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The Innovation Story

Supporting Home –School Partnerships during
Stage 6 in the New England Region

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The Innovation Story

The process of development over time is important to reflect upon in order to understand why the product exists in its current form. *Senior Success* had its genesis before *Facebook*, before the digital education revolution put a laptop in front of every student, before social media was used as an educational tool and under the auspices of a different state government. The dynamic nature of the educational environment means that in order to meet the needs of the students who are in the classrooms today educators must be innovative, proactive, reflective and responsive simultaneously. The story of *Senior Success* would be different if it started today. It would be different if I had had the luxury of a year or two of research and development prior to implementation and it would be different if it were the primary focus of my work. This project is a genuine workplace innovation. It has had to fit in the swamp of the workplace and within the competing and extensive demands of being a member of the leadership team of a secondary school (Schon, 1995).

The *What? So What? Now What?* structure of this report is offered to provide insight into the processes involved in the innovation development. The data reports and analysis informed each step in the development of what the product looked like; as such they are included in this section of the portfolio.



Figure 1: Students and SSPs working together

1. Description of the reflective process

...on first thought there is nothing provocative to the idea that reflection is central to the life of the educator. It is in the very nature of the pedagogical relation that the teacher reflectively deals with children, rather than doing so unthinkingly, dogmatically, or prejudicially. Moreover, the concept of teacher as pedagogue assumes that he or she is motivated by a caring interest in the growth and welfare of children. In other words, teaching is not only governed by principles of effectiveness, but also by special normative, ethical, or affective considerations. In colloquial language: the teacher teaches with the head and the heart and must feelingly know what is the appropriate thing to do in ever changing circumstances with children who are organized in groups but who are also unique as individuals.

(Van Manen, 1995: 1)

The process of reflective practice is a fundamental element of teaching as a profession. The process of reflection underpinned the development of each phase of this project. It has been reported in this section of the portfolio using cycles of *What? So What? Now What?* with the inclusion of *What else?* when the stage being reflected upon had multiple outcomes. In this manner the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge” (Smith, 1999) was undertaken.

Van Manen (1995) suggests that there are three kinds of reflection: technical, practical and emancipatory. These three aspects of reflection consider the concrete



considerations of economy, effectiveness and efficiency, the reflection on the setting and achievement of goals and outcomes as well as the abstract considerations of moral, ethical and values facets of the experience. Throughout the reflection cycles I have underpinned the consideration of *What? So What? Now What? What else?* with the consideration of the concrete, the practical and the abstract.

Reflection allows experience to gain meaning. It is the cognitive function of considering, contemplating, speculating, musing and pondering (Raber-Hedberg, 2009: 12). However, reflection in educational settings is more than this. It is the constant observation and questioning of the learning experience, what is happening and why it is happening (Van Manen, 1995: 13). Teachers' reflective practices add the constant variable of reflecting upon the mercurial behaviour and emotions of the young people in their care. This is also reflected upon during the process outlined in this analysis of the innovation development.

In addition, in order to share the reflection of others upon the experience of *Senior Success* I have included reflection statements from representatives of the different stakeholder groups in the partnership of Home, School and Student. These reflection statements are placed into the chronological account of the innovation's development.



2. Learning over the life of the project

The creation of the innovation to support the home-school partnership during Stage 6 grew through the developmental cycles that were undertaken to create the core product *Senior Success*. This program is the central innovation. Other innovations stem from its uptake and from interest in the development of the partnership between home and school in Stage 6.

2.1.1. 2005

2.1.1.1. What?

In 2004 I completed six years of holding the position of Year Advisor for a group of students who held some interesting school records. These included the youngest pregnancy in the school's history, the highest number of students prescribed medication for various behaviour and mental health issues, the quickest application to the tutorial centre for behaviour support, the most applications for the tutorial centre as well as the highest UAI (University Admissions Index)¹ mark in seven years and 25% of the year attaining university entrance. As discussed in Book 1, the school was in a low socio-economic area, supported by a range of funding sources which recognised the disadvantage of the area. Throughout this time I had spent many hours talking to parents about what was happening with their students and their learning, talking with students, mediating between home and school, sorting out

¹ Now the ATAR,- Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank.

See <http://www.uac.edu.au/undergraduate/ATAR/>



folders and work, reminding students about assessment tasks and expectations and dealing with catastrophes which to the rest of the world seem like minor issues, but to students in their HSC years are akin to a national disaster. I had cornered the market on tissues, for the parents as well as the students, and developed a close relationship with every school counsellor who worked in the school.

2.1.1.2. So What?

In 2005 I began mentoring other Year Advisors and supporting them in working through Stage 6 and its challenges. I experienced a dawning realisation of how many of the concerns that I had experienced with my group were repeated, alongside how many could be averted with a proactive approach. Simple steps were taken by the Year Advisor and the supporting teaching staff such as, collecting materials for the students prior to an English assessment task which required access to a variety of images, having cardboard and other resources accessible at school and providing a seminar room in the library for students to leave their work set out. This avoided numerous family conflicts because the mess that accompanies this task was not at home and younger siblings did not cut things up and no-one had a parent throw anything out thinking that it was rubbish. It was becoming apparent that ‘something needed to be done’ but deciding what and by whom were not priorities for the school community as each issue was seemingly ephemeral for the individuals directly involved in the events.



2.1.1.3. Now What

At this stage the school was increasingly involved in the establishment of *Schools in Partnership in Partnership* (hereafter: SiP). This scheme was introduced by the New South Wales state government in 2004-2005 to provide intensive support to schools with high Indigenous student populations. The school was in the group of the first 10 schools selected in New South Wales and was the only secondary school in the first cohort. This scheme was heavily committed to enhancing community partnerships. I was instrumental in the development of these partnerships and in the research and development of the students' *Personal Learning Plans*, a mandated responsibility of schools receiving SiP funding.

Personal Learning Plans were to be implemented for every student in the school, regardless of background. These plans were to be negotiated between the home, the school and the student. What they were to entail, how they were to operate and how they were to be used was to be determined by the school community. I was tasked with the research and development required to take this expectation and transform it into a workable reality for our school community. I was also responsible for the leadership of the community consultation, the staff professional learning and implementation within the school. As the program unfolded I was responsible for supporting other schools and regional staff in the process of developing *Personal Learning Plans* in secondary schools. This work has subsequently been recognised as 'best practice' by the *Dare to Lead* project (Campbell, 2009). Elements of the



early research and development that I led are evident in the PLPs of schools across the state.

This research confirmed for me the vital role the family has in learning for all children, regardless of age or stage of learning. It also became very clear that whilst the parents of our community wanted to support their children and were very proud of their achievements, that they did not understand how to support their children or what the expectations of Stage 6 actually were. The majority of the parents in the school community had been educated to Year 10 level or had left school as soon as they attained the age of 14 years 9 months. This was the end of compulsory schooling during the 1970's and 1980's.

At the end of 2005 we were still left with the need to 'do something' without any real direction as to what that 'something' was.

2.1.2. 2006

2.1.2.1. What?

The school holidays, prior to 2006, saw two events which were the catalysts for the formalising of a proactive approach to addressing the needs of Stage 6 families. As described in the introduction, I was discussing Year 11 and its expectations with the mother of one of my daughter's friends. Quite simply she was frustrated, 'I want to help her but I don't even know where to start'. Another friend, also with a child entering Stage 6, was visiting that holiday. We were chatting and she laughed at me,



'You teachers talk your own language, everyone else needs a glossary to understand you!'. My friend is a well-educated, articulate and involved parent, yet my language was so heavily laden with jargon that she was able to articulate the line between the teachers and the other members of the learning partnership. There was a clear barrier created by language and by experience between school and home.

2.1.2.2. So What?

I spoke with the school principal about the issues which I had encountered. We also examined the school's situational analysis that had been undertaken to support the development of *Personal Learning Plans*. The anecdotal evidence was supported by the data in the situational analysis. The parent members of the school community had little experience with tertiary education and limited experience with the educational expectations of the Higher School Certificate. Given the research that we had examined regarding the importance of the family in the educational achievement of students and the mandate that our school had to explicitly develop the home-school partnership, the principal and I decided that we needed to address this situation.

Our school had a focus on enhancing the home-school partnership. One of the indicators on the school plan of outcome achievement was 30% of parents participating in a positive interaction with the school.



2.1.2.3. Now What?

The 2006 Year Advisor was an early career teacher. She welcomed any and all support that was offered to her in her role. I discussed with her my thoughts about an information workshop which presented the students and a support person from home, with the information about how to set up and be organised for Stage 6 and an explanation of the language and expectations of this stage of schooling.

2.1.2.4. What?

The Year Advisor and I notified parents and the students through a wide range of communication networks, including my own friendship group that we were holding a workshop to introduce Year 11 to the students and their families. We decided that we would avoid the term ‘parent’ in the program as we were aware of a number of students who were living in different family configurations other than with their ‘parent’. Thus, the term *Study Support Person* or SSP was coined.

The first workshop was developed to introduce students and their SSP to the organisation required to undertake Stage 6. This included the organisation of folders, adequate stationery resources, space in the home, the use and management of a calendar, the organisation of back-up plans for computer usage as well as discussion around the time commitment of Stage 6. I concluded the workshop with the quotation from Albert Einstein accompanied by a cartoon. This slide was designed by my brother, Gregory Wade as a gift to one of my daughters. It was very well received and has become a motif for *Senior Success*

Never regard study as a duty, but as the enviable opportunity to learn to know the liberating influence of beauty in the realm of the spirit for your own personal joy ... and to the profit of the community to which your later work belongs.

Albert Einstein

The first meeting was held on 21 February 2006 in the staff common room. Our school traditionally had less than 10 parents attend information evenings, yet 46 people were at that first workshop. Students attended with their parents, with older sisters, two girls came with their partners and their babies, two students came with teachers who had volunteered to act as SSPs and two students with the grandparents who were the carers for a significant group of students in our school. There were Indigenous students and their parents present as well as two mothers who came without their children, because pre-season football training had commenced.

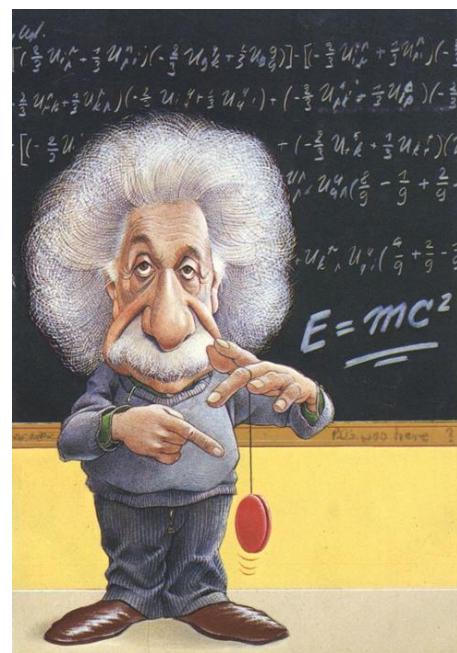


Figure 2: The first slide in Workshop 1. A reflection of the multiple demands of Year 11.



2.1.2.5. So What?

This first workshop was very well received. The SSPs present were engaged and interested, asking many questions. The Aboriginal Education Assistant articulated the tone of the evening with her ‘a ha’ moment of realisation as to the difference between assessment tasks and assignments. This information was only part of an answer to a question in this first workshop. It was developed into a detailed discussion for the next cycle of the program’s development.

There was strong support for another workshop with the topic of studying. This topic was identified after one parent had commented that they ‘didn’t know anything about it’ (the subjects being studied) and therefore was of ‘no use’ to their child. Their child had, rather flippantly concurred with the parent. I briefly explained that I did not know about the other subjects that my daughter was studying and that there were many things that could be done to help without needing pre-knowledge. This was a revelation to most in attendance and another workshop was scheduled for two weeks hence.

An issue of concern stemming from this workshop became apparent in the week following the workshop. A parent spoke to me at netball, quite annoyed that I had ‘scared’ her daughter with what was expected with regard to commitment and workload. The student had expressed serious self-doubt after the workshop. She also felt that the workshop was too focussed on students who planned to go to university and were ‘brainy’. This was a fortuitous conversation, one that would not



have occurred without my unique and privileged position within my school community.

2.1.2.6. Now What?

The principal and I discussed Workshop 1 and considered the evaluations and comments, both formal and informal. We acknowledged, again, the gap between our perceptions of Year 11 and Year 12 and the parents. I undertook to balance all future workshops with explicit information and comments for those students who were not seeking high levels of academic success at school but were striving to simply have their exit certificate. We identified the need to gently encourage students not to self-limit in the belief that they ‘couldn’t go on’ to further study. We also arranged an extra series of checks upon the student who had been ‘scared’ by the workshop and put in place a reminder to take the explanation of expectations a little more gently in the future. The student whose situation precipitated this discussion completed Year 12 in 2007

Our analysis of the workshop also identified that we needed to validate the SSP’s knowledges and experiences, reminding the students that their educational opportunities did not make them ‘more intelligent’ than their families, only that they were given more educational opportunity.

I undertook to plan and prepare a second workshop entitled *How to help someone study something that you know nothing about*. This workshop focussed on study



techniques and upon the work of Gardner on multiple intelligences (Cornish & Garner, 2008:180; Gardner, 2006)². These two areas were linked but also had the alternative agenda of ensuring that all present understood that different people have different skills and could offer different perspectives.

2.1.2.7. What?

This workshop was again well received with some new participants and a group of 5 students who did not return. This was investigated. One parent felt that she was not going to be able to help and that she did not like the workshop, however she did not articulate what she did not like. The other non-returning students had other commitments on the second evening

The second workshop evaluation was again positive. I was contacted by a parent who lived over 60km from the school who requested a copy of the notes and asked if I could run through it with his son so that they could do the work at home. This was the first indication that I would be need to consider an *at home* version of the workshops.

At the request of participants two more workshops were held, just prior to and just after the examinations in early Term 2. There was a decrease in attendance to 16 students at these workshops. This was investigated and comments were made such as, 'No note reached home' and that it was too difficult to get to the school at night in the winter months. One very honest and forthright student admitted that he did not

² These references were not the original references used. I relied upon professional learning and my previously developed resources. I have included this reference for the benefit of the reader.



want his parent knowing ‘any more stuff’ because he was not ‘getting away’ with as much.

We had requested that students bring their examinations along to discuss with their SSP. This sounded like a sensible idea; however, it was most ineffective as the students did not want to share exams where they were not happy with their results. The teachers saw the errors in examinations as an opportunity to learn. The students saw the errors as failures. The SSPs saw the errors as support for implementing measures such as decreasing social lives, social networking and visits from boyfriends or girlfriends. The differences in participant attitudes were significant and led to a more negative tone during this activity. Subsequently, this workshop has been changed and more discussion around the purpose of Year 11 examinations has been included.

2.1.2.8. So What?

The question now arose as to the validity of continuing the workshops through the winter months. After discussion it was considered that we had to decide at what point the support we were providing was worthwhile. There had been strong attendance and interest in the early months of Year 11. Anecdotally the information and discussion was clearly making a difference to students’ organisational behaviours and contact with the school from the participating parents. The principal, Year Advisor and I decided that we were prepared to continue to volunteer our time for even a small group as *Senior Success* was providing another support structure for



those who were seeking ongoing information. The financial cost of the program was negligible, coffee and cake and cartons of milk and juice were easily supplied.

Term 3's plans did not come to fruition in 2006 as I contracted whooping cough and was limited in my ability to work at night. This situation was the first recognition of the need to have a team of people able to present the workshops and to have the organisational tasks clearly outlined. At this point I did not have the program established in enough detail to enable someone else to continue the workshops in my absence.

This group continued on to Year 12 workshops.

2.1.2.9. Now What?

Given the interest in the first workshops, the principal, myself and the Student Welfare Team felt that *Senior Success* was a worthwhile inclusion in the planning for 2007. We deemed it useful even if only for families to know what was needed with regard to equipment, space and expectations surrounding assessment and study.

2.1.1.2007

2.1.1.1. What?



2007 began with a different group of students and SSPs. This group included a group of three students who were living independently but did not include the young parents trying to juggle babies and school. This group also included an international student and his carers. These carers were very committed but had little experience with adolescents in their home. The personalities in this group were very different to the previous group. As a whole these students were a serious group who had the propensity for being anxious about their learning.

The workshops ran with the same structure as 2006, however, with greater mindfulness of the need to validate all post-school destinations and to outline expectations with considerable care and explicit explanation. Also included were more information on the structure of the school's and the Board of Studies' assessment schedule and how to read the assessment handbook. It had become apparent that this document, whilst explained to the students was not fully understood by the parents. In many cases it also became clear that the full meaning of the assessment requirement was also not understood by the students.

At the conclusion of the first workshop I was approached by a grandmother who was supporting her granddaughter as SSP. She also had grandchildren at another secondary school in a neighbouring community, a community with similar demographics as our school. She wanted to bring her other grandchildren along in future. This was not possible as much of our discussion was context specific and there were community reasons that this would have been inappropriate, however, it



did indicate early in the program's development the possible applicability in other schools.

A similar pattern of attendance occurred with high levels of attendance at the first two workshops and then a small, very dedicated and interested group continuing throughout the winter. This group made a request for handwriting assistance as the need for fast and legible handwriting became increasingly apparent to these students. A workshop was organised with partner primary school teachers who came and presented a series of skills and exercises to enhance legibility and speed.

As the momentum grew for this innovation, more explicit data collection was undertaken to ensure that the development from initial situational response to sustainable program was considered and transparent. The comments below were summarised from qualitative evaluations taken at the conclusion of the second cycle with Year 11 students in 2007. I had not formalised my research in this project at this stage. I was undertaking Action Research cycles as an expected part of my responsibilities in leading a new project within the school. The records from my professional role have informed the early sections of this report.



Verbatim Report 1: Comments from Senior Success 2007³

Comments From Participants in the Peel High School Senior Success Program 2007.

Matt ~ Student

This was a program that has benefitted me in study for the HSC. For only a few times a term the results for me were very rewarding. A strong recommendation to all teachers to take it up.

Jane~ Parent

Brought the students and parents closer, gave them an idea for first time parents. It gave suggestions for parent-student study.

Matt B ~ Student

Senior Success brought our year closer together at the start of year 11.

Ben ~ Student

It gave something for me to commit to.

Selley ~ Student

As a Year 11 student the Senior Success courses that were made available helped me to prepare for what was to come, it made it a lot easier.

Mr H ~ Principal

The program was a success judged by numbers of parents/support people that attended. I think one of the successes was that we deliberately were very inclusive about who we targeted as support people. This allowed the school to appreciate some of the obstacles the students faced. If two of the new 3 R's are resilience and relationships the program allowed us to develop both these.

The program unpacked the hidden curriculum that is embedded in Stage 6. It stripped out the assumptions behind the HSC UAI road and made them accessible to all. Students became empowered to know what they could expect from their school, from Principal down, and in turn what the school could expect. The drop off in the number of Board Warning letters showed that these went from being "wallpaper" to being meaningful warnings and that it was OK to ask for help and say you weren't coping.

The fact that it was ongoing and regular showed our commitment. By involving key personnel there was a demonstration of the "heavies" commitment to the program to the students and the support people.

³ Pseudonyms used



Mitchell~ Teacher and SSP

I learnt a lot about what it was like for the kids and parents at home. As I don't have kids that age, it really helped to understand life outside the classroom.

Michael ~ Parent & AEO

As a parent, I was involved in a program called Senior Success. It involved helping our Year 11 students with skills in how to study and balancing study with leisure.

As an Aboriginal Parent, this helped my daughter and me to understand how it all worked and to ultimately gain her HSC.

This program was very successful for the Aboriginal students, who find it difficult to get this help at home. The Senior Success Program was delivered at a level easily understood by all, regardless of their academic ability.

Mary ~ Carer

Our student only came to live with us as he went into Year 11. We were totally unprepared for what Stage 6 was all about. Senior Success not only gave us valuable information but also a time to speak with other parents, the teachers and to discuss issues with our student in an organised manner.

Rachel ~ Year Adviser

As Year Adviser the best thing about Senior Success was that it gave everyone a shared language to talk about what was going on with the students. The parents had a chance to ask questions before things became big issues and I got to know more about how the kids were going at home.

We also were able to plan how to deal with issues before they became big problems. The kids also learnt how to ask for help and that it really is okay to need to ask advice and assistance.

Dan ~ Carer

Senior Success made sure that we talked about our expectations of each other and how we would organise our family to suit everyone and still support our senior student. I had not realised some of the things that I would need to plan for, particularly in the organisation of all of his equipment and papers.

2.1.1.2. So What?

The comments illuminated unsought outcomes, particularly around connectedness and relationships. This led to deeper investigation into research-based literature



surrounding the significance of connectedness for adolescents and for school communities. The professional learning opportunity for the teachers involved was also an unsought outcome. This led to investigation into the gaps in the knowledge of teachers about the learning experiences for their students once the student leaves their classroom. This included literature regarding socio-economic disadvantage, minority groups and school partnership and at risk groups and school partnerships. The analysis of these evaluations reinforced the need for the explicit discussion of equipment, space and family organisation. One of the people who commented on the significance of this aspect of the workshops was a teacher from a local selective school. This was the first indication that *Senior Success* may be applicable in contexts other than the type of school community for whom it was initially developed.

The Year 12 workshops began with discussions surrounding stress and organisation. While these were well received, it was apparent that this information should have been sooner in the process as there were students already indicating high levels of anxiety and stress. This discussion was moved to late Year 11 with a revisit in the Year 12 workshops.

Like many school based innovations, this one was still heavily dependent upon one person for its momentum. This was an organisational flaw that was evident at the time; however, the challenge was to convince already over-worked teachers of the worth of a time commitment based on faith and ideas when the teaching personnel were already over extended in their own commitments and the needs of their own student group responsibilities. *Senior Success* workshops were unremunerated by

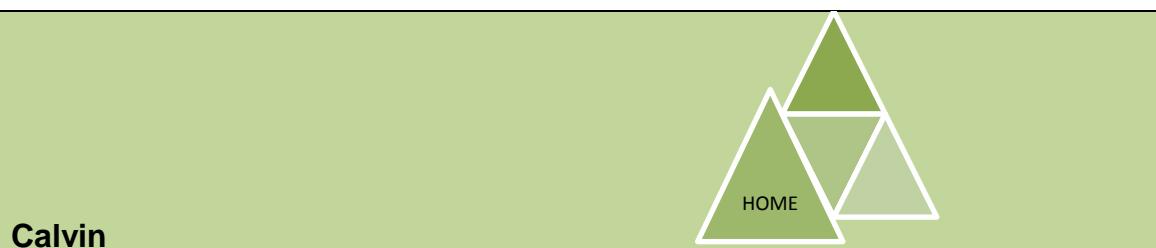


either time allocation or money. Time being the more valuable of these two resources. As such, by 2007, *Senior Success* remained a good school based practice that had not moved into a sustainable system or scalable form.

2.1.1.3. Now What?

Senior Success was an effective intervention if it was driven and directed by myself in the role of developer and facilitator. The next developmental step was to extend the capacities around the program so that it was not dependent upon a particular person and to investigate other aspects of providing support for the home-school-student-partnership so that *Senior Success* as a program was supported by other resources.

As the innovation progressed the diversity of the participants in the partnership became increasingly more apparent. I was challenged to consider the ways in which the workshops and the information were presented in order to ensure the development of the partnership for all students and their support network. The verbatim report from the SSP of an international student not living with his own nuclear family illuminated the experience of a non-traditional partnership structure





Calvin came to our school as an International Student. He had experienced one year at school in New Zealand. This school and his previous education had been conducted in Chinese. He came to live with family in Tamworth who wanted to support him as much as possible. However, they only had small children and no experience with living with adolescents. Calvin's male carer was a teacher in another school so knew about the HSC and how it worked. This was important in supporting Calvin. *Senior Success* gave this family time to discuss what was happening in their family and how they were going to manage This experience.

Participating in *Senior Success* was a cultural challenge for Calvin. He was not accustomed to discussing his thinking and the challenges that he was facing. Attending the program allowed Calvin to see that other students also faced challenges in Year 11 and 12. He saw that needing to know what was happening was not a result of him being new to the system but was a common experience for all students.

Calvin and his carers attended all workshops. They were able to develop a network of other parents and students that they did not have already established as Calvin was new to the community. They were also able to develop a rapport with the teachers involved. Thus there were regular opportunities to touch base with this family and to be proactive in supporting them. This case was a clear example of how important it is to have a strong home-school partnership to support Stage 6 students.

In any cohort of students there are unique cases that require extra support. *Senior Success* facilitates ongoing, proactive and non-confronting opportunities to access support through Stage 6. The support given to Calvin and his carers through this program cushioned some of the unexpected challenges such as negotiating an appropriate amount of space, understanding the assessment schedule and discussing expectations regarding commitment to study, homework and other activities.

Calvin completed Year 12 as Dux of the school and attained entry to the University of Technology Sydney to study Business. In 2011 he completed his degree and is now employed within his field of study.

Calvin's SSP's Reflection

Having just become responsible for a teenager doing Year 11 & 12, without the lead up of the previous years, *Senior Success* helped us understand what the school's expectations and requirements were, and new ideas of how to assist Calvin, and to know what we were going through, emotionally, psychologically and physically were normal of students who wanted to do their best at the Higher School Certificate.





The first session was informative and guided us through some questions to find out if Calvin wanted to work out everything himself or if he wanted us to be a part of his learning. We had never thought of the two options, we assumed he would have chosen option two. For Calvin I think it was good to be able to make the decision for himself and vocalise it. Several times through the next two years, knowing Calvin made the decision for us to be apart of his learning, we all checked with each other to make sure we were all still being helpful and assisting him in his learning. Also knowing that Calvin wanted to be a family member helped us to organise family times around Calvin's study. Another idea to come out of this session was to make it mandatory for everyone to eat dinner together and discuss their day's activities with everyone.

The session on handwriting was helpful as well. Calvin was a perfectionist with his writing; it always looked like a piece of art. After the handwriting session he realized that it was okay to put a line through a word or sentence. Calvin also benefitted from the handwriting kinaesthetic. Learning how to sit, relax and write pages and pages of information was wonderful. It took a little while to get used to but Calvin found it helped him to be able to write the information he wanted in class, home and exams.

The complexity and difficulty has increased so much since I had done the HSC. It was impossible to know how we could help. The Study Skills session helped in this area. Calvin used us to read his essays, when they were almost finished, to check that it made some sense even if the concepts didn't make sense to me. The idea of revising with Calvin also worked well with us. Calvin and I would talk about a topic in whatever subject he needed and he had to explain it to me. Given the fact that I knew little about some of his subjects it helped Calvin solidify his understanding as he explained it to me. The willingness of Calvin's teachers to read and extra work or essays that he did was both encouraging and helpful. Calvin has continued this practice throughout his university studies, 'phoning for discussions about his learning and to tease out ideas in English'.

Getting ready for the exams and what to do in the exams session fitted in well with everything we had already learnt. But the simple thing like making sure you took heaps of pens that worked, sitting up straight and relaxing benefitted on the exam day. Also the basic things like trying to find something for breakfast that was both nutritious and bland enough to be eaten with all the exam nerves became invaluable. This ended up being the staple for many mornings and a few evening meals as well.

Senior Success made a huge difference for us. I know that we were in a different situation to most families, but this probably made each workshop of extra value for us as we negotiated the HSC with a young person who we had not raised and who was negotiating many cultural and social differences.



2.1.2. 2008

2.1.2.1. What?

Senior Success was now integrated in to the school improvement plan. It had been part of the school community for two years and the principal and I had the perception that people ‘knew what was going on’. This was an erroneous assumption, which in hindsight was ill-considered. The reason why we needed to develop the program was because of the paradox of the ephemeral yet enduring issues of Stage 6. Of course the new Year 11 students were not familiar with the *Senior Success* program; they had had no reason to listen to announcements for Year 11 when they were in Year 10. The new Year Advisor knew that we held *Senior Success* workshops, but had been focussed on her responsibilities associated with the completion of Stage 5. Unfortunately, we did not advertise as we had done in previous years nor did we contact people who we felt may not receive messages from traditional sources of information such as notes sent home. Subsequently, a very small group of 10 students and their SSPs attended the first workshop of 2008, a group primarily of students with older brothers and sisters who already knew about the *Senior Success* program plus students who were high achievers or with special needs.

2.1.2.2. So What?

The low attendance at the first workshop required careful analysis and evaluation. The principal, Year Advisor and I discussed the reasons for the low attendance and



whether or not the program was applicable for this group. The decision was made to continue with the workshops as there were participants attending who were in need of additional support. This included at student with Asperger's Syndrome who was in need of organisational and management skills development and support. Whilst the program was not intended to meet the needs of students with specific additional needs, the areas of focus of *Senior Success* were particularly pertinent for this student. The 2008 team therefore decided to continue with the program as it was a means of proactively assisting this student and providing an opportunity for other students who were interested to gain additional support alongside their SSPs. Those who did attend clearly valued the opportunity and continued into the winter months. Whilst this was a small group, it was a very committed group of participants.

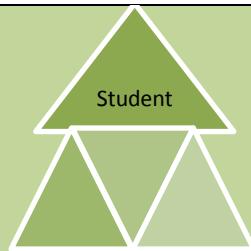
2.1.2.3. Now What

There were questions from 2008 regarding the ongoing value of the *Senior Success* program. Each meeting we asked if the participants wanted to continue and if the next topic was meeting their needs. This always met with an affirmative. In order to ascertain why so few parents and students attended, the Year Advisor and I undertook to ask, informally, any parent or carer who we had contact with in other contexts, why they had not participated. Invariably the answer was 'I didn't know about it'. Of note was a comment made from one of the parents of this year group during Focus Group A. This parent suggested that the school should have regular meetings with the parents and the students to make sure that 'everyone is on the same page'. She had been oblivious to the opportunities that had been offered. It was very much a case of 'you don't know what you don't know'. Subsequently, when



the program moved from school based to a regionally offered program there was an emphasis on communicating the availability of *Senior Success* to the community via a variety of avenues.

Verbatim Report 3 Mainstream Student – From student perspective



Keya's Story

Keya typifies the students for whom *Senior Success* was originally designed to support. She was, and continues to be, a capable and committed student. Her father drives trucks and her mother manages a chicken hatchery, neither of them have a HSC. Both of her parents are supportive and interested people who did everything possible to assist their daughter during her final years of school. It was knowing what to do to help that was the challenge for them. Keya was dux of her year, school captain and currently holds a Teach NSW scholarship with the Department of Education and Communities. She is studying to become an English teacher.

Keya's Reflection

The senior years of high school are often synonymous with anxiety, stress and high expectations. For me, it was no different and coming from a small, rural school- I felt an enormous amount of pressure. I found it hard to communicate the stress I was feeling to my parents, as neither had completed year twelve, or had a large knowledge base on the subjects I had chosen to study.

It was the implementation of the '*Senior Success*' program at my school that helped to turn this lack of communication and feelings of anxiety around. My mother and I attended the small meeting at my school, where the program was outlined and the lines of communication between me, my parents and the school were immediately opened. The meeting gave everyone a chance to discuss how parents could help their children- even when the content of what they were studying was unfamiliar to them.

This *Senior Success* program gave me the capability to be confident in my abilities, and helped me to learn how I could maximise my efficiency and





success both in school hours and out. The program enabled me to be independent, although wise about when and who I needed to speak to if I needed guidance throughout my senior years. This program provided me with the tools I needed, both academically and emotionally to be able to reach my goal of tertiary study.

While many of my year group did not attend the initial meeting, those who did found it became an invaluable part of school and home life. The program was instrumental in my success in the HSC, and because of this, I was able to achieve my goal of getting accepted into university.

The 'Senior Success' program at my school provided both the students and parents with positive ways to interact and maximise the success of our senior years. This program guided me through the most stressful two years of my schooling, and helped me to achieve to my full capabilities.

2.1.2.4. What?

The challenges of marrying research and a professional life is that the professional life is dynamic and change can occur unexpectedly and quickly. Subsequently the path of the research can take unexpected turns as it follows emerging professional opportunities. In July 2008, the New England Region advertised for a Positive Learning Initiatives Project Officer to lead the introduction of Positive Behaviour for Learning in the region. PBL is the New South Wales adaptation of Positive Behavior Intervention Systems; PBIS (Sugai, Horner, & Lewis, 2011), a whole school approach to the management of academic and social competence. It is a significant change to the philosophy underpinning many of the school's management systems. This role offered me Deputy Principal status, an opportunity for extensive professional development, access to a wide range of schools and an innovative leadership position. The appointment to this position was on merit, and I commenced my duties in August 2008.



2.1.2.5. So What?

I was now part of the New England Region's Student Services team. My responsibilities were to lead PBL implementation, co-ordinate Essential Skills for Classroom Management and contribute to the achievement of goals set in the Regional Plan. As the Regional Plan had a mandate for the improvement of home-school partnerships, I developed a presentation about *Senior Success* for my supervisor who felt that it had potential for implementation in other schools in the Region.

2.1.2.6. Now What?

As *Senior Success* was developed explicitly for a Priority Schools Program (PSP) school, a low SES community, I approached the PSP consultants and asked them to read and critique the workshops that had been developed for Peel High School. I also asked the Later Years consultants to read and critique the workshops. Both of these teams concurred that the workshops would be beneficial to a range of school communities, particularly those with PSP funding.

The New England Region's Marketing Manager assisted me to prepare a brochure about the program and a set of information flyer (See Appendix 2.1). The combined consultants' and extended Student Services Team meeting was the first opportunity that I had to begin marketing *Senior Success*. This meeting included workshop sessions where innovations or training opportunities were shared. This stimulated the first interest in the facilitator's training. I also gave the brochure and the



information to the schools I was visiting and sent information to contacts in other schools.

2.1.2.7. What?

I now focussed upon developing the training package for facilitators and creating the resources so that the presentation of *Senior Success* was as smooth and as simple as possible. I created a package that included all copies and templates of notes home, all roll call notices, information sheets, check lists for organisation, worksheets, evaluation tools and a presentation suitable for staff meetings in order to inform the teaching staff of the program and its structure and expectations. This package was explicit and extensive, aiming at minimising the tasks that the facilitator had to undertake in order to organise and manage the program. See Workshops.⁴

The first facilitator training was held at West Tamworth Public School on November 29 2008 via video conference and with face to face participants. There were twelve participants from six schools. The evaluations from this workshop were very positive. As indicated by the evaluation graphs, there was a significant growth in knowledge and understanding as well as high satisfaction scores. The tool used was the standard evaluation tool used for the Positive Learning Initiatives and all PBL training. See Appendix 2.2.

⁴⁴ This document and all other workshops are accessible via an *Edmodo* group. This is an education based social media site.



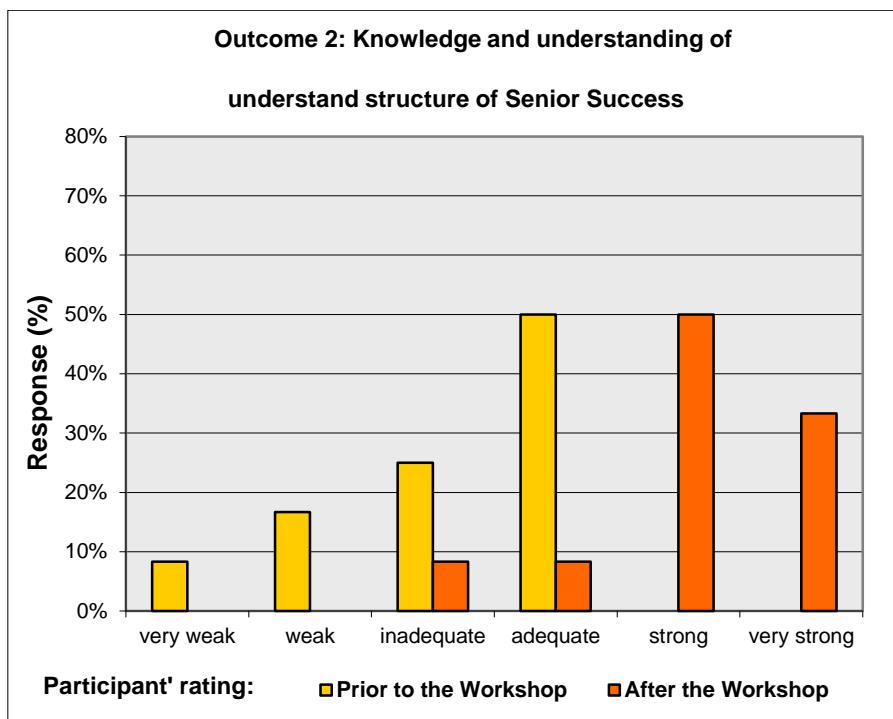
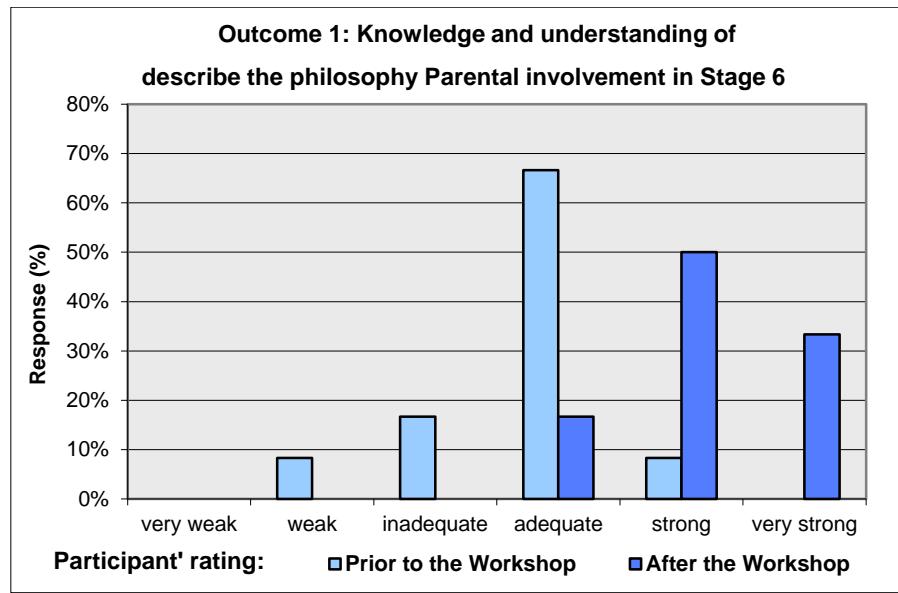


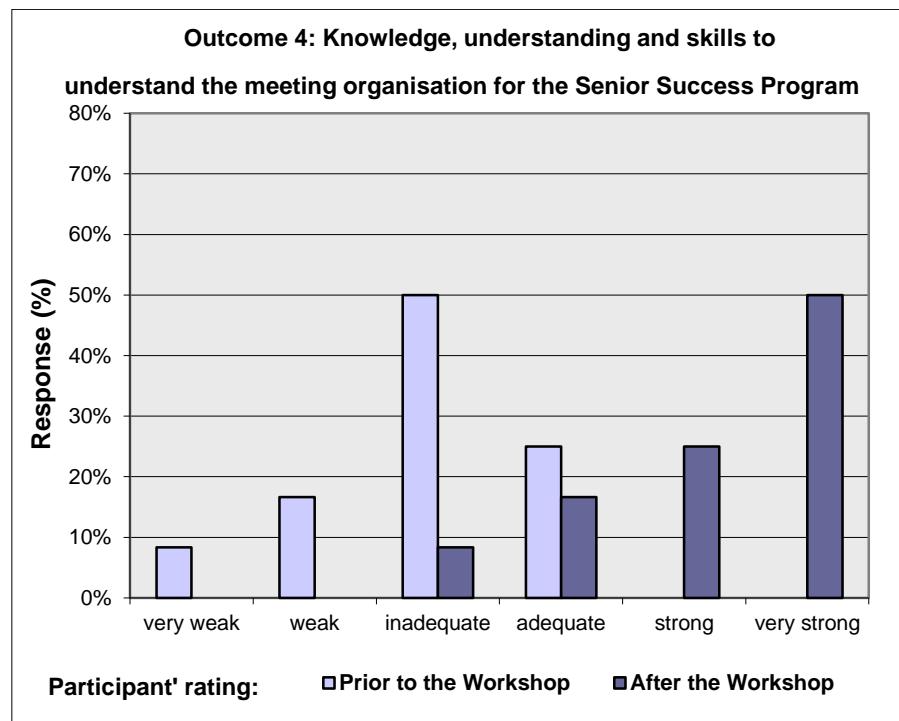
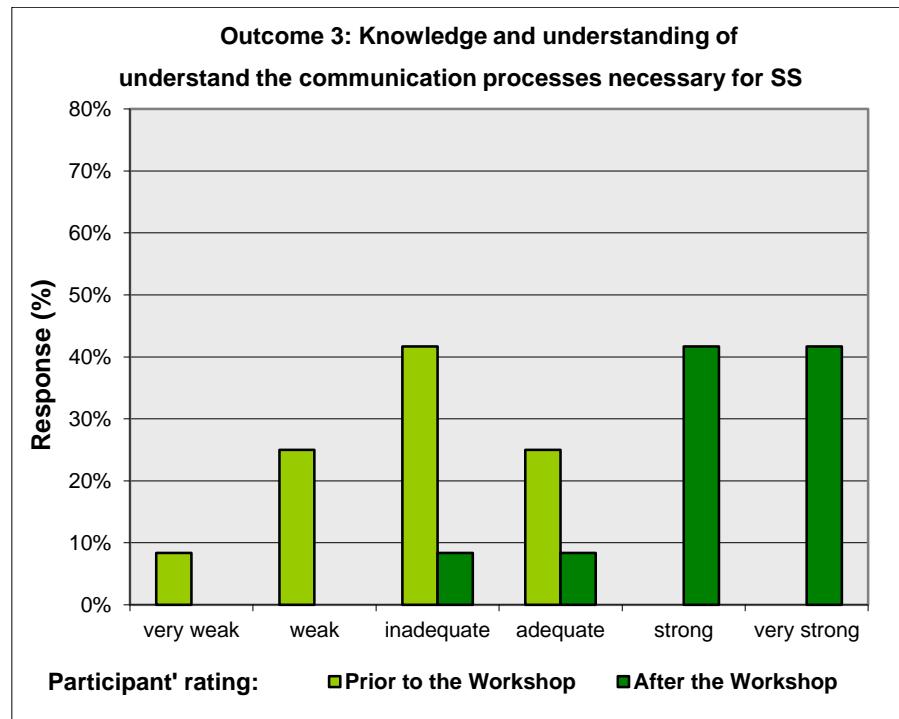
This data tool was developed by Western Sydney Positive Behaviour for Learning Team and used by the Student Services Team in the New England Region to evaluate and inform the development of the Positive Learning Initiatives. The data is collected in a comparative 5 point Likert scale that indicates the participants' self-evaluation of their learning for key outcomes. A satisfaction rating is indicated on a 1 to 6 scale, 1 being 'not valuable' and 6 being 'very valuable'.

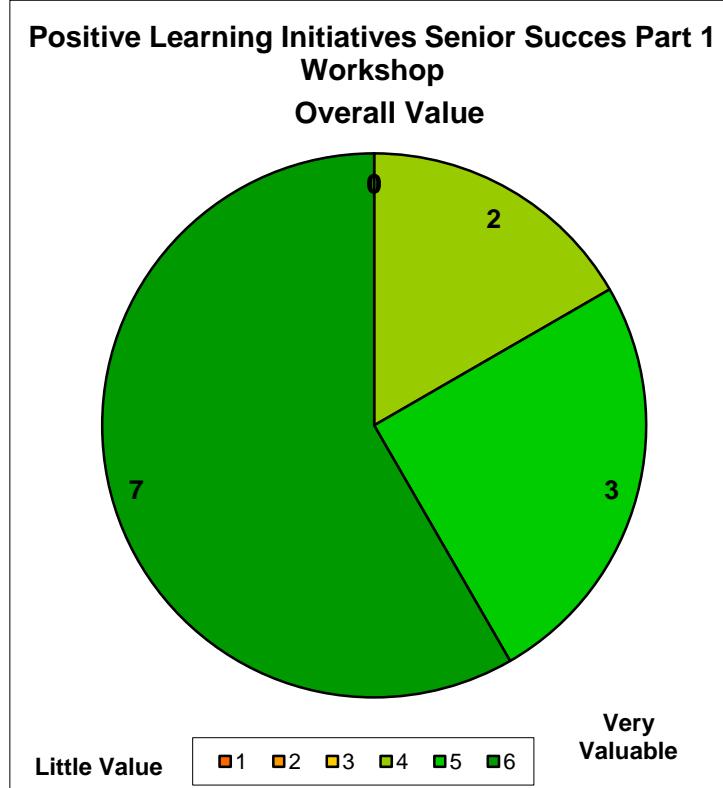
Three questions are then posed to the participant concerning the most valuable aspect of the learning experience, the actions that are planned after the workshop and suggestions for further support. There are three YES/NO questions regarding satisfaction, usefulness and whether or not the participant would recommend the workshop to someone else



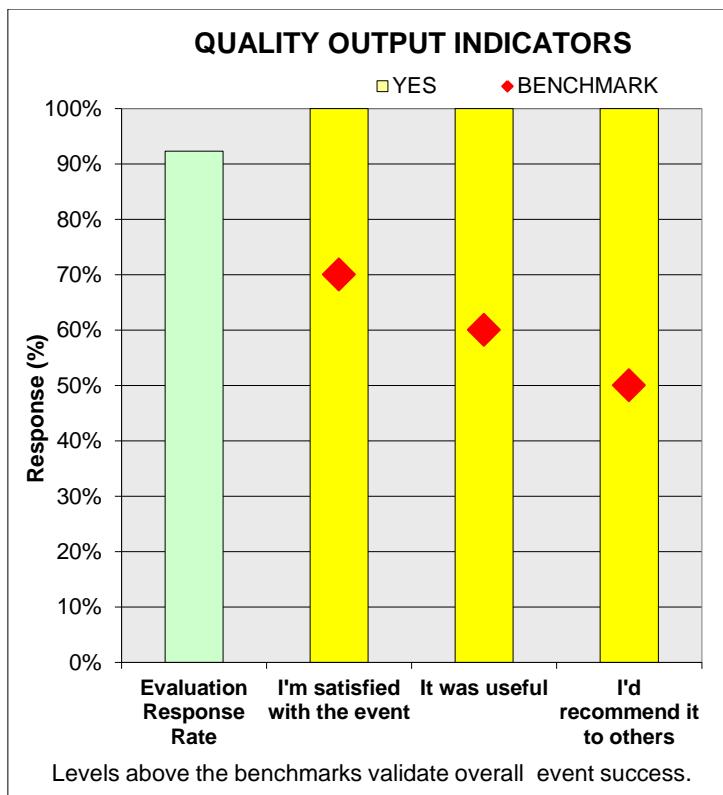
Figure 3: Evaluation from Teacher Professional Learning







The number in the pie chart indicates the number of participants with that response.





2.1.2.8. What else?

The evaluations of the twelve participants were discussed with my supervisor and we agreed that we should continue to develop and support *Senior Success* in the New England Region. She also agreed that the research validation of the program and other aspects of the support of Stage 6 families and students were imperative. Thus, the path of this research was able to extend beyond that of an innovation for a particular school context into a regional context.

It was at this stage that important decisions had to be made about the way in which the actual workshops were created and supported. I consulted with the ICT consultant and with the consultants responsible for professional learning in the area of technology. They were able to show me some exciting and innovative ways to present the workshops, using a full range of programs and interactive technology. I then discussed these ideas with people in schools who would be presenting the workshops and found that they were not all confident with the new opportunities for interactive and 'fancy' (quote from a colleague) ways of presenting workshops. The consensus was that if it was fancy then there were too many things that can go wrong. Thus, I created the simplest possible PowerPoints and other resources so that those with the confidence to add extra effects, sound, film clips and so forth, could do so and those who were not as confident could be assured that they could use all resources with ease.



2.1.3. 2009

2.1.3.1. What?

2009 saw the first implementations of *Senior Success* in schools with presenters who were not the developer. I remained in close contact with each facilitator, checking on their progress and supporting them with ideas and answers to their questions. I collected detailed evaluations from the schools in this first group in order to examine how the program was received and what suggestions participants had to improve the program.

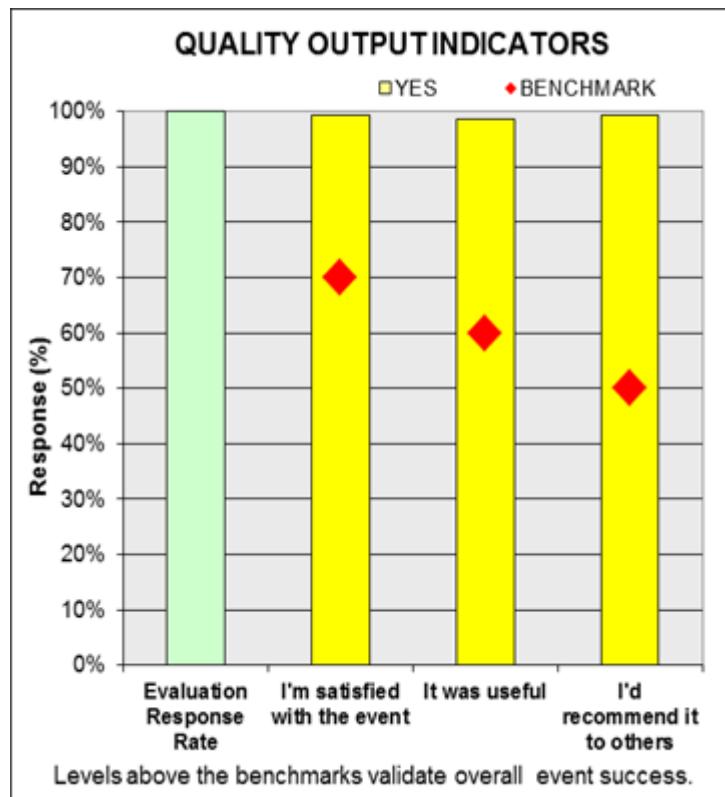
Using the same evaluation tool as was being used to evaluate professional learning for teachers I collected data regarding the learning that the students and their SSPs were receiving. Data were collected from four schools. It was then mixed so that the impact of an individual personality upon the reception of the workshop would be diluted. Some of the presenters were people with whom the students had a relationship which meant that they had a sense of loyalty to that person. I was concerned that this may skew the data. I used the surveys as an analysis group. 137 surveys were analysed. 66 surveys completed by students and 71 by the study support people (parents, carers, friends and teachers).

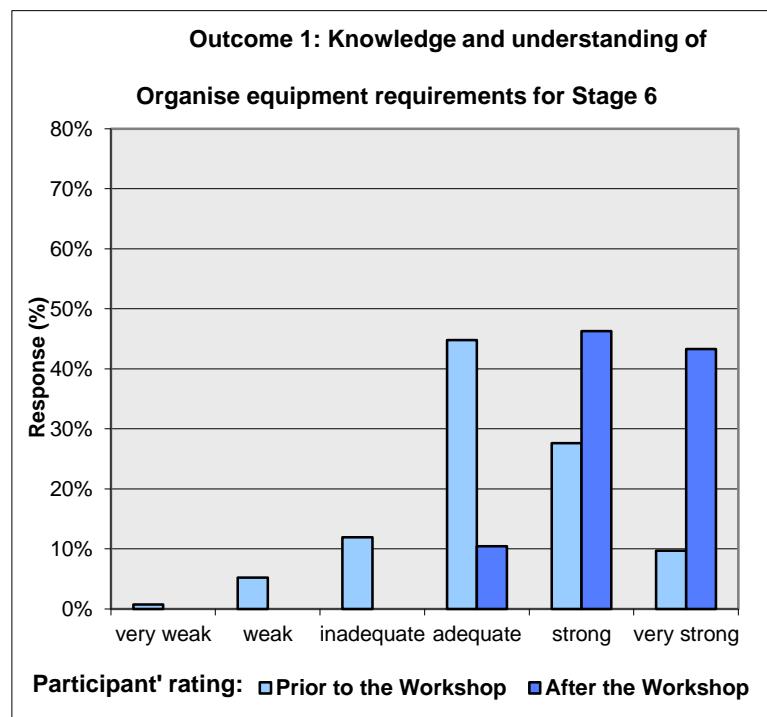
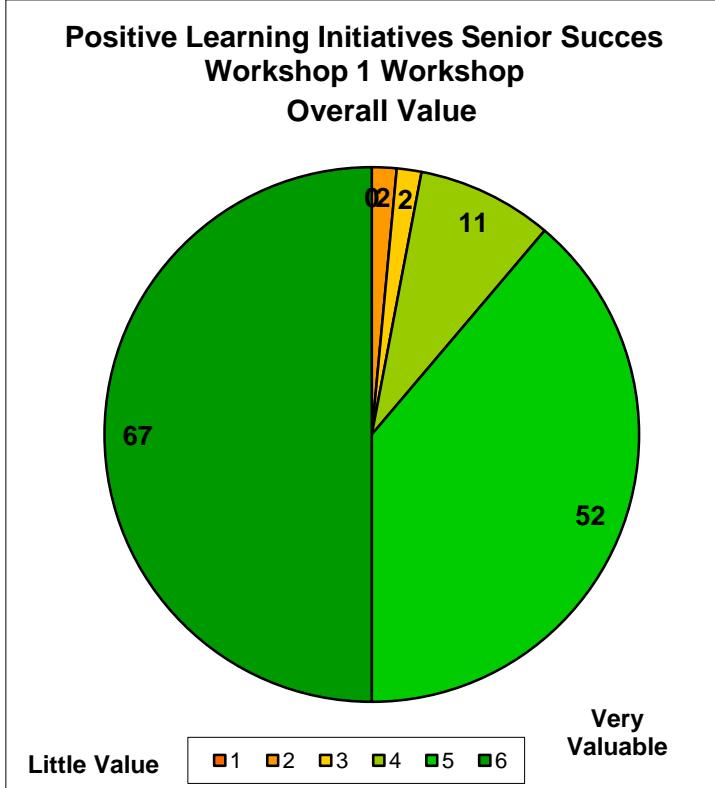
The data below indicate that the workshops were perceived as offering significant learning and high levels of satisfaction.

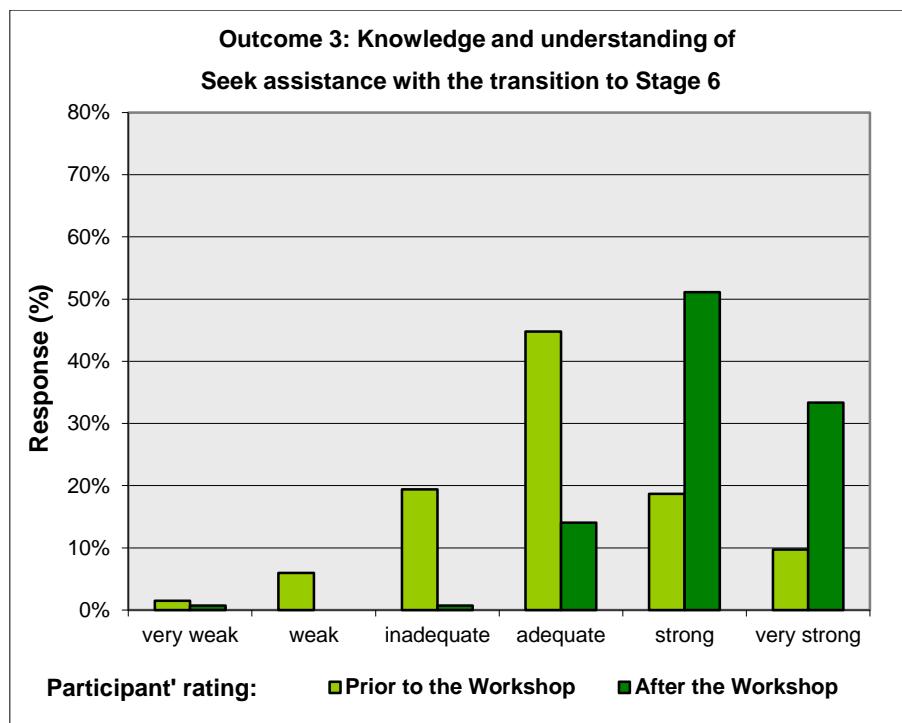
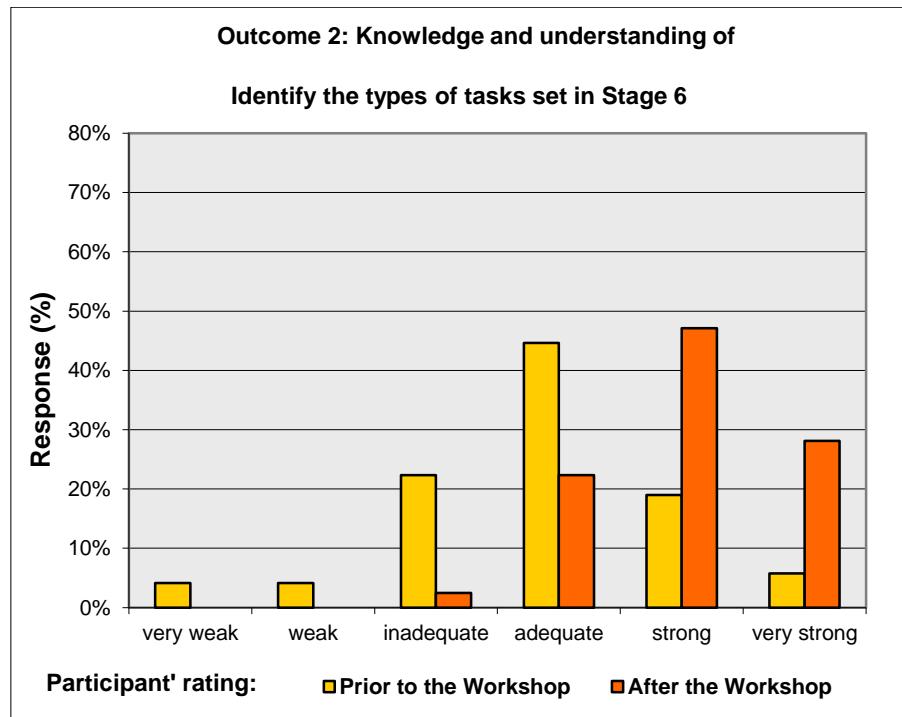


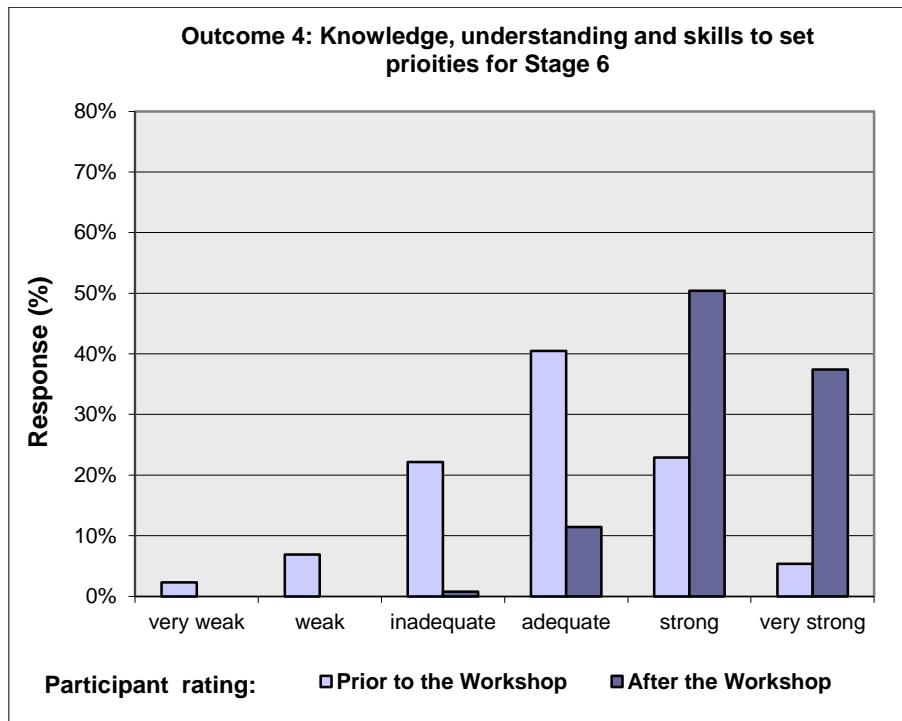
The report of those evaluations was essential in informing the ongoing development of the program.

Figure 4: Evaluations from all Participants in Senior Success 2009 Workshops









2.1.3.2. Responses to this data

The responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with Workshop 1. The aim of the workshop is to ensure that all participants score their exit knowledge and understanding in the adequate range or above. The indicators on Outcome 2, *understanding the different types of tasks set in Stage 6* was not at a unanimous level of high understanding. This is an area of significance in Stage 6 study and the desired outcome is that all participants have either strong or very strong understanding of this outcome. Subsequently the workshop was adjusted to enhance the discussion and learning around this point.

In future workshops the facilitator was encouraged to take in different types of tasks and to give more explicit teaching around the impact of each type of task upon learning and upon final results. An analogy was also added to the presentation



considering how a sport season unfolds and the need for fitness training, skills training and the games during the season leading up to a grand-final. The analogy was then drawn with study, homework, assessment tasks and the final examinations and the reminder that should the game not go as planned that there is always 'next season'.

Figure 5: Examples of added slides after evaluations were considered.

Think of it like this...

- The HSC is the grand final game.
- Assessment tasks are the games through the season.
- Assignments are your skills training.
- Homework is your fitness training.
- Study is your personal training.



BUT REMEMBER...

- There is always next season if this season wasn't what you were hoping for!

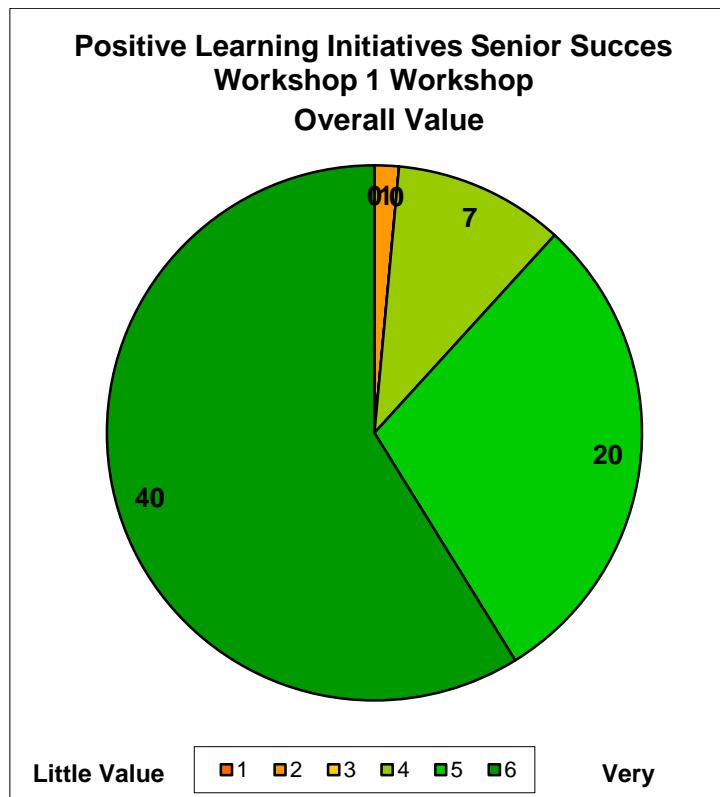
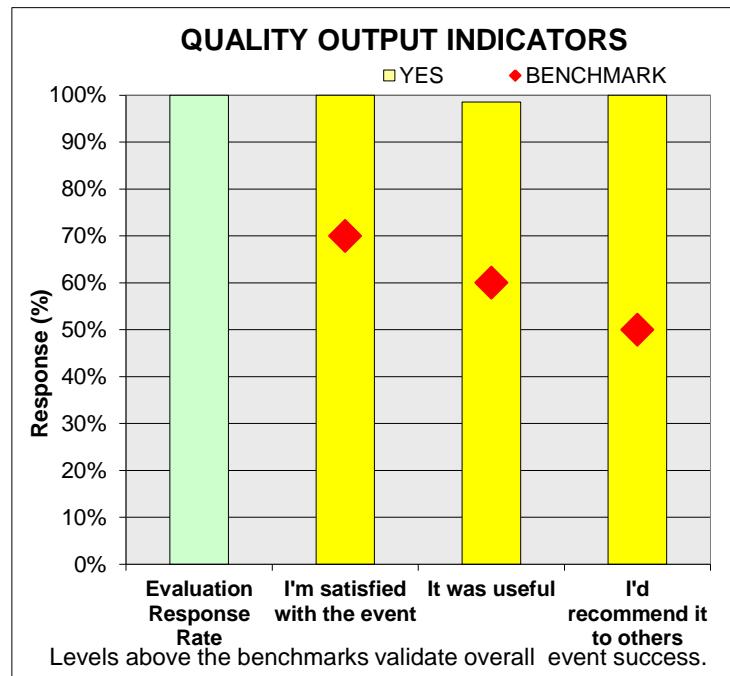


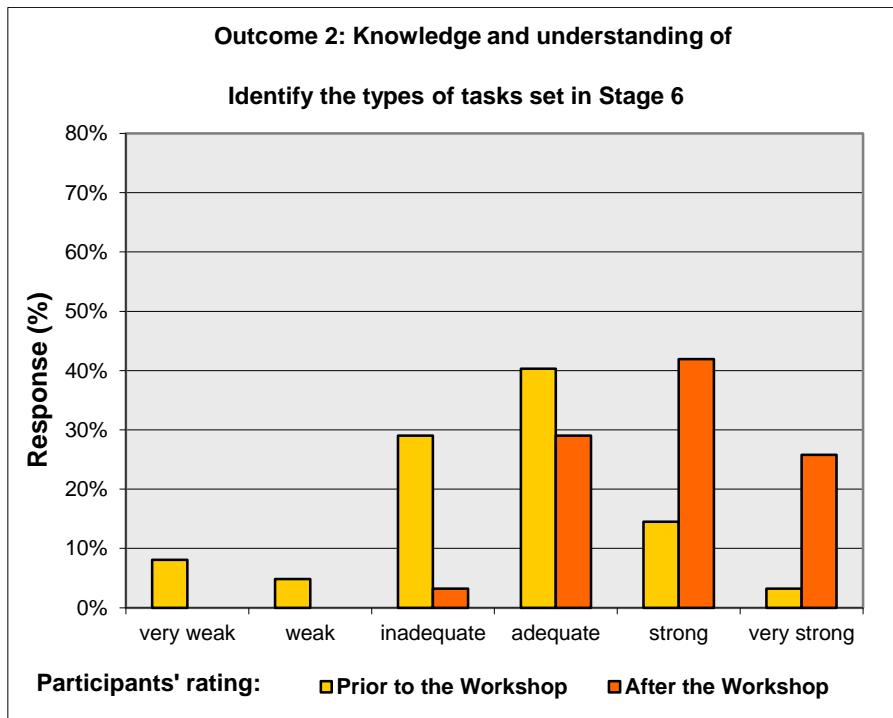
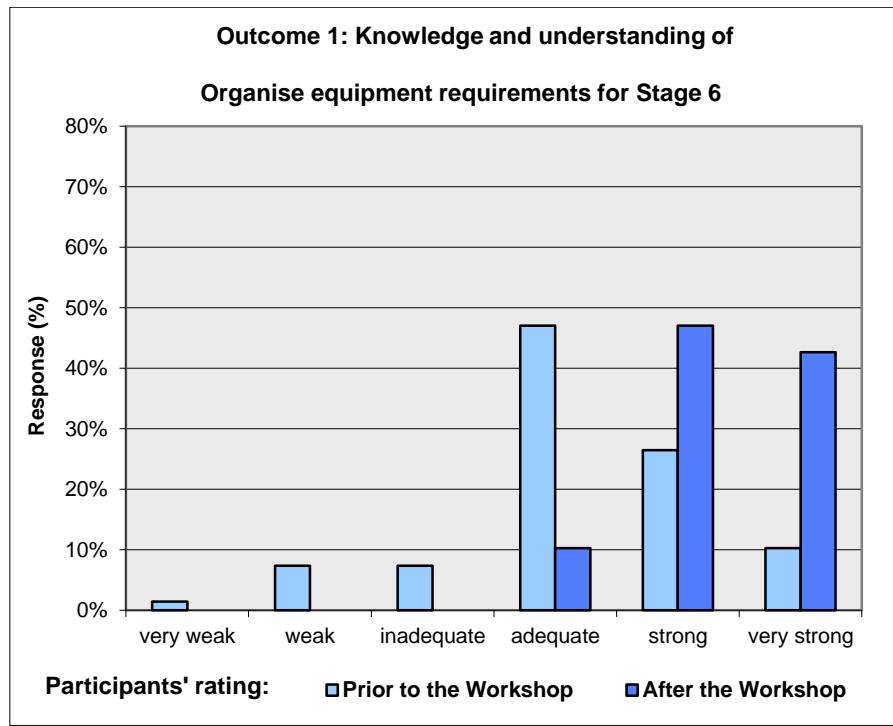
The data were then analysed as presented by the Study Support People as they are not exposed to the learning about these outcomes in other forums, such as the classroom and Year meetings, avenues by which the students should also be receiving all of the information discussed in Workshop 1. The SSP could be assumed to have not been exposed to recent prior learning and so the value of the workshop needed to be considered from their perspective.

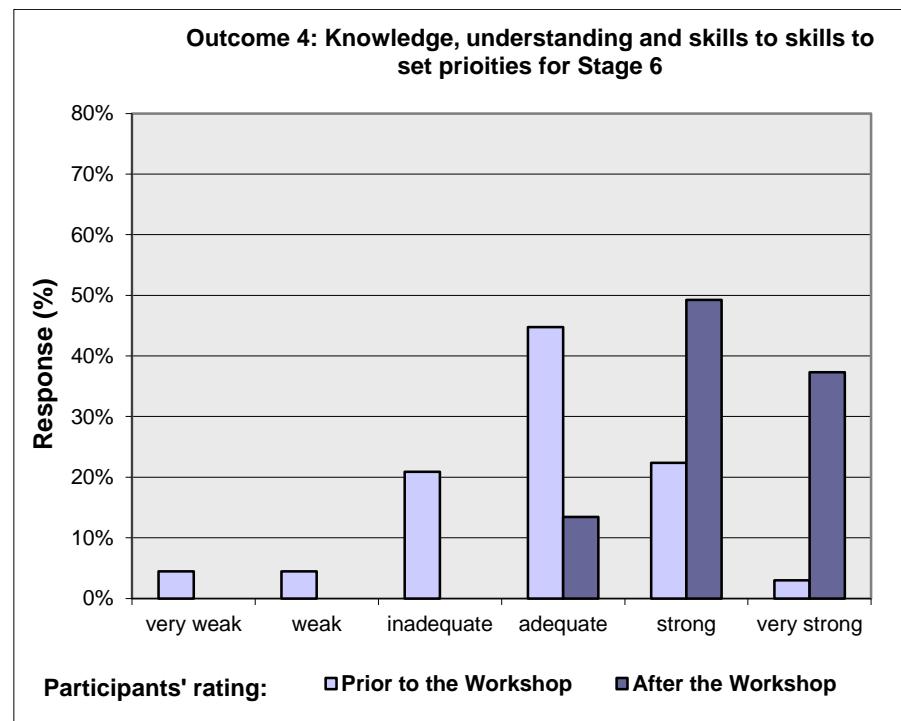
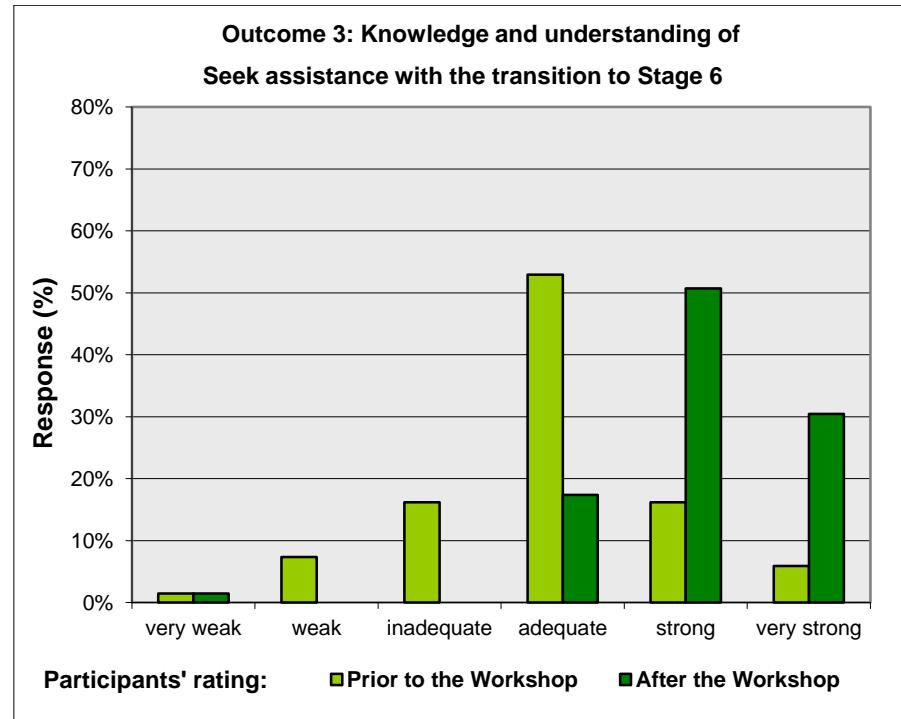
⁵ South Sydney NRL team was experiencing a resurgence at the time this slide was produced. It will require contextual alterations.



Figure 6: Evaluation of Workshop by SSPs







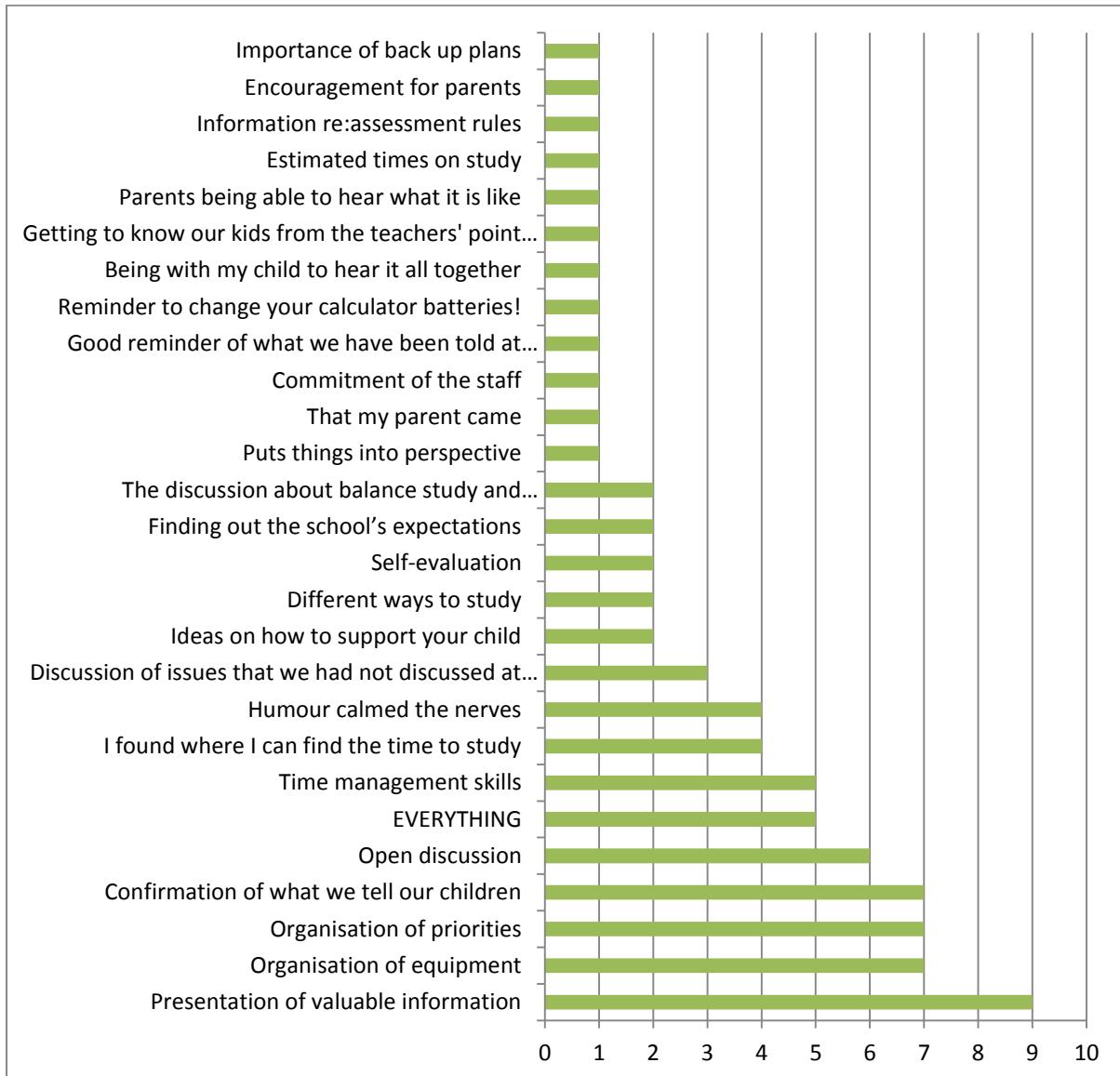
The aim of the workshop of ensuring that exit knowledge and understanding was at adequate level or above was apparent in three outcomes. The lower response to the fourth outcome was addressed in the next workshop. The growth in strong and very



strong understanding and knowledge indicated that the workshop was meeting the needs of the audience and was providing the information and learning intended.

The evaluations also included qualitative data. Both student and SSP data was analysed. These data were grouped for frequency of repetition of comment.

Figure 7: Significant aspects of Senior Success Workshop 1



The high frequency comments were around the issues discussed during the workshops and the concrete information imparted that gave families the tools to

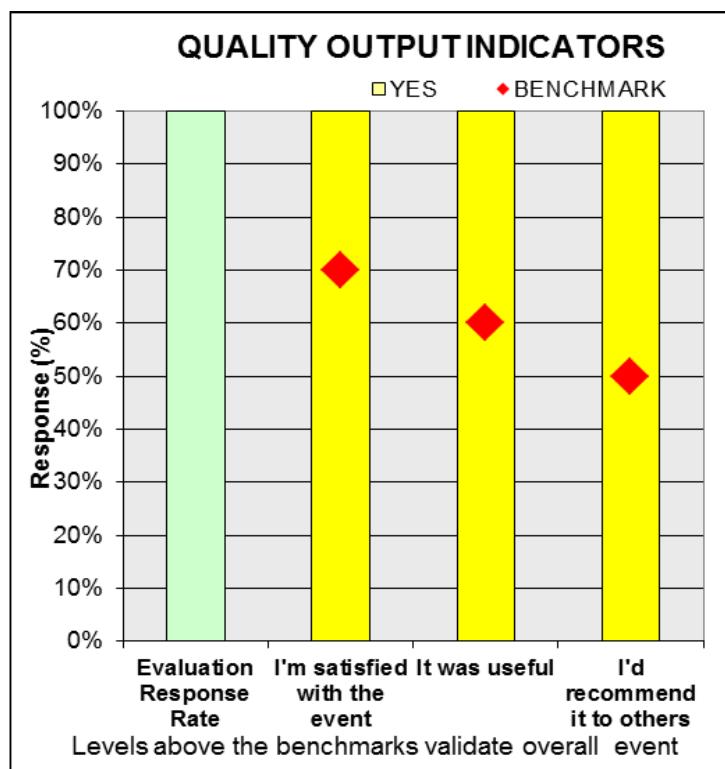
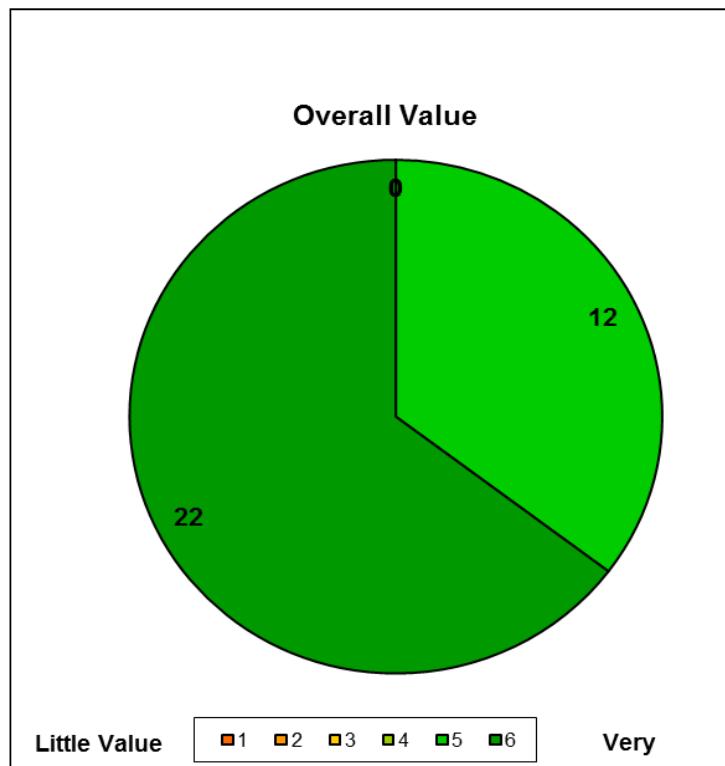


understand and support their student through the Stage 6 experience. The most poignant comment was from a student for whom the most important aspect of the evening was that her ‘parent came’ with her. This again poses the question of the valuing of qualitative data. How significant was the presence of that parent on that occasion to the ongoing relationship with the student? This is part of the human face impact of *Senior Success* for which there is no quantifiable measure.

Workshop 2 received 34 survey returns, from two of the four schools participating. The teachers had hesitated to ask for the second evaluation as it had been time consuming after the first workshop and had impacted upon the time for casual conversation after the meeting. As this was public data, collected for the purpose of workplace use, I did not request the teachers to change their mind regarding their decision not to distribute the second survey in two of the schools. The data received continued to substantiate the value of the program and the learning experiences of those participating.



Figure 8: Evaluations of Workshop 2





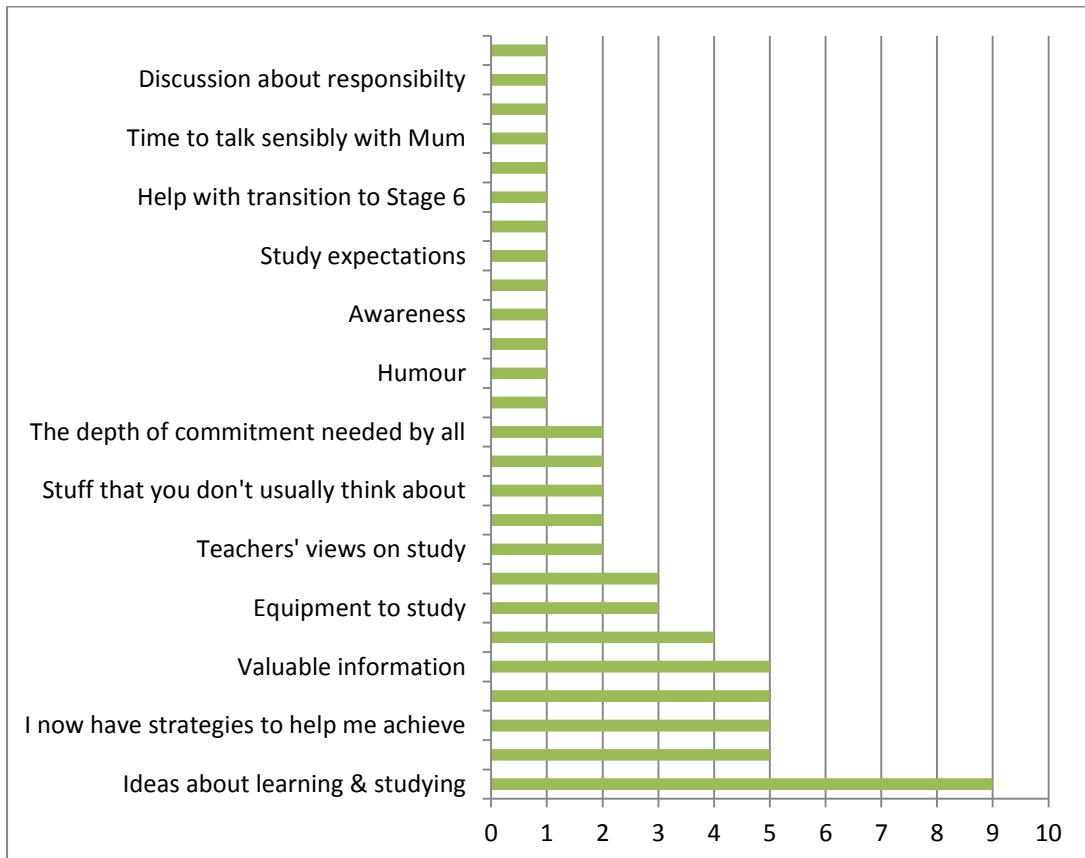
Those people who did contribute to the second survey proffered extensive comments in response to the qualitative questions.

With regard to the most valuable aspect of the workshop they responded::

- Understanding the assessment schedule
- Expectations discussions
- I now have strategies to help me achieve
- Time management
- Humour
- Valuable information
- A good chance to discuss issues
- Awareness
- Family preparation
- Study expectations
- Equipment to study
- Other people's ideas
- Teachers' views on study
- Pathways discussion
- Getting to know staff
- Help with transition to Stage 6
- A very positive experience
- Multiple Intelligences
- Time to talk sensibly with Mum
- Knowing that we are doing things correctly
- Stuff that you don't usually think about
- Being able to communicate with my daughter
- Discussion about responsibility
- Learning ways that I can help my daughter
- The depth of commitment needed by all
- Ideas about learning & studying



Figure 9: Significant aspects of Workshop 2



In this workshop, the information presented was again deemed most valuable as evidenced by the greatest number of responses. Again there were poignant, yet infrequent, comments alluding to the value of the workshops in building the home-school-student relationship between the three participants in the learning partnership.

Data collected from both workshops regarding suggestions for future content were tabulated and addressed. The table below illustrates how the suggestions made by the participants in these two workshops were incorporated into the design of future workshops.



2.1.3.3. So What

Suggestions and Responses from Evaluations – Presenters other than developer

The evaluation tool also offered the opportunity for respondents to make direct suggestions as to future improvements of the program. The comments were grouped into like responses analysed and each suggestion considered, even if there was only one record of that suggestion. The table below records the responses to the suggestions made.

Table 1 Responses to suggestions for improvement

Suggestion	Frequency	Response
More evenings like this	16	Workshops have been developed so that there are sufficient options for at least 2 workshops per term in Year 11 and 1 per term in Year 12, including choices for schools with different examination structures.
Keeping me up to date – giving information to the home	4	Participants found that there were more open channels of communication developed, resulting in more information sharing. School website usage is now being utilised to keep parents more informed, without dependence upon newsletters surviving the hazardous journey home. The use of other technologies, such as group SMS systems and emails. (School approved social networking sites, such as Edmodo, have also addressed this suggestion since these tools have become available.) Senior Success has facilitated parents' enhanced awareness of these avenues for communication channels to be effective between home and school.
Study skills	4	Workshop 2 is focussed on study skills. A workshop on the use of concept mapping as a study tool has also been developed



		that can run as a standalone workshop or in conjunction with another workshop. One school, with a high proportion of students undertaking major works developed an extra workshop focusing on developing study skills and organisation skills for this group of students.
Make it fun	2	Always a challenge. This suggestion is a two edged sword. Fun is highly subjective and can be seen as time wasting by some and essential by others. This comment has been incorporated into the facilitator training as a discussion point, facilitators encouraged to 'read' their audience carefully.
Teachers to continue to keep a close eye on students	2	This is a standard practice. However, <i>Senior Success</i> facilitates heightened connectedness which facilitates the ability to 'keep an eye' on students.
More teachers to explain about the specific subjects	2	The invitation can be proffered in Workshop 2 or at any other stage. However, <i>Senior Success</i> is an additional duty for teachers and subject specific information is only going to apply for sectors of the audience. SSPs seeking subject clarification are encouraged to contact relevant teachers and to participate in Parent/Teacher meetings.
One on one tutorials	1	Everyone would like this opportunity – it is limited by time. However, many teachers do give one- on-one time to students, if the students avail themselves of the opportunity. An additional slide was added to Workshop 2 which provides school specific information regarding tutorial and other additional support.
More organisational tips	1	More organisational tips were included in each following workshop with additional support for major works and those students with work placement commitments.
Look for ways to encourage more students to attend	4	This is a major challenge. A marketing strategy is now included in the facilitators' information. Word of mouth and constant advertising in different places is effective. One small school sent personal invitations to all families and this resulted in



		attendance of 17 of 19 students. Another school asked the Aboriginal student support staff to make personal phone calls to various families and this was effective. The use of the school bus to run a pick-up service in a disadvantaged area also proved successful for a larger school. The primary message is that a strong marketing strategy is necessary because <i>Senior Success</i> is a new way of strengthening the home school partnerships.
Have it earlier in the year	1	Schools are encouraged to start Week 2 Term 1. This is an organisational challenge that needs to be met the previous school year. Schools tend to be more organised in their second year of implementation.
Cater for a greater range of learning styles in the presentation	1	Similar to the statement re:fun. Facilitators use the workshop as a framework to present to their community. A point is made in training about considering the learning styles of the audience.
Study groups	2	Skills are given in Workshop 2 to facilitate study groups.
Clearer information about assessment schedules and expectations, including non-submission of tasks	3	The information around this issue has been increased. Some schools are inviting a different presenter to deliver this information, such as the principal, Board of Studies representative or other senior staff member.
Careers and pathways information	1	Workshop 5 in Year 11 and Workshop 3 in Year 12 focus on this point.
Essay writing skills	1	This is different in all subjects. Generic skills are discussed in the study skills workshops.
A list of current teachers and how to contact them	1	Added to the information package for Workshop 1.
Mind-mapping skills	1	Extra workshop developed to be included at appropriate time.
All my own work	1	This is the mandatory program for all Stage 6 students outlining the expectations regarding integrity of intellectual property. Parents also need to be aware of the rules. This has been added to Workshop 1
Stress management	1	Workshop 4 begins this conversation and Workshop 5 focuses upon issues



		associated with stress and resilience.
Ways of accessing additional materials	1	Added to Workshop 3
Explain the ATAR	1	Schools in the New England usually have a separate meeting with the Board of Studies Liaison Officer who provides the most current information on this issue. It is a highly dynamic process, thus has not been included in the workshops as the information will date very rapidly.

Facilitators requested some consideration of social media. This is an issue fraught with conflict in many families. It has been added in Workshop 3. This gives the facilitator time to have developed rapport with participants and be ready to mitigate inappropriate airing of family grievances.

2.1.3.4. Now What?

The analysis of these evaluations led to refinement of the workshops and the scope and sequence of learning outcomes. The schools found the data collection onerous and that the filling in of forms at the end of a session did not facilitate the discussions and positive conversations that they were seeking at the conclusion of the workshops. As the data provided was consistent and had reached a point that no new information was emerging, I accepted the decision of presenters and asked them to undertake an informal evaluation at the end of workshops and to notify me of concerns.

I had some contact from one school where there was an issue with a very intense parent who was dominating their child's learning experience. After workshop 2 this parent sought a meeting with the Year Advisor and admitted to their intensity and



asked for assistance in managing that situation. The only other comment that arose was a challenge created when a teacher from a primary school was a parent and they sought more in regards to the policies and procedures than the workshop was providing. The facilitator addressed this by showing links to the Board of Studies website and to the school's policy statements.



Figure 10: Health and the HSC Workshop. THS Workshop 6 Option.

2.1.3.5. What else?

Late in Term 4 2008 and early Term 1 2009, the teacher grapevine was active and I was receiving emails and telephone calls requesting *Senior Success* training. Thus, a second facilitators' training was held at Bingara Central School on February 11th 2009. This training also included some schools who had young teachers as Year Advisors who were not yet ready to present such extensive programs as *Senior Success*, but who needed some support in their role as Year Advisor for Stage 6. This was an interesting sidebar to the intention of the training as such inexperienced teachers rarely undertake this role, however, in hard to staff schools this was clearly the case and these young teachers had no other professional learning opportunities



available to support them in their role outside of the Board of Studies policy in-service.

This training was well received and the evaluations echoed the evaluations analysed after the previous workshop.

2.1.3.6. What?

The New England Region hosted the NSW School Education Directors meeting in 2009. Part of that meeting was a presentation of the Positive Learning Initiatives in the New England. *Senior Success* was presented at this meeting. This engendered interest from outside the New England Region, primarily from the Riverina area. This meeting was closely followed by the Careers Teachers' Conference, a cross sectoral conference held in Armidale. I was invited to present *Senior Success* to this group, which I did with my daughter co-presenting and discussing the opportunities of the program from a student's perspective. These two meetings resulted in another evolution of the program and its implementation strategies. The training program had been designed for the New England Region and for Department of Education and Training schools. The interest from outside this group resulted in a series of meetings with senior regional staff to determine if and how the program could be presented outside of the region and of the sector. The other regions were not a major problem, there was a small change to the advertising of the training and the development of staff skills in using the rapidly developing interactive classroom technology.



Cross-sectoral training proved a greater challenge. The barrier of resource sharing had to be addressed as well as the access into the video conferencing and training facilities. After considerable debate, [REDACTED] Catholic College, [REDACTED] Catholic College and [REDACTED] School have received training in *Senior Success*. These schools and the schools outside of the New England Region paid \$500 towards the research and development costs, primarily my time, as well as \$55 per person training fee. These funds were directly paid into the Positive Learning Initiatives budget. I was not renumerated above my salary as training was part of my professional responsibilities.

2.1.3.7. So What?

The increase in interest in the program and the challenges of timing training meant that I was running the two hour introductory video conference to meet the needs of interested schools. I usually managing to work with two schools simultaneously, using the connected classroom technology and video conferencing. The smaller groups were more effective for me from an instructor's viewpoint as I was able to see and engage with the participants more effectively.

2.1.3.8. Now What?

With the growing interest in *Senior Success* and the advent of the need for registered training recognised through the New South Wales Institute of Teachers (NSWIT), it became apparent that the facilitator's training course should be registered. This was a challenge for our team as the Student Services Team had not yet registered any courses and there had been only two other courses previously



registered from the New England Region. This was a challenging part of the development of the *Senior Success* program. The NSWIT registration application process was in its infancy and there was little known of expectations and requirements. After extensive consultation the training course became the first course registered by the Student Services Team and the ninth by the region. It was course 151NER009 and was registered from June 2009 to June 2011. The second registration cycle will be discussed in the 2011 reflection statement.

2.1.3.9. What?

With the growing interest in *Senior Success* it was becoming apparent that there was a need to ensure that the needs of the intended audience were being met. I sought to ensure that there were no gaps in the topics being presented in the workshops and that I was not assuming knowledge from the audience which was not actually held. My intention was to use a very casual and social focus group structure as I wanted to ensure that the groups were conversing in an open manner, confident that they could express issues and challenges with Stage 6. I sought to investigate the needs of parents with various educational backgrounds as the interest in the program was far broader than originally intended and I was unsure if the workshops would suit all audiences.

The Focus Groups were conducted with the purpose of triangulating the topics identified by teachers as significant for inclusion in *Senior Success*. The Focus Groups were discussed with guiding questions, but not limited to these topics.

1. When did your child complete the HSC?



2. Briefly describe your child's attitude towards the HSC.
3. What were the positive experiences of Stage 6 for you and your student?
4. What were the greatest challenges that you faced in supporting your student through Stage 6?
5. If you addressed these challenges, how did you do this?
6. What impact, if any, did having a family member in Stage 6; have upon the rest of your family?
7. What advice would you give a parent or carer who has a child about to embark on Stage 6?
8. What is your child doing now?

A relaxed and open environment was established in order to facilitate the open discussion about the lived experience.

These Focus Groups were conducted as part of the scaling up of *Senior Success* from implementation in a single school context to a program suitable for a range of school contexts. Groups A, B and C were parents with students who had completed Stage 6 but had not had home-school partnership support through *Senior Success*. These groups were conducted in late 2009 and 2010. There was a gap between the first Focus Group and the latter two as the first group was from the school context where *Senior Success* was originally developed and implemented. The second version of the program emerged after this Focus Group. Once the program was reflecting the perceived needs of this group, the program could be considered in a broader context. It was in preparation for this broader context that the second and third Focus Groups were undertaken.



Group A⁶

Group A were a group of six parents/carers from a rural city with students who had been at three different NSW DET High Schools. The Focus Group was conducted in September 2009. Focus Group A was organised by a friend who is a member of the local Indigenous community. The members of this group had completed their secondary education prior to the commencement of Year 11. The group included mothers, an aunt and a grandmother who had been primary carers of a student(s) through their Stage 6 education. Four of the women identified as Indigenous Australians and two as Anglo/Australian. The group had 12 students between them, four boys and eight girls. All participants live in public housing or rental accommodation with rent assistance.

Group B

Focus Group B was conducted in October 2010. A teaching colleague who was an executive teacher in a small western New South Wales community arranged the Focus Group. All students had attended the same high school, with the exception of the son of the Aboriginal Education worker who had attended a NSW DET boarding school. This group comprised of a teacher, with post-graduate qualifications, an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous school assistant and two para-professionals who worked in the health sector. This group had supported 12 students through Stage 6, 6 males and 6 females. The students had a range of post-school destinations, 4 were at university, 6 were undertaking or had completed trade qualifications and 2

⁶ This information is repeated from Book 1 as the books are intended to meet the needs of read alone audiences.



were working within the local community. All participants had raised their children in two parent families.

Group C

Focus Group C was arranged in October 2010. A university colleague arranged this group. She arranged five participants with post-graduate qualifications. These participants had supported students in NSW DET schools and a systemic Catholic School. In total this group had supported 9 students through the HSC, 5 males and 4 females. The group had 1 single parent and 4 from two parent families. This group included a father. This was the only male parent who had accepted the invitation to participate in the Focus Groups. This gender imbalance reflected the participation in the early presentation of the *Senior Success* workshops. The question of which parent provides the support for a Stage 6 student was outside the specific scope of this study, it is a question for further investigation. The Focus Groups had sought parental input without the distinction between male and female parent.

Group D

This Focus Group was conducted in late 2010. This was a group of parents who had students who were completing Year 12 and had done the first two *Senior Success* workshops. This group were 4 mothers, one was a teacher and the others worked in various businesses in the area. Three of the parents had not done the HSC. This group had two daughters and two sons. I had asked one member to invite others to participate, however, as I live in the same community, two of these participants had been previously known to me.



After the first focus group discussion, which was held with people whose blunt honesty I could rely upon, I developed my initial coding protocol. This protocol was effective in the analysis of the second and third focus groups. The following summarises the concerns, issues and insights provided by the three groups.

The purpose of the Focus Groups was to identify what were the most important aspects of the Stage 6 experience to focus upon in *Senior Success*. Time is very precious and the workshops need to be explicitly addressing the identified needs of parents and their students if they are to be of value.

Each group indicated that the two years of Stage 6 impacted upon family life and upon the other members of their families. The focus on the HSC student and their needs was an issue in all groups, regardless of the education or socio-economic background of the parents. It was also clear that the stress and concerns of the experience garnered an intense personal response for the parent. There was a sense that the experiences for the focus group participants was as intense, if not more intense, than the students. Some parents, who initially stated that Stage 6 did not impact upon them, later made comments regarding changing family routines, the necessity for accommodations to family expectations and consideration of the student within the home. The impact was not always a negative impact on the family as different families coped with the pressure differently. However, the comments indicated that pressure on the family was a topic worthy of further investigation.



The comments surrounding expectations illuminated a series of assumptions that schools make about the understanding that parents have about the HSC. The comments also challenged the belief that school personnel have about the sharing of information and shared understanding of that information. The HSC information night held in the all of the schools represented in the focus groups, met with similar levels of confusion, regardless of the parental education levels.

The comment, made by a parent who holds post-graduate qualifications in her own field, summarised the concerns expressed in each group:

We had an information evening about the HSC – but basically most parents walked out with blank looks – I was the only one who asked a question – I really doubt that anyone else knew what to ask... so really there were – no questions.

Focus Group C

Of concern was the expression from those with limited educational backgrounds that they did not expect to understand the HSC and that the reading of information provided was simply too hard. The parents expressed that they had to trust that the school would do the right thing by their student. The parents had been hesitant to ask questions for fear of appearing ‘dumb’, yet the most detailed expression of the communication barrier came from a parent with an extensive educational background.

The other repeated concern was that information given to the students was not effectively conveyed to the parents

They often think these kids are big kids now and they (the school) explain things to them –and that the kids should then



be able to explain that to the parents – which is just rubbish... cos they can't! A lot of the things that I have asked I have been told – but we've talked to the kids about it.

Focus Group C

This is coupled with the parents' concern about being on the 'same page' as their student. This further validates the need for *Senior Success*, as these workshops provide an opportunity for courteous translation of the complex language and expectations of Stage 6.

The parents who had limited educational backgrounds were primarily concerned with their student actually 'just finishing'. They seemed to see the completion of school as a goal in itself, rather than the attainment of a particular standard or mark range. They were unsure about what else they should be expecting, unsure about how much was required to achieve more than 'just finishing'; and articulated that they felt that they did not understand what the many tasks required of the students.

The anxiety and stress levels of students were reported very differently in each Focus Group. This was the area where the greatest difference was expressed between parents who had an educated background and those who did not. The commonality however, was that all parents, except one in Focus Group B, expressed experiences characterised by stress and anxiety. One parent only spoke of very focused students who were well supported at home and who were not overly concerned about their post school destinations.

An interesting differentiation in the discussion about stress and anxiety emerged in these Focus Groups between families with educated backgrounds and those with



limited educational backgrounds. Families with educated parents expressed more concern about Year 12 than Year 11 and more concern with girls than with boys. Parents with educations completed at or before Year 10, expressed concern about stress and anxiety levels in their sons in Year 11 more than Year 12. The groups had closely balanced numbers of male to female students in their families. This study does not provide the avenue for further investigation of this difference. The evidence, however, substantiates the concern that parents have regarding stress and anxiety. This reinforces the significance of the inclusion of information about these issues in *Senior Success*.

The expectations surrounding major works raised considerable discussion in two of the focus groups. In Group C the parents expressed the challenges associated with the balancing of expectations of the major work(s) and other subjects. The parents felt that they had not appreciated the extent of the commitment required by major works, particularly when undertaking more than one major work. Parents with students who had done major works offered repeated comments about the need for time management skills and long term planning skills.

The other issue that parents in each group raised was the challenge associated with the mercurial responses of their student when it came to expectations of their parents. Some days the student wanted ‘support’ on other days they felt that the parent was ‘nagging’. Comments from the evaluations of *Senior Success* provides an opportunity for the supporting adult and the student to discuss how to manage to



cue each other as to how the support/nagging balance is operating at any given time so that interactions remain positive and supportive.

Ongoing motivation was not a major issue for the Focus Groups. The challenge articulated across all groups was primarily associated with those students who were lacking in direction and were thus unsure of why they were at school. The secondary challenge was associated with maintaining momentum throughout the two years of Stage 6. The long second term periods were times of low motivation for many students. This came as a surprise for parents but was a norm for teachers. Sharing this knowledge may be a useful step in assisting the passage through this low motivation period.

The parents in these focus groups were supporting students prior to the advent of the 17 years compulsory education regulations. It will be a direction of further investigation as to how with young people who do not want to be at school will deal with this aspect of Stage 6⁷.

Parents found assessment task requirements confusing. All focus groups expressed surprise at the extent and range of the requirements and at the significant differences between Stage 5 and Stage 6. The parents in Focus Group A articulated their incredulity at the high expectations for tasks and at the short time frames required. There was a concerning lack of understanding surrounding the difference between how assessment worked in Year 11 and in Year 12. A number of the

⁷ See Book 3 for discussion on this point.



parents who struggled with the reading of information sent home did not understand how each task contributed to the final HSC results.

Parents and students need to know how it works... it's a bit of a shock.

Focus Group A

The parents with educated backgrounds also struggled with understanding how the marking criteria operated. They were unsure of why their student who had previously received high marks suddenly receives a low mark. The change in standards between Stage 5 and Stage 6 needs explanation and illustration so that students are not placed in negative situations with their parents.

When they suddenly come home with a mark of...say 40... you have to dedicate yourself to know what that actually means.

Focus Group B

It was also apparent that there was confusion between the expectations of assignments and assessment task. These terms were interchangeable in the Focus Groups when within school contexts they mean very different types of tasks with different rules associated with each different type of task.

The parents who had students who were striving to maximise their University Entrance scores, UAI for the Focus Groups, now known as ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) were very confused about the system associated with the ranking of students in their school-based assessment and the impact of this upon their final marks.



It was hard to understand the UAI and the marks associated with each subject... fortunately we had the back up of Principal's recommendation – but even that didn't seem to decrease the stress.

Focus Group B

I found the ranking system really confusing – the teachers can't really explain it – every time I hear it it's different.

Focus Group C

As parents at the end of this experience, the discussion was rather intense around this topic. It was an area where all group members felt that they needed more understanding and earlier understanding. It was apparent that the participants felt that in hindsight they had not appreciated how important it was to have a complete understanding of assessment requirements from the outset of Stage 6.

Time management was the topic that created the most consistent animated responses from the Focus Groups. Each group had anecdotes of last minute disasters, of computer failure, group discord and missing information. Even students who were well organised and aware of the time commitments of their studies had moments of tension and stress around the management of time.

My daughter was very well organized but we still ended up at 3am the night before Society and Culture was due ... she had started early, was very organized and it was still very hard.

Focus Group C

She put a lot of work into her art... getting her to do anything else... no... She was really distracted by her major work.

Focus Group A



Each group expressed the importance of being aware of the possible time management issues and how ‘if only’ they had been aware before the ‘crisis’ hit, the experience may have been calmer and more productive. There was a consensus that the families needed to know more about what was to come and how to be prepared for contingencies. This was particularly significant for those students who had subjects that required the presentation of major works. This was an area of significant concern that was then exacerbated by the group performances required in the performing arts subjects. To say that the recollection of that experience evoked instant tension in the parents with students involved in these assessment tasks is an understatement.

Each group recognized that the time management expectations were greater than they had anticipated, even for those who had experienced the HSC with older students under the pre 2000 HSC structures or who had experienced the process themselves. This was an area that the parents felt they needed to be able to discuss with their student and have the understanding of expectations that facilitated an informed discussion.

The experience of Stage 6 was a period of growth that each parent recognised as valuable. Focus Group A spoke strongly of the value of the growing up that occurred during these two years. This was a reflective conversation where the tone changed when the participants examined the ‘what if’ question which consider the consequences if their student had not done the two years of Stage 6.



They matured in Year 11... if she left in Year 10 she wouldn't be doing anything... probably be pregnant somewhere.

Focus Group A

We valued the friendship – valued the time to grow up.

Focus Group B

The nature of this conversation was a salient reminder that the HSC is more than the classroom learning and the attainment of the exit qualification. The valuing of the growing up and the personal growth was an issue that the participants felt should be discussed and shared with parents embarking on this journey.

Focus Group A raised the issue of sleep and the way in which sleep impacted upon the student and their learning.

Getting them out of bed can be really hard.

Focus Group A

There was some discussion about the level of sleep deprivation that was emerging due to the growing use of mobile phones and social networking. These groups were conducted on the cusp of the boom in these communication behaviours. Facebook was not yet on their mobile phones as a free application. Further investigation will need to be undertaken in response to these social and legislative changes.

The issue of study and how to study did not feature significantly as a separate issue; rather it was woven into the ongoing discussion about the experience of the HSC. It was as if the idea of study was more implied than explicit. This was of interest because there was not a common understanding that the assessment tasks,



examinations and class work would not be adequate to fully prepare for the external examinations. Study skills were assumed to be knowledge that the students held and were developed at school. This assumption is an area that needs investigation as study is conducted primarily in the home environment, thus those in the home need to understand its structures and opportunities.

The expectations of technology use and availability are constantly changing. Parents spoke of challenges associated with computer and printer failure.

Of concern was a comment by one parent that she found the *boredofstudies* site was of great assistance to her as she supported her student. This site is a student blog where the information is not validated or necessarily accurate. The parent did not understand the way in which the information on the Internet was generated. She blindly accepted this information as correct. This misinformation needs to be respectfully addressed in a proactive manner to ensure that parental help and guidance is not counterproductive.

The groups spoke briefly about the distractions of the excitement of late adolescence.

They are distracted by formals, balls, schoolies – but sometimes they need the distraction.

Focus Group A

However, there was not the anxiety and concern that is often heard amongst teachers when this issue is discussed. The Focus Groups did not raise concern



about the work hours of part time jobs or the other commitments students have outside of school. This poses the question of whether or not the parents are aware of the impact of these distractions or whether teachers are overly concerned about their impact. There was a marked difference between the comments voiced by the parents on this issue and anticipated concern based upon discussions with Stage 6 teachers.

The system, the rules and the expectations of how the Higher School Certificate actually works created considerable discussion in Focus Group C. This group had students who wanted to maximize their marks and their post-school opportunities.

Just saying that the rankings are important is not the same as explaining it – I had no idea what was important about them.

I was frustrated with the rigidity of the rules and not understanding how the rules work.

We were getting conflicting messages from different teachers about the rules (eg. If a teacher who is marking an assessment can they assist the students with the task or not).

*I didn't really understand how strict the BOS rules were.
Focus Group C*

The broad theme of this conversation was interwoven with the other discussions but it was the issue that raised the most dissatisfaction with the communication between home and school. There was animated discussion about the information in the assessment handbook and the accessibility of that information. There was a strong sense that the parent had been not clear about the rules, and again the concern was voiced that only telling the student was not adequate when issues arose. This



particular set of concerns underlined the need to be proactive in the development of effective partnerships between home and school.

The Focus Group members were consistent in their desire to see their students achieve through the latter years of school. They were open in their expression of the challenges of this time in their child's life. The participants validated the need for open channels of communication and ongoing access to information. They also expressed the shared opinion that they wished they had more information as they supported their student. The Focus Groups supported the need for *Senior Success* and justified the overview of the workshops. Their comments guided the addition of a workshop on generational difference and reinforced the need for explicit work on communication skills.

2.1.3.10. So What?

The Focus Groups led to some adjustments in the *Senior Success* workshops, particularly around the explicit discussions regarding assessment and the expectations of assessment. There were also additions around the area of appropriate computer usage and the use of valid websites. The Focus Groups presented a very common view of the lived experience of Stage 6, its joys and tribulations. They also illustrated that the key to surviving Stage 6 is to establish strong communication channels between all partners in the learning experience. The group members had supported young people who range from those who had experienced a relatively uneventful two years to a parent who had a child who had



attempted suicide. However, all participants remained positive about the need to have family support and for that support to be informed and working in partnership with the school. The Focus Groups strongly triangulated the evaluations from the schools who had undertaken the first series of workshops.

2.1.3.11. Now What?

The workshops were now becoming more formalised including teaching notes and reference information in order to support facilitators who wanted to go ‘by the book’. The organisation, however, was flexible enough to also suit those interested in adapting the workshops and yet maintaining fidelity with the intention and the research underpinning each aspect of Senior Success. The next stage of validation was to ensure that the workshops met the perceived needs of parents as they were preparing with their student to embark upon Stage 6.

2.1.3.12. What else?

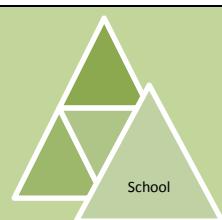
2009 also saw further expansion of interest in the home-school-student partnership in Stage 6. *Up, Up and Away* is a workshop held on the North Coast for Indigenous students and their families who are undertaking school based traineeships. This is a complexity for Stage 6 as it requires a great deal of organisation and autonomy in managing school and work. I was invited to present a workshop to parents and carers, helping them to understand the role that they could play in supporting their student. See Appendix 2.3 for the workshop.



The 22 participants were very involved in the workshop. It received all high or very high evaluation rankings. It was the comment from one parent that reminded me to be aware of the information parents were giving me about their experience with Stage 6. I started my presentation explaining that every young person is different and some people have children for whom Stage 6 is plain sailing. The response from one mother was 'and some people lie'. This is a salient reminder that not everyone is comfortable in sharing the challenges of parenting and that there are those who would rather not recognise issues than address them. In presenting the resources for this project, respectful support of individuality is imperative as is supporting people to acknowledge the challenges of the experience.

In 2009 The New England Region developed and published *Strategies for Schools: Supporting parents to understand classroom teaching* (NSWDET, 2009). I was invited to be one of the writers for this publication as I had the combined areas of expertise in literacy and home-school partnerships. The extensive contribution that I was able to make to this publication is a reflection of the recognition by my profession of my contribution in these areas of research.

Verbatim Report 4 School Perspective



Narrabri High School

Narrabri High School has three trained presenters. This school has completed three cycles of Year 11 workshops and two cycles of Year 12 workshops. The



experience in this school has been consistent with other schools in that the first workshops of the year are very well attended and then a small group of between 10 and 20 continue through the winter months. Narrabri facilitators also identified the problem with when to hold workshops once football season started. This challenge may be able to be addressed in the future if more online and independent resources are developed. This is a key future direction for the innovation as time for workshops is a common concern.

Narrabri High School has enriched their *Senior Success* program with a workshop early in Year 12 which explicitly deals with the organisation and responsibilities of major works. This workshop involved subject teachers who came along and worked with their students and their parents-carers on planning the timelines for their projects.

The school also ran a workshop at the end of Year 12 conducted by the principal that explained the difference between the competitiveness of the assessment tasks and the teamwork required to maximise HSC examination marks. The principal also addressed the particular challenges of parenting through this time from his perspective as a parent and as a principal. This workshop had high attendance.

The facilitators from this school had many anecdotes of the comments and reactions of students, SSPs and staff. They were particularly touched by a student who walked, by herself from the other side of the town to come to *Senior Success*. This student's commitment and her presence at the workshops led to structures of support being developed for her by her teachers and by the parents of her classmates who ensured that she always had transport and someone to work with at *Senior Success*. Further, the teachers have reported that many of the ideas and the language of the program have become part of the lexicon of the students when talking about study and organisation.

NHS Report for School Magazine 2010.

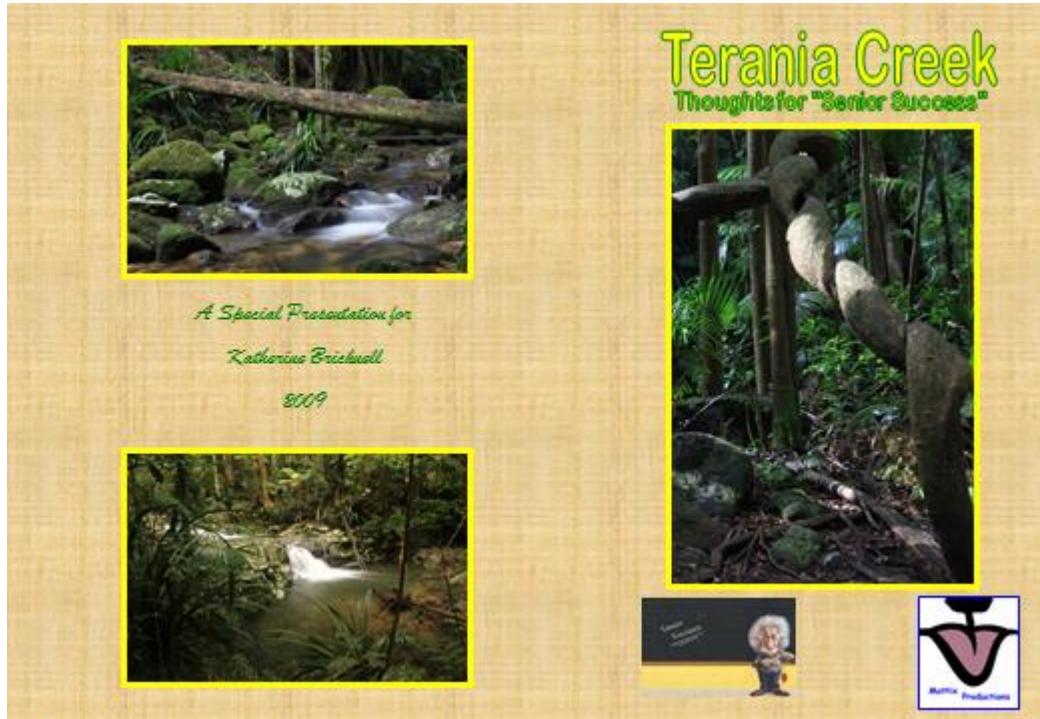
Success is being held twice a term, by Lanie Ranger (Yr 12 adviser), with the help of Jayne Hamilton (Yr 11 adviser) at the school grounds. When you arrive not only are you welcomed by friendly smiles, but by chocolate!! Anyhoo, to the serious side of things, Senior Success is only a hour and a half of you and your mentor's time (whoever it may be) to understand and develop skills to help with your senior years.

This includes time management – how you can work around sport, music, a casual job and family to get your study and tasks completed. It can put your mind at ease of how you're going to make it through to year 12. This program also allows your mentor to see just how much is being asked and expected of you, and gives them ways of how to help, when they know little about a particular topic.

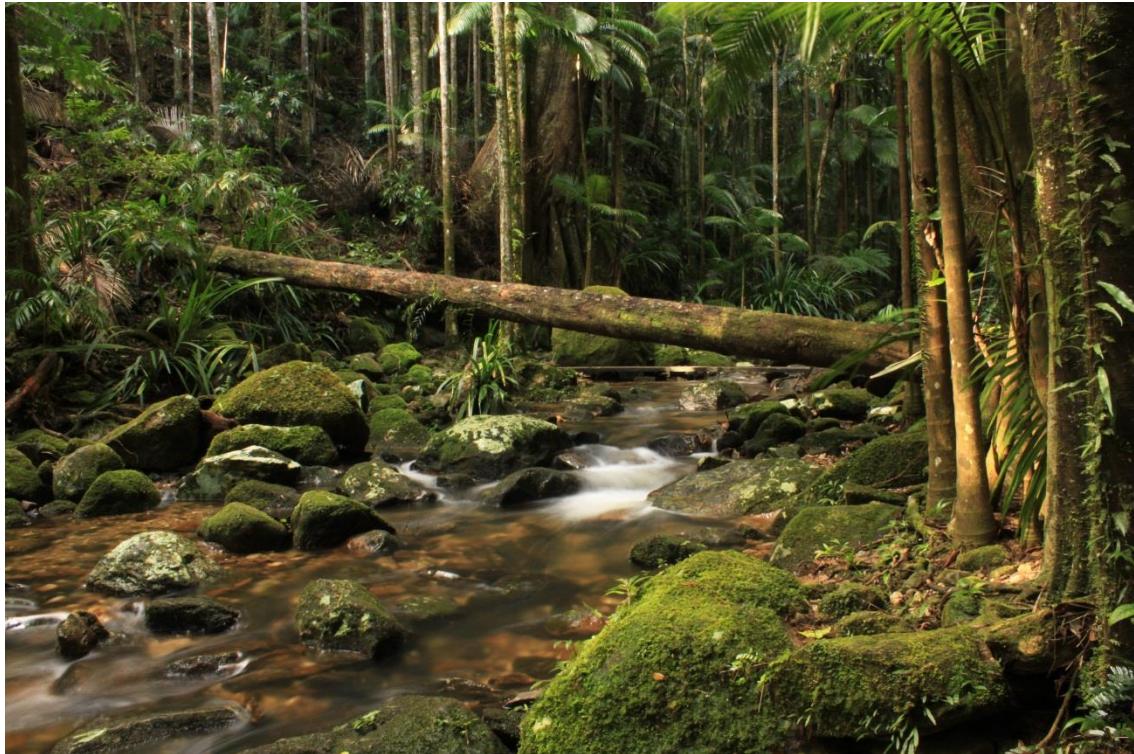
At the end of the night, both of you are walking away with the confidence of how to get through the senior years.



2.1.3.13. What else?



In 2009 Gregory Wade created a motivational DVD to accompany *Senior Success*. The DVD is a brief series of rainforest photographs with a motivational commentary set to the music of Mark Knopfler's *Going Home- Theme from Local Hero*. This DVD captured the imagination of an interesting range of participants (See Ainsley's Story 2011). This rainforest imagery and the associated symbolism have become the design theme for *Senior Success*. The uptake of this theme did not come to full fruition until 2011.



2.1.4. 2010

2.1.4.1. What?

As training continued into 2010 and the schools who were now moving to their second cycle of presentations, the contextualisation of the workshops grew in strength. [REDACTED] High School had a significant number of students with major works, they developed an extra workshop for this group. [REDACTED] High School had an issue with students not getting enough sleep, so they developed another part of Workshop 3 which addressed this issue. [REDACTED] School adapted their program to support house masters, the Catholic schools added a spiritual dimension. [REDACTED] High School had students who were travelling over 45 minutes to attend workshops, so they condensed workshops and presented one per term instead of two. This contextualisation indicated that the framework was strong enough to



support a range of school communities and different partnerships working to support Stage 6 students.

2010 saw two significant changes to Stage 6, the announcement of the Learn or Earn until 17 years of age was introduced and *Facebook* became free on phones. Students who would previously leave school were now compelled to stay at school if they did not have a permanent job or they were enrolled in a TAFE course. This group pose new challenges for schools and for the parents who are responsible for ensuring that their 16 year old, Year 11 student, is in the right place at the right time.

Facebook and other social media also posed an increasingly complex array of issues needing negotiation and communication between learning partners. This discussion was added to the second workshop. It is a discussion that requires careful management as it can be quite fraught as parents and their student discuss an issue that has often been a source of conflict.

2.1.4.2. So What?

It was becoming increasingly apparent that generational differences were impacting upon how the parents and the teachers saw learning, school and the associated commitments in comparison to the students.

2.1.4.3. Now What?

I began to investigate the work of Michael McQueen on generational lenses and how to assist each generation to understand the other. McQueen's work advocates one



generation understanding the other with reciprocal responsibility for returned understanding. I was unsure how to incorporate this into workshops, thus chose to leave the implementation until 2011 when I was once again presenting the workshops.

During 2010 my office was moved to Tamworth High School, where I came under the supervision of the school principal as well as my Regional supervisor. Until this time I had been under the nominal supervision of a primary school principal, who had not had any involvement in *Senior Success*. Tamworth High School had been in the first group of implementing schools, thus the principal was very committed to supporting my work in this area. After realising that I needed to present the workshops with the new inclusions and with the inclusion of work on generational lens, I asked if I may be the presenter at Tamworth High School in 2011. This request was warmly received.

2.1.4.4. What?

In October 2010 I conducted a Focus Group of parents who had students who were completing Year 12 and had done the first two *Senior Success* workshops. This group were 4 mothers, one was a teacher and the others worked in various businesses in the area. Three of the parents had not done the HSC. This group had two daughters and two sons. I had asked one member to invite others to participate, however, as I live in the same community, two of these participants had been previously known to me. This proved advantageous as I had taught the elder child of



one participant which resulted in her being open in referring to this child's experience in comparison to the current HSC student.

This Focus Group validated the first two workshops and reflected upon the ongoing impact of having the information and organisational skills presented in these workshops. The participants commented on how important it was that they had the information about the expectations and processes of Stage 6. The idea that they were 'one the same page' was a theme of many aspects of the focus group's discussions.

In juxtaposition to the extensive conversation in the other focus groups about issues arising from misadventures, sport, illness and assessment tasks, this group were very aware of the expectations and had worked with their student to ensure that there were no issues around following assessment procedures. This was important as this group had students who played representative sport, one who had ongoing illness and three who were involved in school leadership. The participants in previous groups with students who had similar commitments spoke at length about issues regarding this aspect of Stage 6, with a number of recounts of ongoing problems because of miscommunication.

This group concurred with the other groups that the experience of the HSC did pose challenges and difficult times. This group felt that they had an understanding that these times were normal and that they knew what to do with regard to 'having a chat' before issues escalated.



I knew a lot more information (In comparison to an older child).

I knew what to do when things happened.

I knew how to back her up.

The participants also reflected upon their own awareness of the expectations of the HSC:

It made me realise that it would be different from my older daughter – I hadn't thought it would be different.

Everything was different for me – she was the first – I was very surprised with what was expected of them.

The assessment was so much – I wasn't even aware.

This knowledge assisted the parents in understanding what was happening for their student. I posed the question of whether or not this information would have reached home in other ways. The participants laughed and one made the following comment:

Isn't it important that parents know the stuff – think about it – 'What did you do at school today?' Nothing!

She also recounted what she believed would have happened with the first assessment that had needed a misadventure for sport:

I would have said 'what do you need that for – it's your teacher who is taking you?' and it would have been a fuss because I didn't understand.

I had watched this scenario play out with another friend who was furious with her son for leaving his work until the last minute. Her argument was that he should leave it and go to bed, she will send a note and he could hand it in on Monday. The child was trying to explain that he had to have it done, but lacked the ability to fully explain



why, 'I'll get zero' he said and she told him not to be ridiculous. Fortunately they were with me as I had been helping with another task and I was able to intervene and explain. The mother ended up sitting with her son and finishing the task. But, her frustration, the conflict and the situation were all avoidable with the sharing of basic information before the situation arose. Her comment to me was 'How was I to know that?'. Her child had tried to tell her, but his limited knowledge of the regulations and their rationale made it very difficult for this communication to occur under the tension of a stress situation.

The power of *Senior Success* in addressing this situation was encapsulated in the comment:

Senior Success certainly spelt out the formality of it.

When asked for issues that were faced during Stage 6 this Focus Group also reiterated the growing concern with Facebook and its impact on time, behaviour and study.

A huge issue is facebook- it goes constantly.

Facebook is a huge issue for the kids.

If she studied as much as she was on facebook she would be doing wonders!

This reinforced the need to include discussion about social media in the workshops and to include the opening of discussion about this topic very early in the workshop sequence. The group members also reiterated the concern which had emerged from the surveys, that many of the people who they felt really needed the information were not present. This again challenged me with how to market the program and



how to make it ‘safe’ for people who are not at ease with the school environment to feel comfortable in attending the workshops.

The Focus group were clearly better informed than any of the three previous groups and were more confident in their knowledge and understanding of the experience that their child was undertaking. They used the language of *Senior Success* in the discussion, particularly around balance and organisational skills. As a group they felt that the attendance at the workshops and participation in the program, even with only two workshops, was a worthwhile investment of time.

2.1.4.5. So What?

This Focus Group had refocussed me on some of the seemingly simpler aspects of the program, reminding me that the core business of *Senior Success* is to cover the important things and to ensure that the messages about the HSC are consistent and accurate. This is a moral responsibility that I have as a teacher of Stage 6 classes, but also as a leader in my school.

2.1.4.6. What ?

To date I had investigated the needs of the audience who were either already involved in the Stage 6 experience or who had completed that experience. In 2010 I sought to investigate the perceived needs of those entering in to Stage 6. This was important because in order to ensure ongoing participation, the workshops had to meet a perceived need so that the first step of attending Workshop 1 would occur. This was challenging data collection as I needed to collect survey data from



participants who had no vested interest in participating in the survey and included a group who were asked to comment upon issues that they may find confronting. School surveys are traditionally hard to collect as the survey form must take the perilous journey home in the school bag, survive the treacherous kitchen table and then complete the return journey to school in the school bag, finally emerging from the depths and being handed in to a teacher.

In order to ensure that some surveys were returned, four schools undertook to send the surveys home with their subject selection forms for Year 11 and 12. The surveys were attached to the forms and were returned with these important documents. As a result 204 surveys were returned completed and 53 surveys returned without comment. There were four schools surveyed, from different communities to the schools who participated in the Focus Groups. Three of these schools were within the New England Region, two large secondary schools and one central school, and one large secondary school from the Riverina. The latter school was surveyed in order to include input from another rural region as the implementation of Senior Success has extended beyond the New England. The needs of the non-government sector are outside of my professional responsibility and are an area for future research.

Schools were offered data collection on the preferred days and times for their 2011 implementation which I tabulated and returned as a gesture of appreciation for their assistance. This data is on the survey (See Appendix 2.4) however, it has no bearing



on the research questions being examined as the day of the week has no bearing on the questions surrounding the implementation of *Senior Success*.

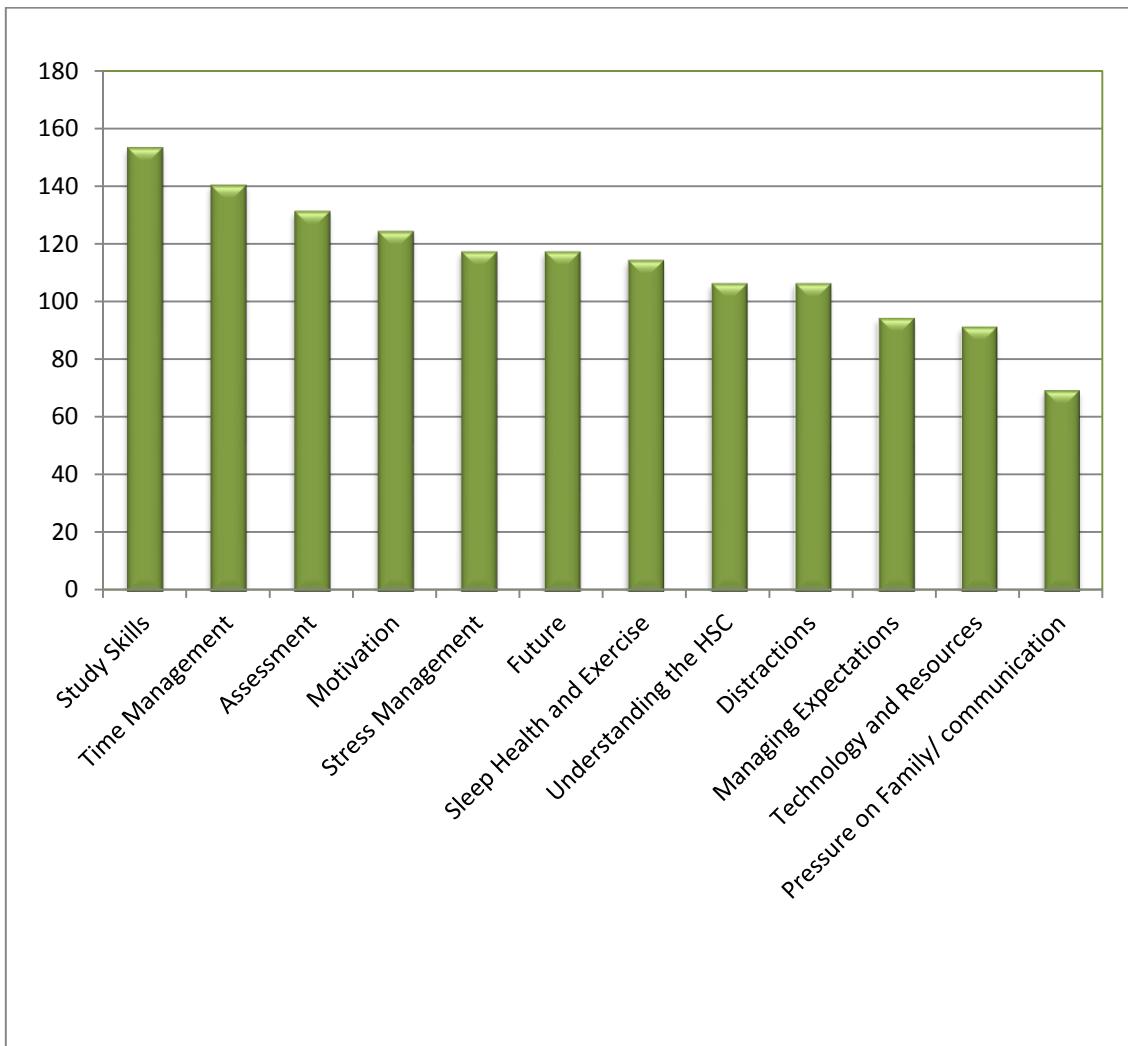
The survey used the coding topics from the Focus Groups in order to ascertain if the points that were made in the Focus Groups met with accordance from a larger sample. The questions posed by analysis of this evidence were:

1. Were the topics of perceived need for parents of students entering Stage 6?
2. Was the order in which the workshops are presented the most efficient for meeting the immediate needs of the families?
3. Were there any other suggestions for areas to be covered by the workshops?

The data was analysed by school and by whether or not parents had already had students complete the HSC. It was then totalled according to the priority given the topic. All sub-groups validated the topics covered and indicated expectations that the information would be significant. The analysis of the order of priority for ‘very high’ and ‘high’ scores substantiated the order of the workshops and the emphasis in the first two workshops on study skills, time management and understanding assessment requirements. This structure ensured that the workshops with the highest attendance, those at the beginning of Year 11 and in the summer months, covered the most essential areas for families and students.



Figure 11: Expected issues for discussion Stage 5 Parents



The positioning of *Understanding the HSC* was not ranked as highly as it is in the order of the workshops. However, this may be a case of people thinking that they know about the structure and working of the HSC because they did it themselves and are unaware of the significant changes since 2000.

Other suggestions were very limited. Five comments were made, most surveys had 'No' written as the answer to the question, 'Are there other issues that you wish to receive information about?'



The five comments were:

Motivation and study skills for flighty dreamers

University options

All of the above and then some!

Have the talks early.

Interactions in the workplace.

2.1.4.7. So What?

The survey data supported the structure and topics of the *Senior Success Program*.

Parents both with previous HSC experience and those without that experience, indicated that the topics covered were of significance to them. It also supported the scope of the workshops as there was no clear alternative direction offered by the respondents.

2.1.4.8. Now What?

The program was now at a point that I was ready to undertake a final round of presentations as the facilitator in order to ensure that the changes made ran smoothly and that they did not lead to any controversy that meant that the workshop was uncomfortable for any participant. This would be done through the Stage 6 cycle of 2011, 2012.



2.1.4.9. What?

As my reputation for involvement in supporting the partnership between home-school and student grew, I was receiving more invitations to contribute to learning environments seeking understanding of the issues of Stage 6 and of the role that the family has in this process. Late in 2010 I was invited to have a major role in the development of the resource created by the New South Wales Department of Communities, *My School A to Z*. To date the section developed can be found at:

<http://www.schoolatoz.nsw.edu.au/homework-and-study/homework-tips/preparing-for-the-hsc>. There is currently further footage being edited to provide other articles for this site.

2.1.5. 2011

2.1.5.1. What?

2011 saw another change in my professional role. Family responsibilities had changed and travelling three to four days per week was no longer practical. I was appointed to Tamworth High School as Head Teacher: Teaching and Learning and once again embarked upon meeting the challenges of a new workplace. My new role is multifaceted, with responsibilities whole school management as well as supervision of PD/H/PE.

Senior Success became part of my role statement, thus instead of merely presenting the program I was responsible for the organisation and management of the program in a school. As a new person in the school without any established rapport with the



new Year 11 group this was very challenging. However, the Year Advisor and I persevered and ran the full Year 11 program. I was, at times very disappointed with attendance; only 12 students took the opportunity to participate, much lower than Tamworth High School's previous groups. There were a number of apologies, many associated with work commitments of either the student, their family or both. The increase in the range of work hours for all workers seems to be impacting upon the ability for people to attend meetings and to have dedicated time with their families. This is an area for extensive further investigation in our school community. Those in attendance responded very positively to the program and I was able to develop a rapport with this group of students and their SSPs.

2.1.5.2. So What?

With consideration of Perrin (2002) and the knowledge that innovation needs to be examined by consideration of greatest impact, I used this opportunity to examine the impact upon two specific students and their learning partnership.

One male student, who was living independently and working to stay at school, did not miss a workshop, even if he was doing very little work in class, he would attend the workshop. He came on his own and the Year Advisor and I acted as his SSP. We talked with him and supported him to keep attending school and keep returning to the tasks that at times were overwhelming him. This student completed the Preliminary Year and was elected Vice Captain for 2012. Both he and his Year Advisor contribute his completion of Year 11 to the support provided by Senior



Success. Once again the intended outcome was not met but a different, possibly life altering outcome was achieved.⁸



Figure 12: Personal organisation

A second student, attended every workshop with her grandmother and her mother. First to arrive and last to leave, the student and her SSP engaged in every activity, and put in place all recommendations. This student was

a very quiet student who had been lacking in confidence throughout her schooling. Her Year Advisor and her mother attribute *Senior Success* with her growth in confidence and her ability to preserve with her studies to achieve her goals. Her mother's comment was that knowing how to support her daughter had made a significant difference for her and the relationship that she had with her daughter. 'It was worth every minute' was her reflection at the end of Year 11 followed by 'When do we start for Year 12?'.



Figure 13: Organised folders and rewards

⁸ This student completed Year 12 2012.

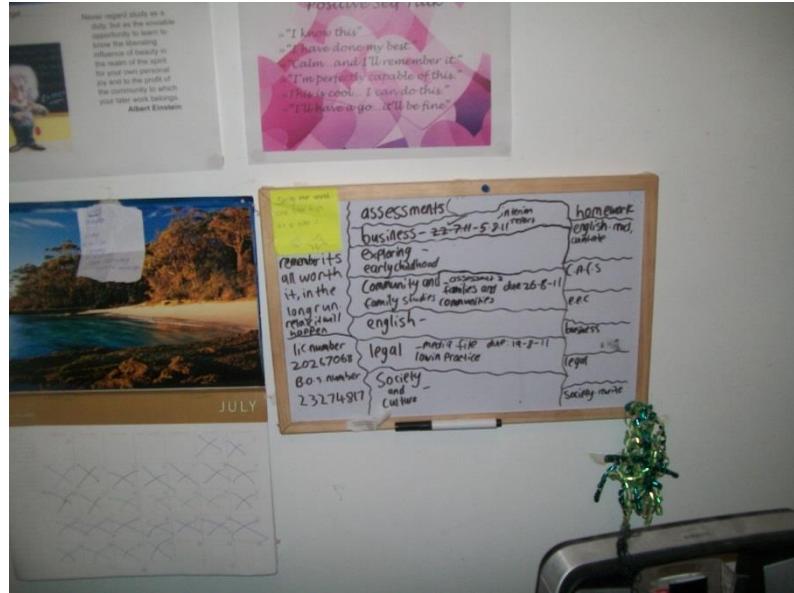


Figure 14: Calenders and plans

These photographs were taken by this student to show me what she had done and for me to illustrate how *Senior Success* works in practice. This student is a mid-range student who had no family background in how to achieve at school. She completed Year 11 with enough confidence to run for Prefect and to be able to present for her examinations feeling ‘more confident than I have ever felt before’.

The experience of 2011 *Senior Success* provided me with an important lesson about this innovation. *Senior Success* is more about the ‘butterfly effect’ that it has upon the students who are present than any tangible, measurable improvement in results. As a teacher, I tend to worry about who is not showing up for workshops and how many more could be there, rather than focussing upon the impact upon each person who is present. The program made a big difference to a small group in this cohort, and that too is of value.



2.1.5.3. What else?

Tamworth High School do not have half yearly examinations in Year 11. This meant that the workshops needed to be reordered. Their package now has a greater range of alternative workshops for schools to use according to their needs.

2.1.5.4. What?

The registration with the New South Wales Institute of Teachers lapsed in June 2011. Upon evaluation of this program it was determined that the 8 hours of training was unnecessary for experienced teachers who were the dominant group of facilitators. This group are also not member of the Institute of Teachers, as it has only been in operation in recent years. The new scheme teachers who are members of the Institute found that 4 hours training was sufficient with the ongoing support of being able to email either myself or other facilitators should they have questions.

2.1.5.5. So What?

Re registration processes are underway for 4 hours of training.

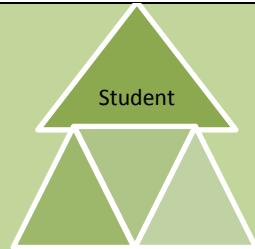
2.1.5.6. What else?

On July 30th 2011 I was invited to speak at the New South Wales Parents' and Citizens conference. I gave two presentations on the need for ongoing home-school partnerships through until the conclusion of secondary education. I discussed the challenges and joys of parenting in Stage 6 and gave a brief overview of *Senior Success*. I have been receiving emails from participants in that conference seeking



further information and am currently negotiating the training process for 2012. See Appendix 2.5 for this presentation.

Verbatim Report 5 Student Perspective



Ainsley's Reflection

Senior Success has opened my eyes to many things about my final two years at school, to things I would never have known without this program. When I first heard about the program called *Senior Success* my initial response was curiosity I wanted to know more about what the program was actually about, what it offered seniors like myself who had no other family members graduate year 12. We were asked to take a support person to senior success, I was lucky enough to have access to two people who wanted to help out.

The first was my grand-mother, she came to the first three sessions as my mother was overseas, my grand-mother and my self, had no idea what to expect from the program, however after the first session with Mrs Bricknell we knew from that moment it was going to be a regular thing, full of great ideas, wonderful tips, and ways to survive the next two years. When my mother returned from overseas, I began going with my mother, I was really enjoying the advice from someone who knew what they were actually talking about. My mother was really surprised on what the program offered, ways to manage stress, ways organise yourself and prepare, as well as exam techniques, stress management, and stories of Mrs Bricknell's own daughters, seeing images on how they organised them self and their study techniques , and hearing from a parents point of view, what the final 2 years are like. As my mother did not complete her HSC, she had absolutely no idea what was ahead for me, the last person in my family to complete their HSC was my Uncle but that was back in 2002 and a lot has changed since then. Senior Success was a way for me to personally know what was laying ahead, and not be completely overwhelmed with the work, my mother's first reactions was how great this program was going to be not only for myself but also for her to know exactly what is going on, how much work is ahead for me, and techniques to deal with little 'hiccups' that may arise along the way, her second thought was how on earth do they expect her baby to complete all this work in such a short space of time.

Out of this program so far I have gained knowledge that has helped me survive what felt like the never ending assessment tasks, the countless piles of



homework that seemed to build up. My mother has been able to support me as she knew exactly what was happening and what I was so stressed about, without even actually having me explain. As I have two younger brothers in my house, my mother and I don't have a lot of time to take for ourselves or even to just take time away together, so these sessions were away of bringing me and my mother together, as well as myself having support that I so desperately needed.

As the work began 'piling' up, and getting harder, all the things Senior Success was talking about began to take hold and without even realising it myself I had organised myself for the year, and was beyond believe on much I had begun to achieve without even being fully stuck into the work for the next 2 years. My mother was so surprised when I actually was putting the practices and advice into act, having simple thing like one folder per subject around my room, to keep all my work together for a particular subject, has made all the difference for me and my mother tells me that she is proud of me, it is strange for me as I rarely hear my mother tell me this. As this year has gone in a flash, the exams approached to fast, in the blink of an eye this year was gone, and exam period was already here.

The stress had already taken hold, but this time was different I was actually able to manage this stress; this stress management was extremely unexpected for me. I have never been good at managing stress or multiple things at once, how all of a sudden was I able to manage all these things, (was the first thing I was beginning to question myself). One night as I was about to finish studying for the night, it suddenly clicked, the reason why I was actually able to manage this stress was because of *Senior Success*, all the techniques, we had talked about were actually being put into place without even realising it myself. I had survived the bulk of year 11 not sure how, but I had. The next hurdle to overcome now was the preliminary exams, every time I thought of these exams I was stricken with panic, panic of how fast everything was moving, panic of actually sitting exams (I've never been good at doing exams), I'd panic knowing I'd soon be year 12 and how fast that would be over and I'd soon be in the real world. This panic however like the stress was manageable only because I knew exactly who I could speak to when I needed to, that the people around me actually cared and wanted to help, me achieve my goals, no matter how insignificant or unbelievable they may have seemed to themselves personally.

Exam week was here, and no one likes exams do they? Mrs Bricknell always talks about brain turtles, and how when you make your brain do something it is not used to or does not want to do e.g. exams. Your brain freezes up and does not regurgitate the information you need. Well these exams as much as I would love to say it didn't happen to me, unfortunately it did, but it was alright as I knew what was happening, and knowing that always makes things more manageable. I did not go as well in these exams as I'd have hoped for. Thanks to my brain turtle, I know no matter where I am I will always have a shoulder to turn to when I need a cry, and ear to chew of when I need a whinge, and most of all someone to support me when I need the support the most. Without a



program like *Senior Success* in place for people like myself, (who don't know what to expect) I personally do not believe I would have lasted the year the stress of year 11 and without knowing how to manage the work load, tips on how to help you survive.

I believe I would have left school and not have gone as far as I have but thanks to Mrs Bricknell and a program like senior success, I've learnt to survive, and I know this support will be around, for as long as I need it. I am looking forward to the beginning of year 12 now as, I look forward into the future, keep my dreams alive and am excited to find out what *Senior Success*, can teach me about my final year of school.

Ainsley had used the Senior Success Rainforest DVD as supplementary material for her English coursework. She had copied the DVD and watched it regularly. She found a framed photograph and quotation which she bought in Melbourne and gave to me as a thank you gift. The impact of the rainforest theme upon this student crystallised the use of the rainforest theme as the design theme for this project.

2.1.6. 2012

In 2012 I again had the opportunity to conduct *Senior Success* at Tamworth High School. This year illustrated the previously established understanding that a known presenter who has a rapport with the students will be able to encourage more people to commit to a school event of an evening. The 2012 Year 11 class included my English class. I had been with this year group throughout their Stage 6 preparation activities and their Year 11 camp. I also had now met more of the parents and was more involved in the school community. The small Year 12 group continued throughout the year, those participating indicating the significance of the program in supporting their learning experience.

The Year 11 program began with 46 people in attendance. SSPs were primarily parents. There were also one sister-in-law, a teacher and a boyfriend in this group. A mature age student, a woman of 30, also attended the program, initially on her own,



but by the third workshop she was joined by her father who was possibly the most thrilled parent I have had participate. His comment was ‘It is so exciting that she is doing this and that I can have a part in it’. This group were also almost even in the number of fathers in comparison to mothers. The evaluation comments reflected previous groups in indicating that the night was of benefit, that it would change how the students would organise themselves and that the participants wished that more people would attend.

Whilst the previous patterns of waxing and waning participant numbers continued, the group did not dip below half of the first workshop during winter and then returned to over forty participants in Term 4. The group also attracted more students who were struggling with staying at school who were seeking extra guidance in study and organisation. This group were unimpressed that Year 12 students only had one session per term, so I developed an extra workshop for Term 4.

2012 saw increasing changes in technology and the need to adapt study strategies to include smart phones and their use in keeping notes, using Dropbox and other record keeping applications. Students were using their phones as their main diary, their library and their study notes. I, and the parents, had to learn to discuss this with the students, what the expectations were around the ever-present phone and the constant input of sound via that device. Students were also beginning to use iPads and other tablets to manage their school and personal lives. This is putting tension on the partnership as some teachers and parents are embracing the changes and others are reacting with fear and negativity.



2.1.6.1. So What?

These observations and changes were similar in part to the changes witnessed in other annual cycles. It is both exciting and daunting to review the changes since the inception of the program. It reinforces the importance of having a dynamic approach to the workshops and a strategy to disseminate the new workshops.

The dependence upon one teacher has begun to re-emerge in my school. I am currently training a team of teachers to understand the presentation of the workshops and to have the skills to respond to the parents' questions. This is a different training model as the teachers who are interested in the program are young staff members who have shown limited experience with Year 11 and 12 students and parents.

2.1.6.2. Now What?

My role is now established in the school. I need to continue with the program and use the work that I am doing at the facilitator level to continually adjust and adapt the workshops, responding to the constant changes in the world of late adolescents.

2.1.6.3. What?

As reported in 2011, I spoke at the Parents and Citizens State conference about *Senior Success*. I was then asked to submit an article to the P&C Journal (See



Appendix 2.6). This article was published in March 2012. As a result of these two opportunities to share *Senior Success* I was invited to travel to the Tweed River District to present a series of workshops and information sessions. The organisation of this series of events reflected the paradigm that *Senior Success* aims at overcoming. The organisers arranged a parent night, student workshops and staff meetings. Again I saw the accepted approach of each of these groups functioning separately. I encouraged the organisers to consider joint workshops but they were most hesitant, unsure as to why this was necessary. After the presentations and the associated discussion there was an increased awareness of the importance of partnership⁹. It was a challenging idea for many of the participants; however each of the three schools visited saw the value in the approach and undertook to participate in *Senior Success*.

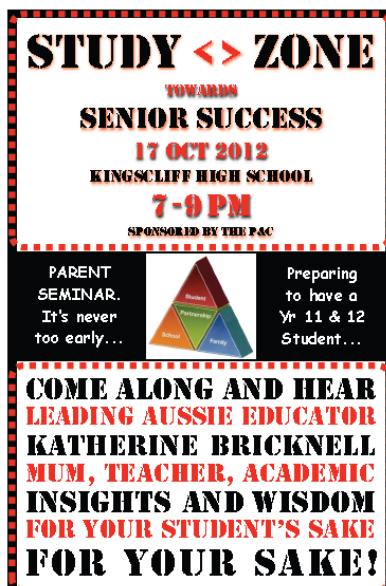


Figure 15: Advertising Flyer from Tweed River District

⁹ These workshops are included in the Senior Success Package



2012 also saw my role as a spokesperson for supporting Stage 6 students and families recognised by local media during the media coverage for the 2012 HSC examinations.

The screenshot shows the PRIME7 news website. At the top, there's a green banner with the text 'FOR A LIMITED TIME' and 'Through 31 December 2012'. Below the banner is a photo of a green tractor. The main navigation menu includes links for HOME, NEWS (which is highlighted in red), SPORT, TV, LIFESTYLE, COMPETITIONS, COMMUNITY, KIDS, WEATHER, CLASSIFIEDS, and JOBS. A secondary navigation bar below has links for LOCAL, STATE, NATIONAL, WORLD, BUSINESS, OFFBEAT, SCI-TECH, GALLERIES, and VIDEO. There's a search bar with the placeholder 'SITE SEARCH' and a location field set to 'TAMWORTH, 2340' with a 'Change Location' link. The main content area features a headline 'Avoiding HSC meltdown (video)' with a timestamp 'October 8, 2012, 7:03 pm'. Below the headline is a photo of three people studying together. To the right of the photo is a text box: 'Year 12 students across the state are knuckling down to study. The HSC exams are a week away. And we've spoken to some experts on how to keep cool during the stressful times.' Below the photo is a link 'Enlarge photo'. To the right of the main content is a weather forecast box for TAMWORTH. It shows 'Currently 15.0°' with a sun icon, 'Today's forecast: Sunny 7° - 25°', and a link '7 day forecast »'. Below the weather box is a dark rectangular area with a small circular icon.

2.1.6.4. So What?

The branching out of *Senior Success* into an entire new area, initiated by parents rather than by the teachers indicates that there are many new avenues for this innovation. The challenge is to continue to facilitate the growth of the innovation in a way as to avoid disruptions to my own students and staff. This is one of the great challenges for workplace innovation, how does one expand the innovation whilst meeting the normal demands of the workplace?



2.1.6.5. Now What?

I have to develop a means of balancing growth of the innovation with meeting my responsibilities within my own school. I will be teaching Advanced English and two Extension classes for the 2013 HSC. This will impact heavily upon the time that I can be away from my own school. I will need to seek other avenues of expansion and development. Tweed River P&C are planning my 2013 visit after the HSC examinations. However, this will be an established group that will need maintenance rather than further expansion. This will be a challenge to meet.



3. Conclusion

The reporting of these cycles has illustrated the dynamic nature of the work that has been this innovation to date. It has made me reflect upon the journey of the innovation and to evaluate the commitment of time and effort, without remuneration, that developing such an innovation requires. My decision to commit to the innovation was affirmed when I had the privilege of watching a young journalist conducting the standard pre-examinations news item interview try, to no avail, to lead two program participants into saying that they were 'stressed out' by the HSC. They were not to be drawn into that trap, resoundingly stating that they were stressed, but only in a positive way and that they were very organised and confident that they would be able to do their best because the school had prepared them for the experience. The journalist tried repeatedly for the traditional sound grab of a 'stressed out' student, ultimately presenting only a snippet from the students and vision of them studying.

Partnerships take commitment and work on the part of all participants. The saddest part of this experience is seeing a student who wants their parent to participate and the parent refuses. Similarly concerning is to see parents wanting to support their child and the child rejects them outright. I have also learnt that there are teachers who do not see a need for partnership, rather perceive it as an imposition. They remain confident in the belief that parents know what to do and that delivering



content and skills will suffice for all students. They are comfortable with how it ‘always has been’ and see no need to change.

Every innovation has those who will take up the offer, those who will take a portion and those who will reject the change. Such is the nature of innovation. *Senior Success* and Stage 6 partnerships have assisted those who accept the offer to build partnerships and to use the opportunity to strive to be ready for all facets of the Stage 6 experience.



4. Adendum

In February 2013 I was interviewed by a journalist preparing an article for *Dolly Magazine* seeking advice for HSC students. This article has not yet been published.

In March 2013 Charles Sturt University Outreach Team requested training in *Senior Success* and the adaptation of the program to suit their needs.

14th March 2013

Dear Kate,

I would like to formally thank you for your workshop training and materials for *Senior Success*. With your permission, the department of Indigenous Student Services intends to use your material in community engagement events to present these workshops as a way of facilitating HSC success and hopefully, a confident and smooth transition to tertiary studies. The workshop materials will be used in a professional manner to also support first year university students who come to study at Charles Sturt University as some of the organisational workshop materials and support person information/tips are also applicable in a tertiary study environment, particularly for those students who are first in family and have no previous experience or knowledge of university study.

The workshops will also be presented in an open manner, for all community members who are studying or who are supporting persons studying at the stage 6 level. This will be a fantastic opportunity for people in our region to access this kind of support and information.

Thank you again for your assistance and advice. Also for the offer of ongoing support in our modification and intended use of the *Senior Success* materials for the benefit of our communities.

Sincerely

Helene Jones

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