SUBJECT SELECTION FOR THE SENIOR YEARS OF SCHOOLING: A CASE STUDY OF A RURAL COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL IN NSW.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education (Honours) of the University of New England.

December, 1997.
CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.
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## CONTENTS

### Chapter One - Introduction
- Context and Purpose ........................................ 1
- Problem .................................................................. 7
- Questions ............................................................. 8
- Significance .......................................................... 10
- Assumptions and limitations .................................... 11
- Terminology .......................................................... 12
- Thesis overview .................................................... 13

### Chapter Two - Literature Review
- Introduction .......................................................... 15
- Outline of a Conceptual Model of Subject Selection .... 16
- Indirect Influences on Students’ Subject Selection: Government and Education Policy 
  - The Academic Tradition - the development of curriculum and education policy ........ 20
  - Post 1980’s - signs of change ............................. 22
- Retention and trends in participation ...................... 28
- Direct Influences on Students’ Subject Selection ....... 33
  - Gender ............................................................. 33
  - Socio-economic Status ........................................ 36
  - Family Support .................................................. 37
  - Ethnic Background ............................................. 38
  - Aboriginality ..................................................... 39
- Summary of Indirect and Direct Influences on Students’ Subject Selection ................. 39
- Reasons for Subject Selection - Other Indicative Factors ........................................... 40
- Interests in Relation to Subject Selection ................ 44
- Conceptual Model of Subject Selection .................. 45
- Summary ............................................................. 48
**Chapter Three - Research Design and Methodology**

- Introduction 49
- Competing Methodologies 49
- Research Design 51
- The Case Study 52
- The Questionnaire 53
- The Interviews 57
- Participant Observation 59
- Documents 61
- Summary of Methods 61

**Chapter Four - Case Study: Context**

- Introduction 63
- Background 63
- Staff and Student Profile 63
- Response to Government and Education Policy 65
- Process of Subject Selection for the Senior School in 1996 71
- The place of Vocational Education 78
- Developing the Curriculum 78
- Summary 79

**Chapter Five - Case Study: Influences on Student Choice**

- Profile of the Students in the Study 81
- Other Influencing Factors 87
- Students’ Subject Preferences 89
- Summary 94

**Chapter Six - Case Study: What Subjects Students Choose and Why**

- Subject Selection 95
- What subjects did students choose? 110
- Why do students choose the subjects they do? 111
- Summary 115
Chapter Seven - Conclusions and Recommendations

Restatement of the problem and research question 117

Conclusions

Influences on Student Subject Selection 117
What Subjects did Students Choose 119
Why Students Select the Course they do for the Senior Years of Schooling 122

Implications

1. Theoretical 123
2. Practical 123
3. Systematic 124

Recommendations

1. Further Research 125
2. The School 125
3. The System 127

Bibliography 128

Appendices

Appendix A  Student Questionnaire 136
Appendix B  ASC© Categories 141
Appendix C  Preliminary Courses 1997 142
Appendix D  Year 11 Lines 1997 143
Appendix E  Interview Schedule 144
Appendix F  Schools As Learning Communities 145
Appendix G  HSC Rules and Regulations 146
Appendix H  Tables 149
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Faculty and KLA organisation in the school</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Country of Birth of Students’ Parents</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Occupation of Parents</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Students’ Post School Expectations for Education/Training/Work</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Students’ Occupational Choice</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Subject Preferences of Students</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Reasons for Student Course Preferences</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Line 2 - Maths courses chosen by Students</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Reasons for choosing Maths</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>Line 3 - Courses Chosen by Students</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>Reasons for Choosing Courses on Line 3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>Line 4 - Courses Chosen by Students</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>Reasons for Choosing Courses in Line 4</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>Line 5 - Courses Chosen by Students</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>Reasons for Choosing Courses in Line 5</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>Line 6 - Courses Chosen by Students</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>Reasons for Choosing Courses in Line 6</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 18</td>
<td>Line 7 - Courses Chosen by Students</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 19</td>
<td>Nationality of Students</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 20</td>
<td>Students’ Enjoyment of School</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The Indirect Influences on Students’ Subject Selection</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>The Direct Influences on Students’ Subject Selection</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Reasons for Subject Selection - Other Indicative Factors</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Conceptual Model of Subject Selection</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The process of subject selection for the senior years of schooling involves a range of inter-related factors that are directly and indirectly related to the student.

This study sought to identify the major influences upon students’ choice and reasons why they chose the subjects they did for their final two years of secondary school. Influences include government and education policy, the rules and regulations governing the Higher School Certificate in NSW through the Board of Studies, gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background, Aboriginality and family support. The reasons for subject selection explored in this study included; intrinsic, interest and enjoyment of the subject; extrinsic, needed for future work and/or study; instrumental, the student’s ability in the subject, gaining a Tertiary Entrance Rank; organisational, curriculum constraints, school factors; significant others, family, friends and teachers.

To better understand how these factors relate to each other a conceptual model of subject selection was developed to show the inter-relationships of the factors to one another and the student.

This study was conducted as a case study in a comprehensive high school in rural NSW using a cohort of students who were making their subject selections for the senior school. As well as using the conceptual model of subject selection the process of subject selection is clearly detailed in the case study to indicate the complexity of the process and the need for clear communication for all people involved in the process.

The findings suggest that students in the case study have similar patterns of subject selection to students elsewhere in Australia. A broader consequence of the research is that schools need to be conscious of the needs of their students and attempt to cater for their needs through the provision of a curriculum that will meet the requirements of the varying post school pathways that students may choose to pursue.