officer prior to participation.
2. Students may have the school Welfare Officer present in the interview room during the interview and completion of the survey/questionnaire.
3. Students, if distressed by sensitive information contained in the survey/questionnaire, may request to withdraw and seek the guidance of the school Welfare Officer.
4. Students may follow-up any future concerns regarding their participation in this study with the school Welfare Officer.

Any complaint(s) or concern(s) you have regarding your child will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University has approved this study. Participation is on a voluntary basis and if the need arises you may withdraw your child from the study without providing any reason.

Should you wish to participate in this study please complete the Consent: Parents/Guardians Of Participant **(PINK)** and return to the PhD Candidate.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Rennie   Assoc Prof Ken Smith
PhD Candidate   Principal Supervisor

APPENDIX F

Consent: Parents/Guardians Of Participant

Consent: Parents/Guardians Of Participant

TITLE OF PROJECT: THE PHENOMEA OF PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL-
                                 RELATED ABSENTEEISM

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ASSOC PROF KEN SMITH

PhD CANDIDATE: MR ROBERT RENNIE

ENROLMENT PROGRAM: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

I .... (*the parent/guardian*) have read (*or have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the *Information Letter To Parents/Guardians.* Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this study, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any given time. I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or be provided to other interested parties in a format that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN: ....
                                         (BLOCK LETTERS)

SIGNATURE: ....   **DATE**: ....

NAME OF PARTICPATING STUDENT: ....
                                                (BLOCK LETTERS)

SIGNATURE OF PhD CANDIDATE: ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ....

DATE: ....

RETURN THIS FORM TO THE PhD CANDIDATE

APPENDIX G

Invitation: Student Participation

Invitation: Student Participation

TITLE OF PROJECT: THE PHENOMEA OF PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL-RELATED ABSENTEEISM

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ASSOC PROF KEN SMITH

PhD CANDIDATE: MR ROBERT RENNIE

ENROLMENT PROGRAM: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dear Participant,

On any given school day thousands of students are absent from classrooms. In most cases these absences are authorised, either by your parents or by the school. Many absences are short-term; for example, when you are unprepared for an exam, or show a lack of interest in a sporting event, or haven't completed homework, or you are feeling unwell. However, if you are frequently absent from school without a reasonable excuse you may face an emotional crisis that could affect your future educational, employment and social prospects. This failure to meet legal obligations regarding school attendance represents a challenge to your family, to school systems and society in general.

The benefits of this research will provide valuable insights into the phenomena of problematic school-related absenteeism. By identifying problems early measures can be taken to improve your future education, social and employment prospects.

It is likely that this research may be offered for publication in professional educational and psychological journals. This will provide information to schools, governments and other practitioners interested in the minimisation of school-related absenteeism.

Confidentiality will be ensured throughout the conduct of this research. Any reference to you will involve the use of a pseudonym (change of name). Your participation in this study will be known only to the PhD Candidate and supervisor(s). It is a policy of this research that all outcomes and results will be presented to your school.

Any questions you have regarding this project should be directed to the PhD Candidate:
Mr Robert Rennie
C/- Assoc Prof Ken Smith
Trescowthick School of Education (Victoria)
Telephone: 9953 3257
E-mail: k.smith@patrick.acu.edu.au
Postal address: 115 Victoria, Parade, Fitzroy. Vic. 3065.

In the event that you have any complaint(s) or concern(s) about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any enquiries that the PhD Candidate or Supervisor(s) have not been able to satisfy, you may write to:

The Chair, the Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Locked bag 4115
Fitzroy. Vic. 3065.
Telephone: 9953 3157
Facsimile: 9953 3315

In relation to this study the following provisions will be made available for students to access school counselling services.
1. Students may seek direction from the school Welfare Officer prior to participation.
2. Students may have the school Welfare Officer present in the interview room during the interview and completion of the survey/questionnaire.
3. Students, if distressed by sensitive information contained in the survey/questionnaire, may request to withdraw and seek the guidance of the school Welfare Officer.
4. Students may follow-up any future concerns regarding their participation in this study with the school Welfare Officer.

Any complaint(s) or concern(s) you have will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University, the Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Office has approved this study. Participation is on a voluntary basis and if the need arises you may withdraw from the study without providing any reason.

Should you wish to participate in this study please complete the Consent: Student Participation **(PINK)** and return to the PhD Candidate.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Rennie   Assoc Prof Ken Smith
PhD Candidate   Principal Supervisor

APPENDIX H

Assent: Participants Aged Under 18 Years

Assent: Participants Aged Under 18 Years

TITLE OF PROJECT: THE PHENOMEA OF PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL-RELATED ABSENTEEISM

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ASSOC PROF KEN SMITH

PhD CANDIDATE: MR ROBERT RENNIE

ENROLMENT PROGRAM: DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

I .... understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision. I agree that the research data collected for this study may be published or be provided to other interested parties in a format that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18 YEARS: ....
                                                        (BLOCK LETTERS)

SIGNATURE: ....   **DATE:** ....

SIGNATURE OF PhD CANDIDATE:................... ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ....

DATE: ....

RETURN THIS FORM TO THE PhD CANDIDATE

APPENDIX I

CASES21 Student Absence Codes

CASES21 Student Absence Codes

Code	Description
Late arrival/early departure	
111	Late arrival at school
112	Early departure from school
113	Late arrival unexplained
114	Early departure unexplained
116	Late arrival to class
117	Early leaver from class
118	Late class unexplained
Educational	
600	Educational
601	Group activity
602	Community service
603	Duty student
604	Excursion
605	Special event
606	Camp
607	Other education activity
608	TAFE
609	Work experience
610	School production
611	Sports
612	Study leave
802	Exempt
School decision	
901	Industrial action
902	Facility damage
903	Weather
904	Staff meeting
Health related	
200	Medical
201	Illness
202	Accident
203	Counselling
204	Sick bay
205	Medical appointment
206	Hospitalised
207	Quarantine
209	Dentist
210	Medical/welfare
211	Bereavement
Unapproved absence	
208	Refusal
300	Truancy
500	Unexplained
Discipline	
400	Suspension – in-school/internal
401	Suspension - external
900	School choice
Exited/transferred	
700	Flags
701	Exit
702	Transferred
Parental choice	
800	Parent choice
804	Extended family holidays
895	Religious/cultural observance

APPENDIX J

73 Motives And Causes For Problematic School-Related Absenteeism (Bimler & Kirkland, 2001)

73 Motives And Causes For Problematic
School-Related Absenteeism (Bimler & Kirkland, 2001)

1. School education not valued by parents.

2. Parents/families unsuccessful at school.

3. Parents lack awareness of child's activities.

4. Overpressured by significant people to succeed at school.

5. Familial history of truanting.

6. Inadequate parental supervision.

7. Family shifts frequently.

8. Parents want company at home during the day.

9. Ongoing problems with family members.

10. Domestic duties required at home (cooking, cleaning, washing, child-minding, etc.)

11. Lacks adequate social skills.

12. Friends are also truants.

13. Has more friends outside of school.

14. Wants to gain respect and/or friendship from peers.

15. Under peer pressure to truant.

16. Has no friends at school.

17. Having difficulties with friends.

18. Finds classes boring.

19. Finds learning uninteresting.

20. Has a poor relationship with teacher(s).

21. Cannot see the point in going to school.

22. Lacks basic skills from previous education.

23. Lacks necessary uniform, school equipment and the like.

24. Is part of a group that the school does not cater for.

25. Knows that the school attendance system will not catch up with him or her.

26. Trying to avoid being bullied or teased at school.

27. Work is due that has not been completed.

28. Avoiding a particular school event (e.g., athletics, swimming sports).

29. Is or feels physically different from peers.

30. Is too embarrassed to go to school.

31.   Feels the teacher(s) not really interested in him or her.

32.   Does not feel a valued member of school community.

33.   Cannot cope with adjusting to a new school.

34.   Feels he or she is always a failure at school.

35.   Cannot cope with the stress school can produce.

36.   A particular teacher is always picking on him or her.

37.   Likes the sense of control provided by the choice to attend school at that moment.

38.   Has a negative view of his or her future (e.g. prospect of unemployment).

39.   Does not like school work.

40.   Rebelling against authority generally, including school rules and regulations.

41.   Involved in criminal activities outside school.

42.   Afraid of failure and/or its consequences.

43.   Lacks motivation to learn.

44.   Victim of family abuse (i.e. physical, sexual, emotional/mental).

45.   Lacks commitment.

46.   Seeking attention from significant others.

47.   Lacks confidence in himself or herself.

48.   Feels there is nobody important to him or her who cares about what he or she does or who he or she is.

49.   Has an identified learning disability.

50.   Cannot cope with school work.

51.   Is drunk or high on drugs.

52.   Finds excitement in breaking rules.

53.   Wishes to avoid places that "challenge" him or her.

54.   Is too busy trying to cope with personal problems.

55.   Feels isolated/alienated from everything, including school and home.

56.   Too tired.

57.   Fatasizes a lot.

58.   Weather is better suited to being out of school (e.g., it is too hot or too cold to go to school).

59.   The only way to smoke or drink during the day.

60.   Has pre-arranged places to go to while truanting.

61.   More interesting activities outside school (e.g., video games, shops, cricket games).

62. "Lost" to the school record system.

63. No school programme suited to his or her individual needs.

64. Physical, educational, sexual abuse factors at school influencing attendance.

65. Ongoing history of school failure not being addressed by school.

66. Overreacts to situations.

67. It is a way to "get back" at others.

68. Willingly manipulated by peers and friends.

69. Can "get away with it" by lying (to parents, teachers, principals).

70. Adults "believe" made-up stories too easily.

71. Adults with supervisory responsibilities are inconsistent.

72. Parents protect/defend truant actions because of personal embarrassment, so the behavior is reinforced and continues.

73. Has school phobia.

APPENDIX K

School And Student Participation

School And Student Participation

Table 1.A

Invited Schools by Zone and Classification

Zone	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
School Classification									
Catholic Boys	1	0	3	1	0	3	8	2	18
Catholic Co-ed	9	9	3	1	7	6	4	8	47
Catholic Girls	1	0	5	2	0	6	7	5	26
Government	11	10	16	8	5	20	20	16	106
Independent	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Total	23	20	28	13	13	36	40	32	205

Table 1.B

Participating Schools by Zone and Classification

Zone	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
School Classification									
Catholic Boys	1	0	2	0	0	1	4	0	8
Catholic Co-ed	2	5	1	1	4	4	3	3	23
Catholic Girls	0	0	5	1	0	3	2	3	14
Government	2	3	6	4	2	2	3	3	25
Independent	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Total	5	8	14	6	7	10	14	9	73

Table 2.A

SRA Invited Students by Zone and School Classification

Zone	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
School Classification									
Catholic Boys	0	0	6	0	0	6	12	6	30
Catholic Co-ed	6	12	6	6	12	12	12	6	72
Catholic Girls	0	0	6	0	0	6	6	6	24
Government	6	12	18	6	6	6	6	6	66
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
Total	12	24	36	12	18	30	42	24	(198)

Table 2.B

SRA Participating Students by Zone and School Classification

Zone	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
School Classification									
Catholic Boys	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	0	12
Catholic Co-ed	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	6	13
Catholic Girls	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	4	8
Government	0	0	1	0	0	4	3	0	8
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Total	0	0	1	0	0	16	16	10	43

Table 3.A

MST Invited Students by Zone and School Classification

Zone	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
School Classification									
Catholic Boys	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	25
Catholic Co-ed	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	25
Catholic Girls	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25
Government	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	25
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25
Total	0	0	25	0	0	50	25	25	125

Table 3.B

MST Participating Students by Zone and School Classification

Zone	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
School Classification									
Catholic Boys	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed	0	0	0	0	0	19	0	0	19
Catholic Girls	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	21
Government	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	21
Total	0	0	24	0	0	43	21	21	109

Table 4.A

PCA Invited Schools by Area and School Classification

Area School Classification	Metropolitan	Regional	Total
Catholic	60	31	91
Government	72	34	106
Independent	4	4	8
Total	136	69	205
(%)	(66)	(34)	(100)

Table 4.B

PCA Participating Schools by Area and School Classification

Area School Classification	Metropolitan	Regional	Total
Catholic	19	10	29
Government	11	8	19
Independent	2	1	3
Total	32	19	51
(%)	(63)	(37)	(100)

Table 5.A

CSP Invited Students by Zone and School Classification

Zone School Classification	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
Catholic Boys	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Catholic Co-ed	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Catholic Girls	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Government	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Total	0	0	8	0	0	2	4	0	14

Table 5.B

CSP Participating Students by Zone and School Classification

Zone	BAZ	BEZ	EMZ	GEZ	GLZ	NMZ	SMZ	WMZ	Total
School Classification									
Catholic Boys	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Catholic Co-ed	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Catholic Girls	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Government	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	8	0	0	2	2	0	12

APPENDIX L

School Instructions: Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism

School Instructions: Student Questionnaire:
School-Related Absenteeism

Dear Member of Staff,

re: RESEARCH PROJECT: The Phenomena of Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

Further to my previous request the Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism is a vital part of the research I am undertaking towards a PHD at the Australian Catholic University. I would appreciate your assistance in the administration of the enclosed questionnaires to the selected Year 8, Year 9, and Year 10 students who have returned the appropriate Parent Consent/Student Assent **(PINK)**.

As the questionnaire will remain anonymous please encourage the students to be totally open with their responses.

All questionnaires will be collected by the PhD Candidate.

Thank you once again for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Rennie   Assoc Prof Ken Smith
PhD Candidate   Principal Supervisor

APPENDIX M

Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism

Student Questionnaire: School-Related Absenteeism

SCHOOL ID...........CLASS.................STUDENT ID...................DATE.........................

YEAR LEVEL............. GENDER *Circle appropriate response* FEMALE MALE

INSTRUCTIONS

What are your feelings about the following statements?

Read each statement and carefully decide how you feel about it.

Please circle one answer i.e. Strongly Agree, Agree, Unsure, Strongly Disagree or Agree, for each statement.

<u>Remember there are no wrong or right answers.</u>

Item 1   I reckon I'm not a good student.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 2   Most subjects are boring.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 3   School rules are unfair.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 4   The world is against me – I just can't seem to do anything right.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 5   Sometimes I feel scared about going to school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 6   I stay away from school because I keep falling behind with my homework.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 7   Other students always pick me on.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 8   Some teachers are okay, but others don't like me because they are always picking on me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 9   I have no one to talk to when I have a problem.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 10   I often feel angry when no one listens to me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 11   I miss school because I always feel sick.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 12   Even when I'm not sick I like to take days off school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 13   School is just a waste of time.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

Item 14   **I like to sneak away from school to be with my mates.**

Strongly   **Disagree**   **Unsure**   **Agree**   **Strongly**
Disagree   **Agree**

Item 15   **Being with mum at home is better than being at school.**

Strongly   **Disagree**   **Unsure**   **Agree**   **Strongly**
Disagree   **Agree**

APPENDIX N

Student Instructions: Student Questionnaire:

Middle School Transition

Student Instructions: Student Questionnaire:
Middle School Transition

Dear Student,

      re: RESEARCH PROJECT: The Phenomena of Problematic School-Related Absenteeism

The following questions are designed to help us understand why some students choose to miss school for the whole day or skip particular classes.

There is no right or wrong answer. What is important is that you answer each question honestly.

The Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition is confidential – please do not write your name on any of the pages. This information will be used for this research only.

To answer the questions simply circle *yes* or *no*. For some questions you may circle more than one response.

I look forward to your help in this important research project.

Your supervisor will collect all questionnaires.

Thank you for your time.

Robert Rennie   Assoc Prof Ken Smith
PhD Candidate   Principal Supervisor

APPENDIX O

Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition

Student Questionnaire: Middle School Transition

SCHOOL ID..........CLASS................STUDENT ID...................DATE.........................

YEAR LEVEL............. GENDER *Circle* appropriate response   FEMALE   MALE

Item 1   How did you feel about entering Year 9?

excited   nervous   overwhelmed   challenged   unsure

Circle appropriate response

Item 2   On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition
Program?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Circle appropriate response

Item 3   On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Circle appropriate response

Item 4   On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Circle appropriate response

Item 5   On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School
Community?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Circle appropriate response

Item 6   Do you enjoy school life?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 7   Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 8   Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 9   Do you find it easy to make friends?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 10   On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Circle appropriate response

Item 11   Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 12   Do you miss school with your friends?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 13   What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip

classes? For example:

1   Day(s) before and after a weekend;

2   Day(s) after part time work;

3   Extended holiday time with the family;

4   Day(s) on exams or tests;

5   Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;

6   Any particular subjects;

7   Often late for school or classes.

You may Circle more than one response

Item 14   Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 15   Did you choose your subjects because:

1   You were interested in them?;

2   Your friends were doing them?;

3   You know what you want to do when you leave school?;

4   You had no choice?;

5   You really didn't care?

You may Circle more than one response

Item 16   Do you think that missing school will affect your results?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 17   Do you intend to complete Year 12?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 18   Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

Item 19   Are you having problems? For example:

1   Boring lessons;

2   Falling behind with homework;

3   Being bullied;

4   Unhappy with school rules;

5   Peer pressure;

6   Teacher conflict;

7   No one to talk to about problems;

8   Don't like subject choice;

9   Family problems;

10 School is not for me.

You may Circle more than one response

Item 20   Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?

Circle appropriate response   Yes   No

APPENDIX P

School Invitation: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

School Invitation: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

Dear Principal,

With the approval of The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University, the Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Office and the acknowledgment of the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria an important research study is being conducted relevant to problematic school-related absenteeism within the Victorian Secondary school system.

This project entitled *The Phenomena of Problematic School-Related Absenteeism* is funded via the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training. The PhD Candidate is Robert Rennie who is undertaking a PhD through the Australian Catholic University.

This study has found from the anecdotal evidence received from the majority of Victorian secondary schools involved in this study that "parental condoned absenteeism" is a growing concern. Therefore, it is prudent that this study should explore further the implications of parent condoned absenteeism.

If you are willing to participate in this research by completing a brief questionnaire (attached) and return by email we agree to share the findings of this study with you.

You can access the following documents via the email attachments:
- ethics approval from the Australian Catholic University;
- approval from the Catholic Education Office;
- approval from the Department of Education and Training; and
- school consent

For further inquiries please contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Rennie   Assoc Prof Ken Smith
PhD Candidate   Principal Supervisor

APPENDIX Q

School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

School Questionnaire: Parental Condoned Absenteeism

SCHOOL CLASS: CATHOLIC GOVERNMENT   INDEPENDENT

Circle appropriate response

SCHOOL REGION: METROPOLITAN   REGIONAL

Circle appropriate response

Item 1   What is highest year level of absenteeism experienced at your school?:

(a) Year 7;
(b) Year 8;
(c) Year 9;
(d) Year 10;
(e) Year 11;
(f) Year 12.

Circle appropriate response

Item 2   What is the greatest type of absenteeism experienced at your school?:

(a) Illness (supported with a medical certificate);
(b) Explained absence (other than parental condoned);
(c) Unexplained absence;
(d) Parental condoned;
(e) Other.

Circle appropriate response

Item 3   Do you consider parental condoned absenteeism is an escalating issue within your school?

No   Yes   Unsure

Circle appropriate response

Item 4   Is there a specific group particular to parental condoned absenteeism associated with your school? For example:

(a) Socio-economic;	No	Yes	Unsure
(b) Gender;	No	Yes	Unsure
(c) Multi-cultural;	No	Yes	Unsure
(d) Family dynamics;	No	Yes	Unsure
(e) Personal/psychological;	No	Yes	Unsure
(f) Indigenous;	No	Yes	Unsure
(g) Other.	No	Yes	Unsure

Circle appropriate response(s)

Item 5   What programs/strategies do you think are appropriate to combat parental condoned absenteeism, if any? For example:

(a) Parental education;
(b) Community programs;
(c) Government legislation;
(d) Attendance officer;
(e) Other.

Circle appropriate response(s)

Item 6   In your view should the appropriate authorities provide more resources to combat parental condoned absenteeism?

No   Yes   Unsure

Circle appropriate response

APPENDIX R

Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: SRA

Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: SRA

Table 1A

SQ: SRA Item 1: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	6	4	2	12
Expected Count	6.4	3.1	2.5	12.0
%	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	10	1	2	13
Expected Count	7.0	3.3	2.7	13.0
%	76.9%	7.7%	15.4%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	3	3	2	8
Expected Count	4.3	2.0	1.7	8.0
%	37.5%	37.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Government Count	3	3	2	8
Expected Count	4.3	2.0	1.7	8.0
%	37.5%	37.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	1	0	1	2
Expected Count	1.1	.5	.4	2.0
%	50.0%	.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	23	11	9	43
Expected Count	23.0	11.0	9.0	43.0
%	53.5%	25.6%	20.9%	100.0%

Table 1B

SQ: SRA Item 1: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.669a	8	.573
Likelihood Ratio	7.386	8	.496
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .42.

Table 1C

SQ: SRA Item 1: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.394	.573
Nominal Cramer's V	.278	.573
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 2A

SQ: SRA Item 2: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	7	1	4	12
Expected Count	5.6	2.0	4.5	12.0
%	58.3%	8.3%	33.3%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	6	1	6	13
Expected Count	6.0	2.1	4.8	13.0
%	46.2%	7.7%	46.2%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	6	1	1	8
Expected Count	3.7	1.3	3.0	8.0
%	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Government Count	1	4	3	8
Expected Count	3.7	1.3	3.0	8.0
%	12.5%	50.0%	37.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	0	2	2
Expected Count	9	3	7	2.0
%	.0%	.0%	10.0.0%	100.0%
Total Count	20	7	16	43
Expected Count	20.0	7.0	16.0	43.0
%	46.5%	16.3%	37.2%	100.0%

Table 2B

SQ: SRA Item 2: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.475a	8	.051
Likelihood Ratio	15.318	8	.053
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

Table 2C

SQ: SRA Item 2: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.600	.051
Nominal Cramer's V	.424	.051
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 3A

SQ: SRA Item 3: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	8	3	1	12
Expected Count	8.1	2.2	1.7	12.0
%	66.7%	25.0%	8.3%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	10	1	2	13
Expected Count	8.8	2.4	1.8	13.0
%	76.9%	7.7%	15.4%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	4	4	0	8
Expected Count	5.4	1.5	1.1	8.0
%	50.0%	50.0%	.0%	100.0%
Government Count	7	0	1	8
Expected Count	5.4	1.5	1.1	8.0
%	87.5%	.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	0	2	2
Expected Count	1.3	.4	.3	2.0
%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100%
Total Count	29	8	6	43
Expected Count	29.0	8.0	6.0	43.0
%	67.4%	18.6%	14.0%	100.0%

Table 3B

SQ: SRA Item 3: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.588a	8	.006
Likelihood Ratio	18.630	8	.017
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .28.

Table 3C

SQ: SRA Item 3: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.709	.006
Nominal Cramer's V	.501	.006
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 4A

SQ: SRA Item 4: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	9	3	0	12
Expected Count	8.7	2.5	.8	12.0
%	75.0%	25.0%	.0%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	9	3	1	13
Expected Count	9.4	2.7	.9	13.0
%	69.2%	23.1%	7.7%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	5	2	1	8
Expected Count	5.8	1.7	.6	8.0
%	62.5%	25.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Government Count	8	0	0	8
Expected Count	5.8	1.7	.6	8.0
%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	1	1	2
Expected Count	1.4	.4	.1	2.0
%	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	31	9	3	43
Expected Count	31.0	9.0	3.0	43.0
%	72.1%	20.9%	7.0%	100.0%

Table 4B

SQ: SRA Item 4: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.167a	8	.144
Likelihood Ratio	13.195	8	.105
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .14.

Table 4C

SQ: SRA Item 4: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.532	.144
Nominal Cramer's V	.376	.144
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 5A

SQ: SRA Item 5: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	9	0	3	12
Expected Count	7.3	1.7	3.1	12.0
%	75.0%	.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	10	1	2	13
Expected Count	7.9	1.8	3.3	13.0
%	76.9%	7.7%	15.4%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	1	4	3	8
Expected Count	4.8	1.1	2.0	8.0
%	12.5%	50.0%	37.5%	100.0%
Government Count	4	1	3	8
Expected Count	4.8	1.1	2.0	8.0
%	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	2	0	0	2
Expected Count	1.2	.3	.5	2.0
%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total Count	26	6	11	43
Expected Count	26.0	6.0	11.0	43.0
%	60.5%	14.0%	25.6%	100.0%

Table 5B

SQ: SRA Item 5: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.418a	8	.037
Likelihood Ratio	17.249	8	.028
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .28.

Table 5C

SQ: SRA Item 5: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.618	.037
Nominal Cramer's V	.437	.037
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 6A

SQ: SRA Item 6: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	9	0	3	12
Expected Count	8.7	.8	2.5	12.0
%	75.0%	.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	12	1	0	13
Expected Count	9.4	.9	2.7	13.0
%	92.3%	7.7%	.0%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	4	1	3	8
Expected Count	5.8	.6	1.7	8.0
%	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Government Count	4	1	3	8
Expected Count	5.8	.6	1.7	8.0
%	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	2	0	0	2
Expected Count	1.4	.1	.4	2.0
%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total Count	31	3	9	43
Expected Count	31.0	3.0	9.0	43.0
%	72.1%	7.0%	20.9%	100.0%

Table 6B

SQ: SRA Item 6: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.069a	8	.336
Likelihood Ratio	12.689	8	.123
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .14.

Table 6C

SQ: SRA Item 6: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.459	.336
Nominal Cramer's V	.325	.336
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 7A

SQ: SRA Item 7: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	10	1	1	12
Expected Count	10.0	1.1	.8	12.0
%	83.3%	8.3%	8.3%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	11	1	1	13
Expected Count	10.9	1.2	.9	13.0
%	84.6%	7.7%	7.7%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	8	0	0	8
Expected Count	6.7	.7	.6	8.0
%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Government Count	6	2	0	8
Expected Count	6.7	.7	.6	8.0
%	75.0%	25.0%	.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	1	0	1	2
Expected Count	1.7	.2	.1	2.0
%	50.0%	00.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	36	4	3	43
Expected Count	36.0	4.0	3.0	43.0
%	83.7%	9.3%	7.0%	100.0%

Table 7B

SQ: SRA Item 7: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.160a	8	.254
Likelihood Ratio	8.477	8	.388
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .14.

Table 7C

SQ: SRA Item 7: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.486	.254
Nominal Cramer's V	.344	.254
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 8A

SQ: SRA Item 8: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	7	3	2	12
Expected Count	6.4	2.2	3.3	12.0
%	58.3%	25.0%	16.7%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	10	3	0	13
Expected Count	7.0	2.4	3.6	13.0
%	76.9%	23.1%	.0%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	1	1	6	8
Expected Count	4.3	1.5	2.2	8.0
%	12.5%	12.5%	75.0%	100.0%
Government Count	5	1	2	8
Expected Count	4.3	1.5	2.2	8.0
%	62.5%	12.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	0	2	2
Expected Count	1.1	.4	.6	2.0
%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total Count	23	8	12	43
Expected Count	23.0	8.0	12.0	43.0
%	53.5%	18.6%	27.9%	100.0%

Table 8B

SQ: SRA Item 8: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.465a	8	.009
Likelihood Ratio	23.072	8	.003
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .37.

Table 8C

SQ: SRA Item 8: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.690	.009
Nominal Cramer's V	.488	.009
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 9A

SQ: SRA Item 9: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	11	0	1	12
Expected Count	9.5	1.4	1.1	12.0
%	91.7%	.0%	8.3%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	9	2	2	13
Expected Count	10.3	1.5	1.2	13.0
%	69.2%	15.4%	15.4%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	6	1	1	8
Expected Count	6.3	.9	.7	8.0
%	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Government Count	8	0	0	8
Expected Count	6.3	.9	.7	8.0
%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	2	0	2
Expected Count	1.6	.2	.2	2.0
%	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total Count	34	5	4	43
Expected Count	34.0	5.0	4.0	43.0
%	79.1%	11.6%	9.3%	100.0%

Table 9B

SQ: SRA Item 9: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.910a	8	.011
Likelihood Ratio	16.238	8	.039
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .19.

Table 9C

SQ: SRA Item 9: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.680	.011
Nominal Cramer's V	.481	.011
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 10A

SQ: SRA Item 10: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	4	1	7	12
Expected Count	3.9	1.7	6.4	12.0
%	33.3%	8.3%	58.3%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	6	1	6	13
Expected Count	4.2	1.8	7.0	13.0
%	46.2%	7.7%	46.2%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	0	2	6	8
Expected Count	2.6	1.1	4.3	8.0
%	.0%	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Government Count	4	1	3	8
Expected Count	2.6	1.1	4.3	8.0
%	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	1	1	2
Expected Count	.7	.3	1.1	2.0
%	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	14	6	23	43
Expected Count	14.0	6.0	23.0	43.0
%	32.6%	14.0%	53.5%	100.0%

Table 10B

SQ: SRA Item 10: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.217a	8	.324
Likelihood Ratio	11.486	8	.176
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .28.

Table 10C

SQ: SRA Item 10: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.463	.324
Nominal Cramer's V	.327	.324
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 11A

SQ: SRA Item 11: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	3	3	6	12
Expected Count	5.6	3.1	3.3	12.0
%	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	6	4	3	13
Expected Count	6.0	3.3	3.6	13.0
%	46.2%	30.8%	23.1%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	6	0	2	8
Expected Count	3.7	2.0	2.2	8.0
%	75.0%	.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Government	4	4	0	8
Expected Count	3.7	2.0	2.2	8.0
%	50.0%	50.0%	.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	1	0	1	2
Expected Count	.9	.5	.6	2.0
%	50.0%	.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	20	11	12	43
Expected Count	20.0	11.0	12.0	43.0
%	46.5%	25.6%	27.9%	100.0%

Table 11B

SQ: SRA Item 11: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.992a	8	.152
Likelihood Ratio	15.923	8	.043
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .51.

Table 11C

SQ: SRA Item 11: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.528	.152
Nominal Cramer's V	.373	.152
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 12A

SQ: SRA Item 12: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	8	1	3	12
Expected Count	6.4	1.1	4.5	12.0
%	66.7%	8.3%	25.0%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	10	1	2	13
Expected Count	7.0	1.2	4.8	13.0
%	76.9%	7.7%	15.4%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	4	0	4	8
Expected Count	4.3	.7	3.0	8.0
%	50.0%	.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Government Count	1	2	5	8
Expected Count	4.3	.7	3.0	8.0
%	12.5%	25.0%	62.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	0	2	2
Expected Count	1.1	.2	.7	2.0
%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total Count	23	4	16	43
Expected Count	23.0	4.0	16.0	43.0
%	53.5%	9.3%	37.2%	100.0%

Table 12B

SQ: SRA Item 12: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.414a	8	.072
Likelihood Ratio	16.283	8	.038
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .19.

Table 12C

SQ: SRA Item 12: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.579	.072
Nominal Cramer's V	.409	.072
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 13A

SQ: SRA Item 13: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	10	1	1	12
Expected Count	9.2	1.7	1.1	12.0
%	83.3%	8.3%	8.3%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	12	0	1	13
Expected Count	10.0	1.8	1.2	13.0
%	92.3%	.0%	7.7%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	6	2	0	8
Expected Count	6.1	1.1	.7	8.0
%	75.0%	25.0%	.0%	100.0%
Government Count	5	2	1	8
Expected Count	6.1	1.1	.7	8.0
%	62.5%	25.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	1	1	2
Expected Count	1.5	.3	.2	2.0
%	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	33	6	4	43
Expected Count	33.0	6.0	4.0	43.0
%	76.7%	14.0%	9.3%	100.0%

Table 13B

SQ: SRA Item 13: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.016a	8	.150
Likelihood Ratio	13.291	8	.102
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .19.

Table 13C

SQ: SRA Item 13: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.529	.150
Nominal Cramer's V	.374	.150
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 14A

SQ: SRA Item 14: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	12	0	0	12
Expected Count	9.2	.8	2.0	12.0
%	10.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	13	0	0	13
Expected Count	10.0	.9	2.1	13.0
%	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	3	2	3	8
Expected Count	6.1	.6	1.3	8.0
%	37.5%	25.0%	37.5%	100.0%
Government Count	5	0	3	8
Expected Count	6.1	.6	.3	8.0
%	62.5%	.0%	37.5%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	1	1	2
Expected Count	1.5	.1	.3	2.0
%	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	33	3	7	43
Expected Count	33.0	3.0	7.0	43.0
%	76.7%	7.0%	16.3%	100.0%

Table 14B

SQ: SRA Item 14: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.340a	8	.001
Likelihood Ratio	28.187	8	.000
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .14.

Table 14C

SQ: SRA Item 14: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.783	.001
Nominal Cramer's V	.553	.001
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the
asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Table 15A

SQ: SRA Item 15: School Classification -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Catholic Boys Count	5	2	5	12
Expected Count	5.6	2.0	4.5	12.0
%	41.7%	16.7%	41.7%	100.0%
Catholic Co-ed Count	8	1	4	13
Expected Count	6.0	2.1	4.8	13.0
%	61.5%	7.7%	30.8%	100.0%
Catholic Girls Count	3	1	4	8
Expected Count	3.7	1.3	3.0	8.0
%	37.5%	12.5%	50.0%	100.0%
Government Count	4	2	2	8
Expected Count	3.7	1.3	3.0	8.0
%	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Independent Count	0	1	1	2
Expected Count	.9	.3	.7	2.0
%	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total Count	20	7	16	43
Expected Count	20.0	7.0	16.0	43.0
%	46.5%	16.3%	37.2%	100.0%

Table 15B

SQ: SRA Item 15: School Classification -
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.183a	8	.738
Likelihood Ratio	5.668	8	.684
N of Valid Cases	43		

a. 13 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

Table 15C

SQ: SRA Item 15: School Classification -
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Phi	.347	.738
Nominal Cramer's V	.245	.738
N of Valid Cases	43	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

APPENDIX S

Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: MST

Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: MST

Table 1

SQ: MST Item 1 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	Excited	Nervous	Over-whelmed	Challenged	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification							
Catholic Boys Count	8	4	2	4	5	1	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	7	7	0	0	5	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	13	1	0	2	2	3	21
Government Count	10	3	0	2	8	1	24
Independent Count	7	2	1	1	9	1	21
Total Count	45	17	3	9	29	6	109
%	41%	16%	3%	8%	27%	5%	100%

Table 2

SQ: MST Item 2-
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Missing Response	Total
School Classification												
Catholic Boys Count	0	1	1	1	2	3	1	10	3	1	1	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	2	1	1	1	3	5	2	3	1	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	1	1	1	1	2	8	3	4	0	0	21
Government Count	3	3	2	0	0	4	5	4	3	0	0	24
Independent Count	0	1	1	3	5	6	3	1	0	0	1	21
Total Count	5	7	6	6	11	20	19	21	11	1	2	109
%	5%	6%	6%	6%	10%	18%	17%	19%	10%	1%	2%	100%

Table 3

SQ: MST Item 3 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Missing Response	Total
School Classification												
Catholic Boys Count	3	1	0	0	1	1	4	6	2	6	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	0	0	0	2	2	1	5	7	2	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	7	6	4	0	21
Government Count	4	1	2	1	5	1	3	2	2	3	0	24
Independent Count	0	0	1	2	1	1	4	10	1	1	0	21
Total Count	7	2	3	6	9	4	19	32	13	14	0	109
%	6%	2%	3%	6%	8%	4%	17%	29%	12%	13%	0%	100%

Table 4

SQ: MST Item 4 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Missing Response	Total
School Classification												
Catholic Boys Count	0	1	0	1	1	4	3	7	5	2	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	1	1	0	1	1	2	4	6	2	1	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	0	0	1	4	5	4	3	3	1	0	21
Government Count	2	2	0	0	1	2	2	5	5	5	0	24
Independent Count	0	0	0	1	2	2	6	3	5	2	0	21
Total Count	3	4	0	4	9	15	19	24	20	11	0	109
%	3%	4%	0%	4%	8%	14%	17%	22%	18%	10%	0%	100%

Table 5

SQ: MST Item 5 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Missing Response	Total
School Classification												
Catholic Boys Count	1	0	0	2	4	0	5	4	6	2	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	0	0	0	2	3	2	7	2	3	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	2	1	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	0	21
Government Count	3	0	2	1	4	2	6	1	2	3	0	24
Independent Count	0	1	1	1	3	1	9	4	1	0	0	21
Total Count	4	3	4	9	17	8	30	14	14	6	0	109
%	4%	3%	4%	8%	15%	7%	27%	13%	13%	6%	0%	100%

Table 6

SQ: MST Item 6 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	9	15	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	1	18	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	1	20	0	0	21
Government Count	3	21	0	0	24
Independent Count	3	18	0	0	21
Total Count	17	92	0	0	109
%	16%	84%	0%	0%	100%

Table 7

SQ: MST Item 7-
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	17	7	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	17	2	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	21	0	0	0	21
Government Count	18	6	0	0	24
Independent Count	15	6	0	0	21
Total Count	88	21	0	0	109
%	81%	19%	0%	0%	100%

Table 8

SQ: MST Item 8 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	5	19	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	9	10	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	21	0	0	21
Government Count	4	20	0	0	24
Independent Count	2	19	0	0	21
Total Count	20	89	0	0	109
%	18%	82%	0%	0%	100%

Table 9

SQ: MST Item 9 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	6	18	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	5	14	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	5	16	0	0	21
Government Count	6	18	0	0	24
Independent Count	1	20	0	0	21
Total Count	23	86	0	0	109
%	21%	79%	0%	0%	100%

Table 10

SQ: MST Item 10 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Missing Response	Total
School Classification												
Catholic Boys Count	0	0	0	3	3	4	3	8	3	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	1	0	0	0	1	1	4	8	4	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	8	6	3	0	21
Government Count	3	1	0	1	0	2	4	5	4	4	0	24
Independent Count	0	0	1	1	1	4	1	10	3	0	0	21
Total Count	4	1	1	6	6	12	13	39	20	7	0	109
%	4%	1%	1%	6%	6%	10%	12%	36%	18%	6%	0%	100%

Table 11
SQ: MST Item 11 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	16	8	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	6	13	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	16	5	0	0	21
Government Count	15	9	0	0	24
Independent Count	17	4	0	0	21
Total Count	70	39	0	0	109
%	64%	36%	0%	0%	100%

Table 12

SQ: MST Item 12 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	14	9	0	1	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	14	5	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	19	2	0	0	21
Government Count	15	9	0	0	24
Independent Count	19	1	0	1	21
Total	81	26	0	2	109
%	74%	24%	0%	2%	100%

Table 13

SQ: MST Item 13 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Missing Response
School Classification								
Catholic Boys Count	5	0	10	3	4	3	5	6
Catholic Co-ed Count	4	0	7	3	8	4	8	1
Catholic Girls Count	1	0	6	2	4	3	0	11
Government Count	3	2	8	4	6	7	10	6
Independent Count	0	0	8	2	2	1	2	10
Total Count	13	2	39	14	24	18	25	34
%	12%	2%	36%	13%	22%	17%	23%	31%

Table 14

SQ: MST Item 14 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	0	24	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	1	18	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	21	0	0	21
Government Count	1	22	0	1	24
Independent Count	0	21	0	0	21
Total Count	2	106	0	1	109
%	2%	97%	0%	1%	100%

Table 15

SQ: MST Item 15 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	Missing Response
School Classification							
Catholic Boys Count	22	9	9	0	3	0	0
Catholic Co-ed Count	15	9	8	1	2	0	0
Catholic Girls Count	20	3	16	1	2	0	0
Government Count	20	8	6	4	6	0	0
Independent Count	15	18	3	2	2	1	0
Total Count	92	47	42	8	13	1	0
%	86%	43%	39%	7%	12%	1%	0%

Table 16

SQ: MST Item 16 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	5	19	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	4	15	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	21	0	0	21
Government Count	8	15	0	1	24
Independent Count	5	16	0	0	21
Total Count	22	86	0	1	109
%	20%	20%	0%	1%	100%

Table 17

SQ: MST Item 17 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	3	21	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	0	19	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	21	0	0	21
Government Count	2	21	0	1	24
Independent Count	1	20	0	0	21
Total Count	6	102	0	1	109
%	6%	93%	0%	1%	100%

Table 18

SQ: MST Item 18 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	1	23	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	0	19	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	0	20	0	1	21
Government Count	6	17	0	1	24
Independent Count	2	19	0	0	21
Total Count	9	98	0	2	109
%	8%	90%	0%	2%	100%

Table 19

SQ: MST Item 19 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Missing Response
School Classification											
Catholic Boys Count	19	6	2	8	0	5	0	1	2	3	1
Catholic Co-ed Count	18	7	0	6	1	4	1	4	2	0	0
Catholic Girls Count	12	4	2	11	0	0	3	1	2	0	3
Government Count	17	10	7	6	5	10	5	8	6	4	2
Independent Count	20	5	0	11	0	10	1	6	2	2	0
Total Count	86	32	11	42	6	29	10	20	12	9	6
%	79%	29%	10%	39%	6%	27%	9%	18%	10%	8%	6%

Table 20

SQ: MST Item 20 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
School Classification					
Catholic Boys Count	6	18	0	0	24
Catholic Co-ed Count	8	11	0	0	19
Catholic Girls Count	4	17	0	0	21
Government Count	12	11	0	1	24
Independent Count	5	16	0	0	21
Total Count	35	73	0	1	109
%	32%	67%	0%	10%	100%

APPENDIX T

Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: PCA

Quantitative Data Analysis SQ: PCA

Table 1

SQ: PCA Item 1 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	1(a)	1(b)	1(c)	1(d)	1(e)	1(f)
Catholic	1	4	10	15	2	3
Government	1	3	10	4	0	0
Independent	0	2	2	0	0	0
Total	2	9	22	19	2	3
%	4%	18%	43%	37%	4%	6%

Table 2

SQ: PCA Item 2 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	2(a)	2(b)	2(c)	2(d)	2(e)
Catholic	7	3	7	9	0
Government	5	3	9	3	0
Independent	1	2	0	0	0
Total	13	8	16	12	0
%	25%	16%	31%	24%	0%

Table 3

SQ: PCA Item 3 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing	Total
Catholic	9	20	0	0	29
Government	3	16	0	0	19
Independent	2	1	0	0	3
Total	14	37	0	0	51
%	27%	73%	0%	0%	100%

Table 4

SQ: PCA Item 4 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	4(a)	4(b)	4(c)	4(d)	4(e)	4(f)	4(g)
Catholic	6	0	4	10	10	2	0
Government	10	3	2	11	5	2	1
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	16	3	6	21	15	4	1
%	31%	6%	12%	41%	29%	8%	2%

Table 5

SQ: PCA Item 5 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	5(a)	5(b)	5(c)	5(d)	5(e)
Catholic	20	0	1	6	2
Government	12	5	2	8	1
Independent	0	0	0	0	0
Total	32	5	3	14	3
%	63%	10%	6%	28%	6%

Table 6

SQ: PCA Item 6 -
Cross Tabulation

Item Response School Classification	No	Yes	Unsure	Missing Response	Total
Catholic	6	17	3	3	29
Government	2	15	1	1	19
Independent	1	1	0	1	3
Total	9	33	4	5	51
%	17%	65%	8%	10%	100%

APPENDIX U

Case Study Profile Transcripts

Case Study Profile Transcripts

Case Study Profile Interview1: Student ID 153

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Excited.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*Every year is a new change. It will be good being head of the middle school.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Six.*
Researcher:	"Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*No. More classes needed.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Four.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Nine.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*I used to do it every third day until I got caught now not as much.*
Researcher:	"Why did you start missing school?"
Student:	*I wanted to hang around with my friends and because it was a 'crappy' day we had a chance to try something new.*
Researcher:	"When did you start deliberately missing school?"
Student:	*In year seven.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*I usually hang out at the park and then go home.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*

Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:
	1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
	2. Day(s) after part time work;
	3. Extended holiday time with the family;
	4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
	5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
	6. Any particular subjects;
	7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*None.*
Researcher:	"You say you deliberately missed school every third day until you got caught but don't now do it as much."
Student:	*I think it's more serious at the end of the year if you miss school. I don't want to fall behind with my work.*
Researcher:	"Are their any issues concerning you at this year level?"
Student:	*It's all pretty good except for some of the girls being immature.*
Researcher:	"What happens when the school finds out you've been wagging?"
Student:	*I get detentions.*
Researcher:	"Do your parents know about this?"
Student:	*Once mum found out and I got grounded for a week.*
Researcher:	"What do your teachers say?"
Student:	*Not much.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes. Classes that you find may help you in your career are more interesting.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:
	1. You were interested in them;
	2. Your friends were doing them;
	3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
	4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
	5. You had no choice;
	6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, & 4.)*
Researcher:	"You seem happy with your subject choice."
Student:	*Because I like sport and Drama...they're a bludge. I don't like theory.*
Researcher:	"Such as?"
Student:	*Child Development and Maths.*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do when you leave school?"
Student:	*I was hoping to become a nurse specialising in the psychiatric area.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:

	1. Boring lessons; 2. Falling behind with homework; 3. Being bullied; 4. Unhappy with school rules; 5. Peer pressure; 6. Teacher conflict; 7. No one to talk to about problems; 8. Don't like subject choice; 9. Family problems; 10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, 6, & 9.)*
Researcher:	"You say lessons are boring – what do you mean by boring?"
Student:	*Theory is boring and some teachers make us copy from board.*
Researcher:	"Why are you falling behind with your homework?"
Student:	*Couldn't be bothered.*
Researcher:	"Do you need some assistance in this area?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"You say that you don't get along with teachers."
Student:	*Some teachers. Maths and PE.*
Researcher:	"Do family problems have a negative impact on your life at school?"
Student:	*I get emotionally drained at home sometimes it's hard to concentrate in class so I skip classes. I can't do homework because it's too hard at home.*
Research:	"Do you have anyone to talk these problems through?"
Student:	*Friends.*
Researcher:	"What about the school counsellor?"
Student:	*Only once.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*Not really.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 2: Student ID 154

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Unsure.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*I was unsure about year nine because I moved schools. I should be okay in year ten because I have made friends and I know the systems.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Researcher:	"Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Four*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Six.*

Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Every week.*
Researcher:	"Why do you miss school?"
Student:	*I always come to school. I only skip classes I find boring.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing classes?"
Student:	*At the start of the term. I can wag without getting caught.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*Wag...go to the toilets and smoke or go to the Glen shopping centre.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example: 1. Day(s) before and after a weekend; 2. Day(s) after part time work; 3. Extended holiday time with the family; 4. Day(s) on exams or tests; 5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due; 6. Any particular subjects; 7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*(4, 5, 6, & 7.)*
Researcher:	"Why do you miss classes when you have exams/tests and when homework is due or don't like subjects?"
Student:	*Because I don't feel like going. There is not enough social interaction.*
Researcher:	"Why are you late for school?"
Student:	*I get the bus at seven thirty so I can arrive at school on time but I'm not bothered with the first period so I go to the Glen shopping centre.*
Researcher:	"Are their issues concerning you at this year level?"
Student:	*Getting into trouble.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes. Sport.*
Researcher:	"What happens when the school finds out you're wagging?"

Student:	*They don't. I know the system. I just sign in late. The school checks rolls at every second period.*
Researcher:	"Do your parents know you skip classes?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What do you think they would say if they found out?"
Student:	*Don't know.*
Researcher:	"What do your teachers say?"
Student:	*Don't know.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:
	1. You were interested in them;
	2. Your friends were doing them;
	3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
	4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
	5. You had no choice;
	6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	*(1, 3, & 4.)*
Researcher:	"You seem to be happy with your subject choice?"
Student:	*Teachers make it boring.*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do when you leave school?"
Student:	*I want to go to TAFE and do a course there.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:
	1. Boring lessons;
	2. Falling behind with homework;
	3. Being bullied;
	4. Unhappy with school rules;
	5. Peer pressure;
	6. Teacher conflict;
	7. No one to talk to about problems;
	8. Don't like subject choice;
	9. Family problems;
	10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, 4, 6, 8, & 10.)*
Researcher:	"What do you mean by boring lessons?"
Student:	*Teachers are not enthusiastic. They don't control the class.*
Researcher:	"If you are falling behind with your homework…have you asked for assistance?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What do dislike about school rules?"
Student:	*We should be allowed make-up and jewellery.*
Researcher:	"Are there any rules at home?"
Student:	*My mum says when I go out I should be home before dark and I'm not allowed sleep- overs during the term.*
Researcher:	"Now you think these rules are fair?"
Student:	*(Pause…No response.)*

Researcher:	"Do you think your mum is acting as a responsible parent?"
Student:	*Sometimes but I do have sleep-overs anyway.*
Researcher:	"How do you get into trouble with teachers?"
Student:	*Because I'm not a good student and talk in class. Teachers favour the good students.*
Researcher:	"Are you talking about particular subjects you like or dislike?"
Student:	*It depends on the teacher. I like Media and Science.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*What's that?*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 3: Student ID 155

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Excited.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*I feel nervous.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*One.*
Researcher:	"Was there a problem with the Transition Program?"
Student:	*How about actually having a Transition Program.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*One.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*One.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Every second or third day.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student:	*Cos it sux.*
Researcher:	You say that school 'sux'. In what way does school 'sux'?
Student:	*It's not interesting and I'm not mature enough. I like to do creative things like cartoons and drawing things.*

Researcher:	"How mature are you?"
Student:	*I have the maturity of a year seven. I should be more mature for year ten.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*Second term of year seven.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*I just wander around the school avoiding teachers.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:
	1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
	2. Day(s) after part time work;
	3. Extended holiday time with the family;
	4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
	5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
	6. Any particular subjects;
	7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, & 7.)*
Researcher:	"You say that you have missed classes when exams or tests when homework or assignments are due."
Student:	*Cos I'm lazy.*
Researcher:	"In what way?"
Student:	*I can't be bothered. I do other things.*
Researcher:	"Such as?"
Student:	*Playing computer games or watching TV.*
Researcher:	"And when you don't like subjects?"
Student:	*I skip the beginning of classes or take an extended toilet break sometimes ten or fifteen minutes*
Researcher:	"Are their any issues concerning you at this year level?"
Student:	*Sex.*
Researcher:	"Why do you think sex is an issue for you?"
Student:	*It's a time kids experiment.*
Researcher:	"How?"
Student:	*Learn about sexual relationships.*
Researcher:	"Does the school know you spend time skipping classes?"
Student:	*They don't know*
Researcher:	"Do your parents know you spend time skipping classes?"
Student:	*No!*
Researcher:	"What do your teachers say?"
Student:	*They don't do anything.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*No. They're boring.*
Researcher:	"What activities do you like?"
Student:	*More of those games. Ya know the stupid ones.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:

1. You were interested in them;
2. Your friends were doing them;
3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
5. You had no choice;
6. You really didn't care."

Student Response: (2 & 6.)

Researcher: "You say you chose your subjects because your friends were doing them and you really didn't care...what subjects do you like?"

Student: *There should be more History classes. I like History.*

Item 16:   "Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"

Student Response: *Yes.*

Item 17:   "Do you intend to complete Year 12?"

Student Response: *No.*

Researcher: "What are you going to do when you leave school?"

Student: *I'm going to get a job at Coles-Myer.*

Item 18:   "Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"

Student Response: *No.*

Item 19:   "Are you having problems? For example:
1. Boring lessons;
2. Falling behind with homework;
3. Being bullied;
4. Unhappy with school rules;
5. Peer pressure;
6. Teacher conflict;
7. No one to talk to about problems;
8. Don't like subject choice;
9. Family problems;
10. School is not for me."

Student Response: (*1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, & 10.*)

Researcher: "You say lessons are boring. What do you mean by boring?"

Student: *Teachers just let kids talk or they talk most of the time. It's boring!*

Researcher: "You have raised a number of issues in relation to school."

Student: *Yes...my older sister is in the same Year level as me. She gives me the shits. I don't do home work because I'm lazy. It's not fair that teachers have mobile phones in class and kids are not allowed. In class some teachers have favourites and pick on other kids.*

Researcher: "So if you have so many issues at school...have you talked to anyone?"

Student: *No.*

Item 20:   "Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"

Student Response: *No.*

Researcher: "Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"

Student: *A ship that carries its citizens.*

Researcher: "Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 4: Student ID 156

Item 1:   "How did you feel about entering Year 9?"

Student Response: *Unsure.*

Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*More confident.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Researcher:	"Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Why?"
Student:	*Perhaps another information session for kids and parents.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Six.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Around three times this year.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student:	*I had work due.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*Year seven. I got injured when a locker fell on me. I missed school.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*Stay home, sleep and play games.*
Researcher:	"You are obviously missing more school than you have said."
Student:	*Yes but not much.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:

1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
2. Day(s) after part time work;
3. Extended holiday time with the family;
4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
6. Any particular subjects;
7. Often late for school or classes."

Student Response:	*None.*
Researcher:	"But you said you missed school when you did not want to go to class."
Student:	*Sometimes.*
Researcher:	"Are there any issues of concern to you at this year level?"
Student:	*Getting a fair Grade Point Average from seven's into the eight's.*
Researcher:	"What does the school do when they know you've been wagging?"
Student:	*Not sure about school.*
Researcher:	"What did your parents say about not attending school?"
Student:	*They haven't found out. I just tell them I'm sick and they let me stay at home.*
Researcher:	"What did your teachers say?"
Student:	*Nothing.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What do you consider are the most important subjects?"
Student:	*Maths and English and SOSE.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:

1. You were interested in them;
2. Your friends were doing them;
3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
5. You had no choice;
6. You really didn't care."

Student Response:	*(1, 2, & 4.)*
Researcher:	"You seem to be happy with your subject choice."
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do after you leave school?"
Student:	*Study Marine Biology.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:

1. Boring lessons;
2. Falling behind with homework;
3. Being bullied;
4. Unhappy with school rules;
5. Peer pressure;
6. Teacher conflict;
7. No one to talk to about problems;
8. Don't like subject choice;
9. Family problems;
10. School is not for me."

Student Response:	*(1.)*
Researcher:	"What do you mean by boring lessons?"
Student:	*Teachers pay more attention to not so good students. So I don't get taught that much. Some teachers have favorites.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*Willing to help others for any reason.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 5: Student ID 157

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Unsure*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*I am unsure about entering Year 10. Sometimes I don't feel confident about choosing new subjects.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Four.*
Researcher:	"Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*I don't know – the information is pretty useless.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Three.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What aspects of school life you dislike?"
Student:	*Because of classes, homework, assignments.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*

Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Three sometimes four periods a week.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student:	*Classes are boring.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*Start of year nine.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*Glen, Knox, Chadstone shopping centres.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:
	1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
	2. Day(s) after part time work;
	3. Extended holiday time with the family;
	4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
	5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
	6. Any particular subjects;
	7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*(4, 5, & 6.)*
Researcher:	"Why you have chosen to miss school particularly on days of tests/exams, homework and some subjects?"
Student:	*I have not been prepared.*
Researcher:	"Are their issues concerning you at this year level?"
Student:	*(Pause...No response.)*
Researcher:	"What happens when the school finds out you're 'wagging'?"
Student:	*Don't know.*
Researcher:	"What happens when your parents find out you're absent from school?"
Student:	*Nothing.*
Researcher:	"Do they know you're absent from school?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Do they let you stay away from school?"
Student:	*Yes. They sometimes advise me to get to school.*
Researcher:	"What do your teachers say?"
Student:	*Nothing.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes. Computers because you actually learn something.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:

	1. You were interested in them;
	2. Your friends were doing them;
	3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
	4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
	5. You had no choice;
	6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, & 5.)*
Researcher:	"Apart from being interested and doing the same subjects with your friends - you say you had no choice with your subjects. But you say that computers are your best subjects."
Student:	*Yes, they are practical and because I actually learn something. I also I like sport.*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do when you leave school?"
Student:	*I've thought about police work or the army.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:
	1. Boring lessons;
	2. Falling behind with homework;
	3. Being bullied;
	4. Unhappy with school rules;
	5. Peer pressure;
	6. Teacher conflict;
	7. No one to talk to about problems;
	8. Don't like subject choice;
	9. Family problems;
	10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	*(1, 3, 4, 5, 7, & 8.)*
Researcher:	"You said lessons are boring. What do you mean by boring?"
Student:	*There is too much theory... I like practical work.*
Researcher:	"You say that you have been bullied – Is this a reason why you miss school?"
Student:	*No. Just occasionally... it's no big deal.*
Researcher:	"What sort of peer pressure are you under?"
Student:	*I am expected to do well in science and maths.*
Researcher:	"You have raised some serious issues about school and you say you have no one to talk to about your problems. Have you tried?"
Student:	*I have talked to the school counsellor.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*(Pause...No response.)*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 6: Student ID 158

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Excited.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*It's good. It gets closer to the end of school.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Ten.*
Researcher:	"Did you find the information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Nine.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What aspects of school life do dislike?"
Student:	*Only some classes but otherwise its great.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Not very. One class a month or two months.*
Researcher:	"Why do you miss school?"
Student:	*Because something may be due or I dislike the class.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*This year. I was new to the school in yeareight but now I know the system. I go to school but just don't go to a certain class.*
Researcher:	"You mean the system of roll taking?"
Student:	*Yes. Periods one, three, and five there are no roll monitors.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*I walk around.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:

	1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;

1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
2. Day(s) after part time work;
3. Extended holiday time with the family;
4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
6. Any particular subjects;
7. Often late for school or classes."

Student Response: *None.*

Researcher: "Are there any issues of concern to you at this year level?"

Student: *One particular teacher.*

Researcher: "What happens when the school finds out you're 'wagging'?"

Student: *They don't know.*

Researcher: "Do your parents know you skip classes?"

Student: *No.*

Researcher: "What happens when the teachers find out you've skipped class?"

Student: *It depends on the teacher. Most don't mind.*

Item 14: "Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"

Student Response: *Yes.*

Researcher: "Any in particular?"

Student: *Sport and SOSE. I am not interested in computers.*

Item 15: "Did you choose your subjects because:
1. You were interested in them;
2. Your friends were doing them;
3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
5. You had no choice;
6. You really didn't care."

Student Response: *(1 & 3.)*

Researcher: "It seems you are happy with your subject choice."

Student: *They're okay.*

Item 16: "Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"

Student Response: *No.*

Item 17: "Do you intend to complete Year 12?"

Student Response: *Yes.*

Researcher: "What do you intend to do when you leave school?"

Student: *Not sure.*

Item 18: "Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"

Student Response: *Yes.*

Item 19: "Are you having problems? For example:
1. Boring lessons;
2. Falling behind with homework;
3. Being bullied;
4. Unhappy with school rules;
5. Peer pressure;
6. Teacher conflict;
7. No one to talk to about problems;
8. Don't like subject choice;
9. Family problems;
10. School is not for me."

Student Response: *(6.)*

Researcher:	"You say you get bored with certain classes. What do you mean by bored?"
Student:	*In class we don't do much. So I plan to meet up with friends.*
Researcher:	"Are they bored with class too?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"You say that you have conflict with teachers?"
Student:	*Only one teacher.*
Researcher:	"Any particular reason?"
Student:	*He is always on my back for any reason.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*Anything Australian.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 7: Student ID 159

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Unsure*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*Okay.*
Researcher:	"What do you mean by okay?"
Student:	*Years seven to ten are stepping stones to VCE.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Researcher:	"Did you find the information useful in the Transition Program?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Not any more but last term a heap once or twice a week.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"

Student:	*To get out of tests or handing in homework. I missed three weeks last term.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*Last year...half way through the year.*
Researcher:	"When you didn't attend school where did you go and what did you do?"
Student:	*Places... park, shopping centres, city, train station.*
Item 12:	'Do you miss school with your friends?'
Student Response:	*Yes. Sometimes I would hang out with friends from other schools.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example: 1. Day(s) before and after a weekend; 2. Day(s) after part time work; 3. Extended holiday time with the family; 4. Day(s) on exams or tests; 5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due; 6. Any particular subjects; 7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*(1, 4, 5, 6, & 7.)*
Researcher:	"You said that you stared missing school last year halfway through Year 8, days before and after a weekend, days on exams or tests, days when homework is due, on particular subjects and you're often late for classes, why?"
Student:	*Can't deal with all the stress school puts on you. Sometimes heaps of things are due in one week.*
Researcher:	"Is their any issue concerning you at this year level?"
Student:	*Not sure.*
Researcher:	"What does the school do when they know you've been wagging?"
Student;	*They call up mum.*
Researcher;	"What happens when mum finds out you've been missing school?"
Student:	*I tell mum school doesn't like me and mum says okay – she doesn't speak much English.*
Researcher:	"What did your teachers say?"
Student:	*Some let me catch up. Some don't. Most do.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What activities do you like?"
Student:	*More sport activities. This semester we only had one sport available for girls.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because: 1. You were interested in them; 2. Your friends were doing them; 3. Your parents/teachers guided you; 4. You know what you want to do when you leave school; 5. You had no choice; 6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	*(1 & 6.)*
Researcher:	"You say you don't like your choice of subjects."
Student:	*My friend Melany did it for me.*
Researcher:	"So you really don't care about any subject?"

Student:	*I don't like RE. The teacher doesn't listen to students.*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do after you leave school?"
Student:	*Be something great so my father can regret that he ever abandoned me!*
Researcher:	"You must have some goal in mind."
Student:	*My sister wants to be a dentist and I want to be a dentist like her.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:
	1. Boring lessons;
	2. Falling behind with homework;
	3. Being bullied;
	4. Unhappy with school rules;
	5. Peer pressure;
	6. Teacher conflict;
	7. No one to talk to about problems;
	8. Don't like subject choice;
	9. Family problems;
	10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, 4, 6, 8, & 9.)*
Researcher:	"You say lessons are boring. What do you mean by boring?"
Student:	*Teachers talk all the time and they don't let me sit next to my friends.*
Researcher:	"So you can talk?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What do you think is unfair about school rules?"
Student:	*I'm not allowed to dye my hair...you can at other schools...this doesn't affect results.*
Researcher:	"Do you have rules at home?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Then what does mum say about things?"
Student:	*She says I'm not allowed to kiss boys and there is no way I am to take drugs.*
Researcher:	"Do you think these rules are unfair?"
Student:	*(Pause...No response.)*
Researcher:	Do you think mum is acting as a responsible parent?
Student:	*Suppose so.*
Researcher:	"You say that you are concerned about family problems - is there any one you talk to?"
Student:	*My sister.*
Researcher:	"Have you thought about talking to the school counsellor?"
Student:	*No. I talk to my friends. But sometimes I go to the school counsellor to get out of class.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"

Student:	*Not sure.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 8: Student ID 160

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Challenged.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*Unsure.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*One.*
Researcher:	"Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*No.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What aspects of school life do you dislike?"
Student:	*It's boring too much homework and not enough holidays.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Six.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Six to seven days a term.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student:	*Sleep in, or didn't want to go to school that day.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*When I started school.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*I just stay home and finish uncompleted homework. Watch T.V.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:"

1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
2. Day(s) after part time work;
3. Extended holiday time with the family;
4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
6. Any particular subjects;
7. Often late for school or classes."

Student Response: (*1, 3, 5, 6, & 7.*)

Researcher: "But you miss days before a weekend, take extended holiday with the family, days when assignments or homework due, some subjects you don't like and you are often late for classes."

Student: *I know because I was tired or if I had something due.*

Researcher: "Are there any issues of concern to you at this year level?"

Student: *Try to score the good marks that allow you to pass the year.*

Researcher: "What does the school do when they know you've been wagging?"

Student: *They send a note to my parents.*

Researcher: "Is that all?"

Student: *No. I get a lunch-time detention.*

Researcher: "What did your parents say about not attending school?"

Student: *They know but...*

Researcher: "What do they say?"

Student: *They tell me I should go to school.*

Researcher: "What did your teachers say?"

Student: *Don't know.*

Item 14:   "Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"

Student Response: *Yes.*

Researcher: "Such as?"

Student: *Wood, Math, English.*

Item 15:   "Did you choose your subjects because:
1. You were interested in them;
2. Your friends were doing them;
3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
5. You had no choice;
6. You really didn't care."

Student Response: (*1, 2, 3, & 4.*)

Researcher: "You seem to be happy with your subject choice?"

Student: *Yes.*

Item 16:   "Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"

Student Response: *Yes.*

Item 17:   "Do you intend to complete Year 12?"

Student Response: *Yes.*

Researcher: "What do you intend to do after you leave school?"

Student: *I am going to do an apprenticeship to become a mechanic.*

Item 18:   "Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"

Student Response: Yes.

Item 19:   "Are you having problems? For example:

1. Boring lessons;
2. Falling behind with homework;
3. Being bullied;
4. Unhappy with school rules;
5. Peer pressure;
6. Teacher conflict;
7. No one to talk to about problems;
8. Don't like subject choice;
9. Family problems;
10. School is not for me."

Student Response:	*(1, 2, 4, & 6.)*
Researcher:	"You say that lessons are boring? What do you mean by boring?"
Student:	*Teachers talk too much. This turns me off. There should be more discussion with students.*
Researcher:	"It seems that homework is a big issue in your school life."
Student:	*The biggest.*
Researcher:	"Have you seen the school counsellor about assistance with your homework?"
Student:	*No*
Researcher:	"What sort of teacher conflict do you have?"
Student:	*I get yelled at for not doing homework.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*To be Australian, to live in the country, to be part of the group.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 9: Student ID 161

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Unsure and challenged.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*In year nine my friends weren't in my classes. I use to stay away from the tough guys. Yes. I feel good about year ten as I will have friends in my classes.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Researcher:	"Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Nine.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Six.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*

Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Nine.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*I miss about once a month.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student:	*Because I couldn't be stuffed going.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*Since year seven. I like to have a rest.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*I stay home. Play computer games or watch TV.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:
	1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
	2. Day(s) after part time work;
	3. Extended holiday time with the family;
	4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
	5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
	6. Any particular subjects;
	7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*(1.)*
Researcher:	"Why do you particularly stay at home during days either before or after a weekend?"
Student:	*I like to rest. Monday is the best day.*
Researcher:	"Are there any issues of concern to you at this year level?"
Student:	*I just think that there are no issues.*
Researcher:	"What does the school do when they know you've been wagging?"
Student:	*My parents call the school.*
Researcher:	"And if they don't?"
Student:	*The school rings me and tells me a note is required.*
Researcher:	"What did your teachers say?"
Student:	*Not much.*
Researcher:	"What did your parents say about not attending school?"
Student:	*Mum isn't happy about this because she says she has to pay the school fees. She goes to work.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Such as?"
Student:	*Sports.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:

	1. You were interested in them;
	2. Your friends were doing them;
	3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
	4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
	5. You had no choice;
	6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	*(1 & 4.)*
Researcher:	"You seem happy with your subject choice."
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do after you leave school?"
Student:	*Something to do with music.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:
	1. Boring lessons;
	2. Falling behind with homework;
	3. Being bullied;
	4. Unhappy with school rules;
	5. Peer pressure;
	6. Teacher conflict;
	7. No one to talk to about problems;
	8. Don't like subject choice;
	9. Family problems;
	10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, & 6.)*
Researcher:	"You say lessons are boring. What do you mean by boring?"
Student:	*The teacher repeats too much. She directs questions to the class not the one student.*
Researcher:	"Why are you falling behind with your homework?"
Student:	*When I miss school I miss out on the work for the day.*
Researcher:	"Do you catch up?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"You say that you have teacher conflict."
Student:	*Only with one teacher.*
Researcher:	"Why?"
Student:	*I talk a little bit in class and get issued with a warning. Other kids talk back and not much happens.*
Researcher:	"Do you think that some teachers have favourite students?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?
Student:	*When someone born in another country comes to Australia and is called Australian.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 10: Student ID 162

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Unsure.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*Nothing, I just keep going… it's just another year.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Researcher:	"Did you find any information in the Transition Program useful?"
Student:	*Yes. Informative.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Ten.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Six.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Why?"
Student:	*I find a lot of people annoying and I don't have a lot in common with most people.*
Researcher:	"So who do you hang around with at school?"
Student:	*Kids that I do sport with.*
Researcher:	"What sports?"
Student:	*Swimming.*
Researcher:	"Any in your classes?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"Do you get on with the kids in you class?"
Student:	*At first I didn't but I do now.*
Researcher:	"How do you think you will go in VCE?"
Student:	*It is more easy to make friends.*
Researcher:	"Why do you think that?"
Student:	*Because we will be doing the same subjects and have things in common.*
Researcher:	"Most will be your swimming mates?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Nine.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"

Student:	*I stay at home or go to work with my mum.*
Researcher:	"On the one hand you say that you have not deliberately missed school but on the other you say that you stay home or go to work with your mum."
Student:	*This is when I'm ill.*
Researcher:	"What do your parents do?"
Student:	*Mum talks to the school or my dad telephones or calls into the school on his way to work.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example: 1. Day(s) before and after a weekend; 2. Day(s) after part time work; 3. Extended holiday time with the family; 4. Day(s) on exams or tests; 5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due; 6. Any particular subjects; 7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*I don't skip classes but if I miss some to help out I don't care.*
Researcher:	"Are there any issues of concern to you at this year level?"
Student:	*Bullying and wagging.*
Researcher:	"Are you bullied?"
Student:	*No. Weak kids get picked on.*
Researcher:	"By older boys?"
Student:	*By other kids in Year 9.*
Researcher:	"And wagging?"
Student:	*I know kids that miss class if assignments are due. Some leave school early.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What do you find the most interesting?"
Student:	*P.E., Science... you do practical stuff.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because: 1. You were interested in them; 2. Your friends were doing them; 3. Your parents/teachers guided you; 4. You know what you want to do when you leave school; 5. You had no choice; 6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	*(1, 3, & 4.)*
Researcher:	"You seem to be happy with your subject choice."
Student:	*They're okay.*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do after you leave school?"
Student:	*Hopefully a fitness trainer or physio.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"

Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:
	1. Boring lessons;
	2. Falling behind with homework;
	3. Being bullied;
	4. Unhappy with school rules;
	5. Peer pressure;
	6. Teacher conflict;
	7. No one to talk to about problems;
	8. Don't like subject choice;
	9. Family problems;
	10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	*(1.)*
Researcher:	"You say that lessons are boring, what do you mean by boring?"
Student:	*Sometimes because I'm tired and I know the work.*
Researcher:	"Anything else?"
Student:	*Some teachers appear to not want to be there.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*When you're part of a community or group.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 11: Student ID 163

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Unsure.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*I wasn't sure of what to expect going from the junior school to the middle school but now I am adjusted and feel I can meet the challenges such as subject choice with year ten. I am quite a career-orientated person; therefore subject selection is important to me.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*(Pause...No response.)*
Researcher:	"Why no response?"
Student:	*We don't have a Transition Program.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Two.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*Four.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes, but despite my answer of yes, the hardest part is finding motivation for large tasks,*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"

Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Five.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*At least once a month, if not more.*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student:	*Either prolonged sickness, personal problems or severe lack of motivation and to avoid handing in homework that day or I stayed away if there were subjects I didn't like.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*Skipping classes year seven to eight. Missing school year eight to nine.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*Stay in bed, or if I'm staying at home to avoid handing in work on that day, I'll do that.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:
	1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
	2. Day(s) after part time work;
	3. Extended holiday time with the family;
	4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
	5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
	6. Any particular subjects;
	7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*(5 & 6.)*
Researcher:	"You say that a severe lack of motivation is responsible for you not handing in homework."
Student:	*I procrastinate more often that I should, therefore 'cramming' is a habit the night before the test/assignment due date.*
Researcher:	"What happens when the school finds out you were absent?"
Student:	*They followed up with mum and made me fill in a school planner.*
Researcher:	"What did your parents say about not attending school?"
Student:	*My mother gave me a talk, but I didn't take much notice.*
Researcher:	"Do the teachers know that you skipped class or stayed away?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Are their any issues concerning you at this year level?"
Student:	*Some compulsory subjects are incredibly boring and unnecessarily tedious.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What are the most important?"
Student:	*Maths, although boring, is pretty important, as is English.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:

	1. You were interested in them;
	2. Your friends were doing them;
	3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
	4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
	5. You had no choice;
	6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	(*1 & 4.*)
Researcher:	"You appear to take an interest in your subject choice."
Student:	*I am quite a career-orientated person therefore subject selection is important to me.*
Researcher:	"What are you're expectations about reaching VCE level regarding attendance?"
Student:	*I am sure I will be more motivated as subject selection is important in the subjects*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What are you going to do when you leave school?"
Student:	*A psychology or law based career, preferably something along the lines of Behavioural Scientist, Psych. Profiler etc.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"In what way?"
Student:	*Psych, Legal and many other science classes would help me achieve this, and I'll benefit a lot.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:
	1. Boring lessons;
	2. Falling behind with homework;
	3. Being bullied;
	4. Unhappy with school rules;
	5. Peer pressure;
	6. Teacher conflict;
	7. No one to talk to about problems;
	8. Don't like subject choice;
	9. Family problems;
	10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	(*1, 2, & 9.*)
Researcher:	You said that some lessons are boring. How are they boring?
Student:	*Some teachers just talk too much. They are not professional – they don't mark hard enough and seem to have favourite students. They let the class talk too much.*
Researcher:	"But you say you miss school with your parent's approval, and you say you are falling behind with your homework. How can you learn if you're not doing your schoolwork?"
Student:	*I know I can do the work... I just lack motivation when confronted with large tasks at school.*
Researcher:	"But you said compulsory subjects are incredibly boring and unnecessarily tedious."

Student:	*I like psych, legal and many other science classes. This will help me get the career I want so I won't miss school as much.*
Researcher:	"Have you talked to anyone at school about your motivation?"
Student:	*Yes. The school counsellor.*
Researcher:	"Are you currently seeing the school counsellor?"
Student:	*No.*
Researcher:	"You say that family problems are an issue in your absence from school."
Student:	*Preoccupation with personal issues affects my work habits.*
Researcher:	"Are you talking to anyone at school about these issues?"
Student:	*I was talking to the school counsellor, but I stopped.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*(Pause...No response.)*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*I'm not sure.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."

Case Study Profile Interview 12: Student ID 164

Item 1:	"How did you feel about entering Year 9?"
Student Response:	*Just another year.*
Researcher:	"How do you feel now about entering Year 10?"
Student:	*I'm going to another school next year.*
Researcher:	"Why are you changing school?"
Student:	*School rules are too strict here.*
Researcher:	"In what way?"
Student:	*Well, if you're late for Homeroom they lock you out, and you're allowed to wear jewellery. And even when you're going home some girls smoke and get into trouble. It sucks.*
Item 2:	"On a scale of 1–10 what satisfaction rating do you give the Transition Program?"
Student Response:	*(Pause...No response.)*
Researcher:	"Why no response?"
Student:	*We don't have a Transition Program.*
Item 3:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Homeroom?"
Student Response:	*Four.*
Item 4:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your Year Level?"
Student Response:	*Eight.*
Item 5:	"On a scale of 1-10 how *connected* do you feel to your School Community?"
Student Response:	*One.*
Item 6:	"Do you enjoy school life?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 7:	"Is the core of your group made up of primary school friends?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Item 8:	"Can others move in and out of your friendship circle easily?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 9:	"Do you find it easy to make friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*

Item 10:	"On a scale of 1-10 how happy (generally) are you at school?"
Student Response:	*Seven.*
Item 11:	"Have you ever deliberately missed school or skipped classes?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"How often?"
Student:	*Often enough!*
Researcher:	"Why did you miss school?"
Student:	*Whenever I'm not up to it, bored, school work due. Teachers are not cool.*
Researcher:	"When did you start missing school?"
Student:	*Year eight.*
Researcher:	"When you don't attend school where do you go and what do you do?"
Student:	*Shops, hang out with friends, anywhere.*
Item 12:	"Do you miss school with your friends?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Item 13:	"What are the particular days or times that you do miss school or skip classes? For example:
	1. Day(s) before and after a weekend;
	2. Day(s) after part time work;
	3. Extended holiday time with the family;
	4. Day(s) on exams or tests;
	5. Day(s) when assignments or home work are due;
	6. Any particular subjects;
	7. Often late for school or classes."
Student Response:	*(4, 5, & 7.)*
Researcher:	"Why do you miss school or skip classes when exams and tests when assignments or homework is due and often late for classes?"
Student:	*Coz I was sick of school.*
Researcher:	"Are there any issues of concern to you at this year level?"
Student:	*Sex... Drugs... Alcohol... Rock and Roll.*
Researcher:	"What does the school do when they know you've been wagging?"
Student:	*They call home.*
Researcher:	"What did your parents say about not attending school?"
Student:	*Mum gives me a lecture, but I don't take any notice*
Researcher:	"What did your teachers say?"
Student:	*Not much.*
Item 14:	"Do you think some classes are more interesting than others?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"What subjects do you like?"
Student:	*Physical Education and Religious Education.*
Item 15:	"Did you choose your subjects because:
	1. You were interested in them;
	2. Your friends were doing them;
	3. Your parents/teachers guided you;
	4. You know what you want to do when you leave school;
	5. You had no choice;
	6. You really didn't care."
Student Response:	*(1, 2, 4, & 6.)*
Researcher:	"Why did you choose your subjects?"

Student:	*Coz my friends were in these classes.*
Researcher:	"What subjects do you think are important?"
Student:	*Health, P.E., Maths, Multimedia*
Item 16:	"Do you think that missing school will affect your results?"
Student Response:	*Yes and No.*
Item 17:	"Do you intend to complete Year 12?"
Student Response:	*No.*
Researcher:	"What do you intend to do after you leave school?"
Student:	*Make-up artist... maybe nothing.*
Item 18:	"Do you think the school can help you achieve your goals?"
Student Response:	*Yes and No.*
Item 19:	"Are you having problems? For example:
	1. Boring lessons;
	2. Falling behind with homework;
	3. Being bullied;
	4. Unhappy with school rules;
	5. Peer pressure;
	6. Teacher conflict;
	7. No one to talk to about problems;
	8. Don't like subject choice;
	9. Family problems;
	10. School is not for me."
Student Response:	*(1, 4, 6, 9, & 10.)*
Researcher:	"You say classes are boring. What do you mean by boring classes?"
Student:	*Some teachers didn't like me. They have favorites.*
Researcher:	"Could you ask the teachers for help with your work?"
Student:	*I guess.*
Researcher:	"Did you ask for help?"
Student:	*Yes someone in the library tried to help me with organisational skills*
Researcher:	"Are there any rules at home?"
Student:	*Yeah.*
Researcher:	"What happens if you disobey home rules?"
Student:	*Nothing much. Mum just yells at me... I don't take much notice.*
Researcher:	"Do you have conflict with teachers?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Do you disrupt classes?"
Student:	*Not really most teachers just let the students call out.*
Researcher:	"Are family problems an issue why you stay away from school?"
Student:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Can you work through these issues with anyone?"
Student:	*The school counsellor.*
Researcher:	"Do you still see the school counsellor?"
Student:	*No.*
Item 20:	"Do you understand the meaning of citizenship?"
Student Response:	*Yes.*
Researcher:	"Can you tell me what citizenship means to you?"
Student:	*A word like any other.*
Researcher:	"Thank you for participating in this interview."