CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The problem being investigated

Until 1967, very few Aboriginal students in South Australia entered secondary school unless they were wards of the state. Given this history of disadvantage it is not surprising that much of the literature about the education of Aboriginal students since then (see Watts 1977, 1981, 1982; Willmott 1982; Karmel 1985; Allen 1989; House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989; Masters et al. 1990; AEC 1991; Education Department of South Australia 1992a, 1992b; McInerney 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992; Marovich 1992; Department for Education and Childrens Services 1993; Titmanis et al. 1993; DEET 1995) refers to the poor retention and attainment rate of Aboriginal students compared to their non-Aboriginal peers. There have been significant improvements in some areas of schooling. For example, participation rates of Aboriginal students in primary schools seem to be improving; the vast majority begin and complete primary school (DEET 1995). In addition, in primary school, "approximately one-fifth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve at levels above the average for students as a whole" (Ainley 1994, 12). However, inequities continue to exist and some even appear to be increasing. For example, participation rates of Aboriginal students at secondary school are still poor compared with those of their non-Aboriginal peers.

In 1992, when I first began to explore the possibility of carrying out this study, significant numbers of Aboriginal students were still not completing their compulsory years of schooling (usually Years 8 and 9); indeed an estimated 25 per cent or more of those who started secondary school left before completing Year 10 (DEET 1995, 64). In addition, only 27 per cent of Aboriginal students who started secondary school four or five years previously were still enrolled in Year 12 (Education Department of South Australia 1992b). Although this apparent retention rate was a significant improvement on the 1982 figure of 10 per cent (Marovich 1992), it still compared unfavourably with the 66.6 per cent apparent retention rate for all students in South Australian schools for that time (Education Department of South Australia 1992b). The apparent retention rate for Aboriginal students at that time was what it had been for all Australian students twenty years previously (DEET 1995, 64). To put it another way, "the retention rate to Year 12 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is less than half that of the national figure" (Ainley 1994, 3).

More recent figures show that only about 0.3 per cent of Year 12 students in South Australia are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent whereas Aboriginal youth represent about 2 per cent of the State's population between the ages of 15 and 19 years (Lloyd 1997, 7). This decline in Aboriginal students' retention is greater than the 8 per cent drop for all students from 1992-1996 (ABS figure cited by Keating 1996, 38).

Watts (1981, 1982, 1983) identified some reasons for the relatively poor attainment and retention of Aboriginal students. McInerney (1991, 155) has grouped some of these under the following headings:

Education system
- comparatively recent introduction of compulsory education for Aboriginal students
- teachers inexperienced and poorly prepared to teach Aboriginal students
- high teacher turnover, particularly in remote areas
- inappropriate curricula and teaching methods
- few Aboriginal role models among teachers and administrators
- isolation from mainstream experiences.

Home background
- poor parental understanding of the importance and function of education
- lack of parental encouragement
- substandard housing, overcrowding and poor facilities for study
- few models of success in the community.

Socioeconomic factors
- poverty, ill health
- high unemployment and poor job prospects
- racial prejudice.

Biological and cultural factors
- deficient language skills
- poor discipline and academic motivation
- differences in cognitive, motivational and learning styles
- socialisation practices at variance to mainstream culture
- peer group influences apathetic to formal schooling
- excessive shyness, poor attendance
- cultural conflict.

It could be argued that McInerney's categorisation is inappropriate, but his work does

help to organise the reasons for the poor performance of Aboriginal students in some way. Other factors influencing poor indigenous retention and attainment mentioned by Watts (1981, 1982, 1983) include the following:

- Teachers do not value or utilise students' cultural groups and prior learning.
- Education systems tend to emphasise what Aboriginal students lack and, as a result, overuse remediation and alternative classes.
- Students lack of positive views of themselves.
- There are limited aspirations and expectations for Aboriginal students on the part of the students themselves, their parents and their teachers.
- There are breakdowns in communication at school and between home and school.
- Individual Aboriginal students are poorly placed at school.
- Aboriginal students experience discontinuities between home and school.
- Contact by the school with home is more negative than positive.
- Teachers' negative attitudes toward Aboriginal students lead to poor relationships with students.

As comprehensive as these items of McInerney and Watts' are, they omit the obvious issue of identity. For example, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s a colleague had been one of the first Aboriginal students in his school and in Queensland to succeed and to go on to university. He eventually became a teacher and, for a time, an administrator of Aboriginal Education in South Australia. Looking back, he felt that he had had to deny his Aboriginality in order to be successful in the 'white' schooling system. It was only after he had achieved his ambitions that he felt able to acknowledge his Aboriginality and to be proud of it. From that point he spent a significant part of his holidays each year going back to the place of his birth to learn about his Aboriginal heritage. He wanted to know if things were different now for Aboriginal students at secondary school, given the legislative changes and the changes in society in general since he went to school.

Denying one's Aboriginality was not a matter of 'passing for white' (Pat O'Shane cited in Mitchell 1984, 147). It was more a matter of having to learn and apply the values of white society that permeated white schooling. For example, built into school success:

> ...is a series of values necessary for success - competetiveness, time perspective, hard work, individualism, and so on. What we have been talking about is perhaps best described as assimilation. A demand is made by the school that all children adhere to a set of values drawn from a relatively small group within the society, and often in clear opposition to the values held by the home and social group from which the children come.... Hence anyone who succeeds in the school becomes acculturated into the dominant group.

> (Harker and McConnochie 1985, 138, 141)

Certainly, after the dismantling of the Aboriginal school system, assimilation was actively promoted in schools so that "Aborigines would finally have equal educational opportunities so that they would emerge from them 'equal with white' " (Fletcher 1989, 279). However, this did not achieve the desired outcomes for Aboriginal students (Fletcher 1989, 279). As Harris (1988, 170) explained:

> Education is culture learning. Any educational system is to some extent a culture building system. Many people involved in it do not recognise just how much white education is tied up with white culture. This is where College education can be a threat to Aboriginal identity.... To go very high on the white education ladder a person has to learn a lot of white culture world view, which is tied in with industrial economy and the way white culture survives.

According to O'Shane (cited by Mitchell 1984, 150): "Very few people hung on long enough. They didn't have the motivation in that kind of system. It was very difficult." Not only was it difficult to succeed when so many Aboriginal peers did not, it was also difficult to achieve as well as non-Aboriginal students without losing one's Aboriginal identity. The latter was clearly articulated by some of the people at Strelley:

> Some men there said to me that they did not trust adult training away from their community because all the young men they had sent away 'lost themselves': they either did not come back to their people, or they did not fit in if they did come back.

> (Harris1988, 169)

However, more recent literature about the retention, attainment and identity of Aboriginal students indicates a different trend. Students who have strong Aboriginal identities now have a much better chance of succeeding at 'white' schooling (Jordan 1984; Buck McKenzie in Pring 1990; Day 1994; AEU 1995). They are able to resist the negative pressures of their non-motivated Aboriginal peers and actively deny that academic success is the prerogative of non-Aboriginal people (Day 1994). Therefore, any study of the retention and attainment of Aboriginal students also needs to explore the students' identities.

Need for the study

If Aboriginal students as a group are not staying at school to the same extent as other students then, as a group, their levels of attainment at school are also significantly less, and their post-school options are significantly reduced. In other words:

> Despite significant advances in recent years, there remain unacceptable
> differences in Aboriginal students' schooling experiences in terms of
> attendance, participation, attainment and retention.
>
> (Education Department of South Australia 1993, 7)

As mentioned previously, many factors have been cited as determinants of this unsatisfactory situation. However, "little work has been done to identify the characteristics common to those students who have been successful" (Scott 1987, 1). Also, according to Ainley et al. (1991, 72), there is not enough information on how school factors such as curriculum, school organisation, and the intervening variables such as early secondary school experiences, achievement and attitude toward school life affect decisions made by students about staying or leaving. There is even less knowledge about how these school factors and various important home, ability and personality factors are interrelated (Poole 1983, 152), particularly in relation to individual Aboriginal students.

Purpose of the study

This exploratory study has been designed to extend the literature about factors that have been important in the retention and attainment of a few individual Aboriginal students who have made a successful transition to senior secondary schooling, and to explore how these factors might be related to their Aboriginal identity.

Ten Aboriginal students participated in the research. All lived in regional or rural centres of South Australia, had stayed at school into their post-compulsory years and were achieving a significant degree of success in their studies, despite the failure of the majority of their Aboriginal peers to do likewise. In more specific terms, the study sought to answer the following questions about these 'successful' Aboriginal students:

- What factors influenced their decision to stay at school?
- What factors have been important in their succeeding at school?
- How are these various factors interrelated?
- To what extent have various factors in the lives of individual students fostered their Aboriginal identities?
- How do these students express their Aboriginality and how do others see them expressing it?
- What is the relationship between the Aboriginal identity of the students and their retention and attainment at school?

The significance of this study

The significance of this study lies in its methodology and its positive focus. The majority of research into factors that are important in the retention and attainment of students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, has involved the use of survey techniques. However, at least in South Australia, most Aboriginal students are very much in the minority if they attend non-Aboriginal schools. In addition, particularly in the regional and rural centres outside the state capital, Aboriginal students come from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it seemed inappropriate to group them together and to make generalisations about factors that were important in the retention and attainment of Aboriginal students in non-Aboriginal schools without examining some specific case studies. In addition, this study is more highly focused on assets analysis than most of the literature on Aboriginal students' retention and attainment, with the possible exceptions of the studies by McInerney (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992) and Day (1994).

By taking specific case studies of Aboriginal students who have made a successful transition to the senior secondary level of schooling my research has achieved the following outcomes:

- Traditional case study research has been enhanced, both theoretically and methodologically, by the development of a model to conceptualise complex descriptive data such as that from case studies;
- Individual case studies now exist to illustrate in meaningful ways the combinations of factors that are important in assisting Aboriginal students to stay at school and to achieve educational outcomes equivalent to those of non-Aboriginal students;
- The case studies add depth to and illustrate the results of the monitoring aspect of the South Australian Social Justice Action Plan;
- Staff in schools have some specific examples to use as a starting point in evaluating the specific needs of individual Aboriginal students in their schools, and for designing appropriate strategies to help them achieve equitable outcomes; and
- Aboriginal students have some role models.

Scope of the study

The following provides an overview of the study: its design; the sample used and how this was determined; how the data were collected; analysis of the data and tools used; ethical issues of particular relevance to the study; assumptions made and the limitations imposed by them on the study; and possible biases in the study.

Design of the study

Individual case studies seemed the most appropriate way to develop in-depth pictures of what characterises successful senior secondary Aboriginal students, particularly as there are not very many of them across the state, let alone in the country areas of the state. The assets analysis orientation and the case study methodology fit well within the constructivist paradigm which has influenced all aspects of the study's design.

Sampling

The sample of students studied is small and non-representative. Student participants were selected if they were in succeeding at school in Years 11 or 12, it was anticipated that they would complete Year 12 or go on to alternative further study and they and their parents agreed to their participation. The final sample consisted of 7 students undertaking Stage 1 of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) (4 females and 3 males), as well as 3 students undertaking Stage 2 of the SACE (2 females and 1 male), a total of 10 students.

Data collection

Unstructured, but focused, interviews were used to obtain most of the data. Each student was interviewed at least once. In addition, significant others (a close family member, and a selection of teachers and/or friends nominated by each student) were also interviewed. All interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed. Additional data about the students came from school copies of students' school reports, and school administrators supplied demographic data about the school.

Analysis of data

NUD•IST was used to analyse the data. Initially this was done for each individual student and descriptive case studies were written. Individual student data were then conceptualised graphically. This revealed patterns which were followed up using the original data and further search facilities offered through NUD•IST.

Ethical issues

The major ethical considerations were those of anonymity, informed consent and the level of power which knowledge gives the researcher. Anonymity has been ensured by the use of pseudonyms for the names of the student participants and by using general descriptions for their schools and communities. All interviewees gave their written consent for their participation and all students gave written consent for me to examine their school records. In addition, the student participants were asked to nominate others from whom information about them might be gained. Transcripts of all interviews were checked by interviewees themselves, and participants were encouraged to make any

changes they wished. Each student participant was provided with a copy of his or her own case study.

Assumptions and biases of the study

The assumptions of the study relate to its case study focus. The perceptions that constitute the case record for each student must be interpreted in context. Therefore, each case is qualitatively different from any other. Although the collective set of case records has been analysed for any common factors in the students' retention, attainment and identity, no effort has been made to produce a picture of a 'typical' senior secondary Aboriginal student.

Authenticity and trustworthiness (Hipps 1993) of the data has been improved by a form of methodological triangulation. The same areas were covered in interviews with different people about individual students, and individual students' school records were also examined. Further, I collected most of the data myself and was as consistent in my approach as it was possible to be working with different people in different settings. The interviews were made flexible by the use of an interview guide rather than a specific list of questions.

Time was spent building rapport with each interviewee, making the relationship as authentic as possible. The case studies and their conceptualisations produced as a result of this research demonstrate *verisimilitude* which dispenses with the quest for validity in the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln and Denzin 1994).

The interviews were prone to subjectivity and bias because of my personal characteristics, the personal characteristics of each interviewee, and our preconceived stereotypes and notions of each other and the research I was undertaking. However, these human elements of interview situations are necessary for the 'validity' of interviews (Kitwood cited by Cohen and Manion 1980). My bias was constant and acknowledged.

Definition of terms

A variety of terms are used in this report. As each of these terms can be used in different ways, this section defines them in the context of this study.

Country

In South Australia *country* generally refers to areas outside the greater metropolitan area of Adelaide which, it is generally accepted, has a radius of 40 kilometres. This does not necessarily conform to the definition of *country* as used by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in its publication *Schooling in Rural Australia* which defines *country* as all parts of the nation outside a 50 kilometre radius of the greater metropolitan regions (Department for Education and Childrens Services 1994, 2). However, due to the shape of the South Australian coastline some country areas, such as Yorke Peninsula, are within a 50 kilometre radius of the Adelaide General Post Office (GPO), but are considered *country* because of their road distance from the GPO.

Regional centres

South Australia has six centres that fall under the category of *regional centres* according to the Commonwealth funded Country Areas Program (Department for Education and Childrens Services 1994, 2). These *regional centres* are Mount Gambier, Murray Bridge, Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Whyalla and Port Lincoln. All have at least one state secondary school which caters for students from Years 8 to 12 or a combination of two or more schools which do so.

Rural centres

In South Australia there are a large number of *rural centres*. These vary in size and in their distance from the nearest regional centre. Some are considered remote and geographically isolated because they are more than 100 kilometres by road from their nearest centre (Department for Education and Childrens Services 1994, 2). Many *rural centres* have Area Schools which cater for students from pre-school to Year 12 but some only cater for students in the compulsory years of schooling.

Retention and retention rates

Education authorities in all states and territories of Australia use *apparent retention rates* to measure retention of students in the school system (House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989, 6). These *apparent retention rates* are calculated by expressing the proportion of students in one year level as a percentage of those students who were enrolled in a previous year, the relevant number of years ago. For example, in South Australia, the *Year 12 apparent retention rate* is usually calculated by expressing the number of students enrolled in Year 12 as a percentage of students enrolled in Year 8 five years previously. Alternatively, the apparent retention rate could be calculated by expressing the number of students enrolled in the first of the non-compulsory years as a proportion of the number of students enrolled the previous year in the last of the compulsory years (see Ainley, Foreman and Sheret 1991, and Ainley and Sheret 1992a, 1992b, 1993).

However, because *apparent retention rates* are based on gross enrolment figures, they do not take into account any movement of students between schools, school sectors or states or students who repeat grades (House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989, 6). These factors, plus the differing social environments of individual schools, can confound statistics derived in this way (Ainley and Sheret 1992a, 170). In addition, these data ignore students who may be undertaking senior secondary equivalent courses at Colleges (now Institutes) of Technical and Further Education. Therefore, many studies use additional indicators of retention. For example, Ainley and Sheret (1992a) included the internal progression rates of students in individual schools included in their study and adjusted these statistically, controlling for the influence of some student background variables and the outcomes of earlier schooling.

According to Johnston (1990, 6) interest in school retention rates is a relatively recent phenomenon, and much of the research has focused on documenting the trends rather than explaining them or isolating the variables which contributed to them. Indeed, those attempts to isolate single variables or groups of variables have met with little success because of the complexity of the issues associated with school retention. Despite this, part of the focus of this study is to identify variables that are associated with individual student's retention. In the context of this study, *retention* relates to students staying at secondary school into the post-compulsory years of schooling.

Attainment

Attainment is one of the outcomes of education. While some authors use the term *attainment*, others use the term *achievement*; still others refer to *school success*. However, what is meant by these terms or from whose perspective they are measured is rarely explained. According to Tomlinson (1986), *achievement* itself is a problematic concept. Reflecting on the situation in Britain where research has shown that inequalities of access to and outcomes from education are perpetuated by educational structures, Tomlinson (1986, 181) asks the following questions:
- Who defines what counts as achievement?
- Who measures achievement and how?
- In whose interests is achievement actually defined?
One might also add the following questions:
- Where do personal goals fit in to this?
- Is success at school a pre-condition for success after school?

Any quantitative assessment of *attainment* depends on two rather dubious assumptions: (1) that there are culture-fair methods to assess attainment and (2) that all students have equal opportunities to learn and perform via an appropriate curriculum (Figueroa 1984

in Tomlinson 1986, 189). Neither assumption is easy to justify given that the whole school curriculum generally embodies the cultural values of the dominant cultural group (Allen 1989). Partly for these reasons, Ainley (1995, 14) chose to measure *achievement growth*, the extent to which student achievement changes over time, as he believed this to be a more valid reflection of student learning than simple static measures of achievement.

In the context of the South Australian Social Justice Action Plan, *attainment* refers to student learning outcomes in the required areas of study for students from Reception to Year 10 and at stages 1 and 2 of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) (Education Department of South Australia 1992a, 12).

The learning outcomes in the compulsory years of schooling are only beginning to be quantified using the National Statements and Profiles and by standardised testing at Years 3 and 5. In the post-compulsory years the means to quantify learning outcomes has existed for some time. All results of SACE courses are registered by the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) to determine whether or not students meet the SACE requirements. Although there is no time or age limitation to meeting these requirements, almost all students need to stay at school until the end of their twelfth year of schooling. A significant number stay for a further year. Therefore, in South Australia there is a significant relationship between retention and attainment.

In the context of this study, *attainment* is defined broadly and is seen to have both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. This allows for perceptions of a student's attainment by the student, his or her peers, family and teachers to be as important as academic achievement that can be measured by standardised testing or by meeting the requirements for certificates. The fact that success in an individual area of the curriculum can, in its own right, be a pre-requisite for post-secondary study or lead to a specialised career pathway is also covered by this definition.

Identity

In the context of this study, *identity* includes how one views oneself as well as how one is viewed by others. The emphasis is on Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality. There is no single definition for either term. Definitions do, however, emerge from analysis of the literature and the data produced from this study, particularly from the students themselves.

Structure of the report

This report contains ten chapters. Chapters Two and Three indicate the breadth and depth of the literature search that was part of this study. Chapter Two focuses on factors that are said to be associated with high student retention and attainment for all students, and then specifically for Aboriginal students. In Chapter Three the concept of identity, particularly Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality, are explored from both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal perspectives. The complexities of identity formation for Aboriginal students and the implications of this for schooling are explicated.

Chapter Four provides the theoretical and methodological background that led to the development of *causal network matrices* to conceptualise complex descriptive data. Data from Chapters Two and Three and that from a hypothetical student are displayed on causal network matrices to demonstrate how the matrices can be used.

Chapter Five provides the rationale and theoretical framework for an *assets analysis orientation* within the *constructivist paradigm* and explains how this led to *multi-site case studies*. Data collection and analysis procedures are then detailed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how relevant ethical issues were addressed, and the trustworthiness of the data.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight present the individual case studies in three distinct groupings: the *expected stayers*, the *possible stayers* and the *unexpected stayers*.

Chapter Nine examines patterns among the various factors identified in the retention, attainment and identity of the majority of the ten students, particularly in terms of the three groups of students. These patterns are related to those in the literature.

The report concludes with comments about the appropriateness of the research process, how this study has extended the literature on the retention, attainment and identity of Aboriginal students and implications for future research and the education of Aboriginal students.

CHAPTER TWO

RETENTION AND ATTAINMENT

Introduction

Much of the literature on the education of Aboriginal students over the past twenty Years (see Watts 1977, 1981, 1982; Willmott 1982; Karmel 1985; Allen 1989; House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989; Masters et al. 1990; AEC 1991; Education Department of South Australia 1992a, 1992b; McInerney 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992; Marovich 1992; Department for Education and Childrens Services 1993; Titmanis et al. 1993; DEET 1995) refers to the poor retention rate of Aboriginal students compared with their non-Aboriginal peers. There have been significant improvements in some areas of schooling, but inequities continue to exist and some even appear to be increasing. According to recent figures (DEET 1995) participation rates of Aboriginal students in primary schools seem to be improving as the vast majority begin and complete primary school. However, participation rates of Aboriginal students at secondary school are still poor compared with those of their non-Aboriginal peers: significant numbers do not complete their compulsory Years of schooling (usually Years 8 and 9); an estimated 25% or more of those who start secondary school leave before completing Year 10; and in 1993 only just over 25% of Aboriginal students who started secondary school four or five years previously were enrolled in Year 12. This is what the retention rate had been for all Australian students twenty years previously (DEET 1995, 64). To put it another way, "the retention rate to Year 12 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is less than half that of the national figure" (Ainley 1994, 3). This is despite the fact that, in primary school, "approximately one-fifth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve at levels above the average for students as a whole" (Ainley 1994, 12).

Throughout much of the literature there is an implied, if not always explicitly stated, interrelationship between attendance, participation, retention and attainment and concern about the general paucity of all of these for many Aboriginal students. More recent studies in this area include those commissioned by the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales (Scott 1987), McInerney's (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992) research into motivation factors for Aboriginal students in secondary school, and Parish's (1990) study of school non-attendance in two traditionally oriented Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Other recent studies that have examined

retention and attainment among Aboriginal students have been on a much smaller scale (Burt 1991; Day 1994), more highly focused on a particular aspect of retention and/or attainment (Gillon et al. 1987; Jenkings 1987; Cavanagh 1988; Courtney 1989; Malin 1989; Russell 1992), or rather broad and general (Sykes 1986; Wilkinson 1987).

McInerney's (1991) findings indicate that there have been changes in the relative importance of some of the variables previously shown to be important for Aboriginal students staying at school and achieving success. For example, although affiliation, social concern, extrinsic rewards and recognition from teachers had previously been identified as being important in Aboriginal student motivation, McInerney found that they were *not* major determining factors. Similarly, McInerney found no evidence to suggest that competition, power and low self-esteem were disincentives for Aboriginal students staying at school (McInerney 1991, 161-163).

That there have been changes in the relative importance of various factors in Aboriginal student motivation is not surprising because society and the position of Aboriginal people in it have continued to change over the years. For example, although a greater percentage of Aboriginal people still live in rural areas compared with all Australians, in 1991 about 68per cent of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas (National Multicultural Advisory Council 1995, 4). Consequently, despite ongoing racism and discrimination, more Aboriginal people now live in closer association with non-Aboriginal people and more Aboriginal students attend non-Aboriginal schools.

This chapter examines the relationships between the concepts *retention* and *attainment*. Then, because of the relative paucity of literature specifically about retention and attainment among Aboriginal students, the general literature in this area is reviewed. The emphasis is on Australian research but some relevant overseas studies are also examined. A range of variables identified as being important in students staying at school beyond the age of compulsion and achieving success while at school are classified and described. This is followed by an analysis of factors that appear to positively influence the retention and attainment of Aboriginal students in particular, thereby putting these latter findings within the broader research context. Where appropriate the interrelationships between the various factors are discussed and conceptualised because:

> readiness to remain at school for the post-compulsory years depends on an interactive framework of factors which overall lead young people to believe in the long run school is of greater benefit to them than the available alternatives, and that it is a satisfying place in terms of their immediate experience.
> (Ainley et al. 1984 cited in Connelly 1989, 52)

Relationships between retention and attainment

A number of studies have demonstrated the existence of strong positive relationships between retention and attainment. For example, Power (1984), following up a study by Rosier (1972 cited by Power 1984), found that students who had positive academic self-concepts were generally more satisfied with school and prepared to stay at school longer. A similar view was put in a number of submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee (1989, 63). However, these submissions went further and argued that levels of achievement were accurate indicators of whether or not young people would stay on to Years 11 and 12 because, if students did well at school, they probably had positive self-images in relation to their academic ability.

Similarly, Ainley, Foreman and Sheret (1991) and Ainley and Sheret (1992a, 1992b) found that achievement measured in Years 9 and 10 was the biggest influence on the decision to stay on to Year 11 and, among the Year 11 students, it was earlier school achievement and self-rated achievement (similar to academic self-concept) which were dominant influences on continuing to Year 12. This may be because success in earlier schooling often determined opportunities in subsequent years (Griffin and Batten 1991; Ainley 1994). Data from other Australian studies indicating that significantly more stayers achieved at a higher level than the leavers (Poole 1983; Braithwaite 1988; Williams et al. 1987, 1993) support this, as do overseas studies (Finn 1989). In addition, most of the stayers had more positive perceptions about their academic abilities (Braithwaite 1988). Williams et al. (1987) concluded:

> We seem to have demonstrated that achievement in school has a substantial impact - perhaps *the* most substantial impact - on participation in all forms of education, other than preparation for the skilled trades.... Those who learn well what schools teach have three time the chance (of completing Year 12) of those who fail to learn. All of this makes sense. Those who learn well are rewarded by schools, find school a reasonably congenial place, and stay on [emphasis in the original].
>
> (Williams et al. 1987, 103, 110)

The above studies indicate some of the possible complexities in the relationships between students' retention and attainment. Ainley, Foreman and Sheret (1991) and Ainley and Sheret (1992a, 1992b) went further than most. They viewed *achievement at school* and *academic self-concept* as two largely independent intervening variables between the students' background and the decision of whether to stay on at school or not. Given Power's (1984) findings above, *satisfaction with school* could also be viewed as an intervening variable.

In order to conceptualise the interrelationships between the two phenomena (retention and attainment) and the various factors seen to intervene between them, the data has been interpreted in the following way:

- Where authors have found evidence of relationships between either the phenomena and various factors, or between the factors themselves, a non-directional line has been drawn to indicate these correlations

- Where evidence of causality or direct influence has been identified a solid line with an arrow at one end has been used to indicate the direction of this influence or causality.

- Where findings have indicated the possibility of a causal link between factors and/or phenomena a broken directional line has been used.

Thus, Figure 2.1 conceptualises the interrelationships between the various factors identified in the literature as intervening between retention and attainment.
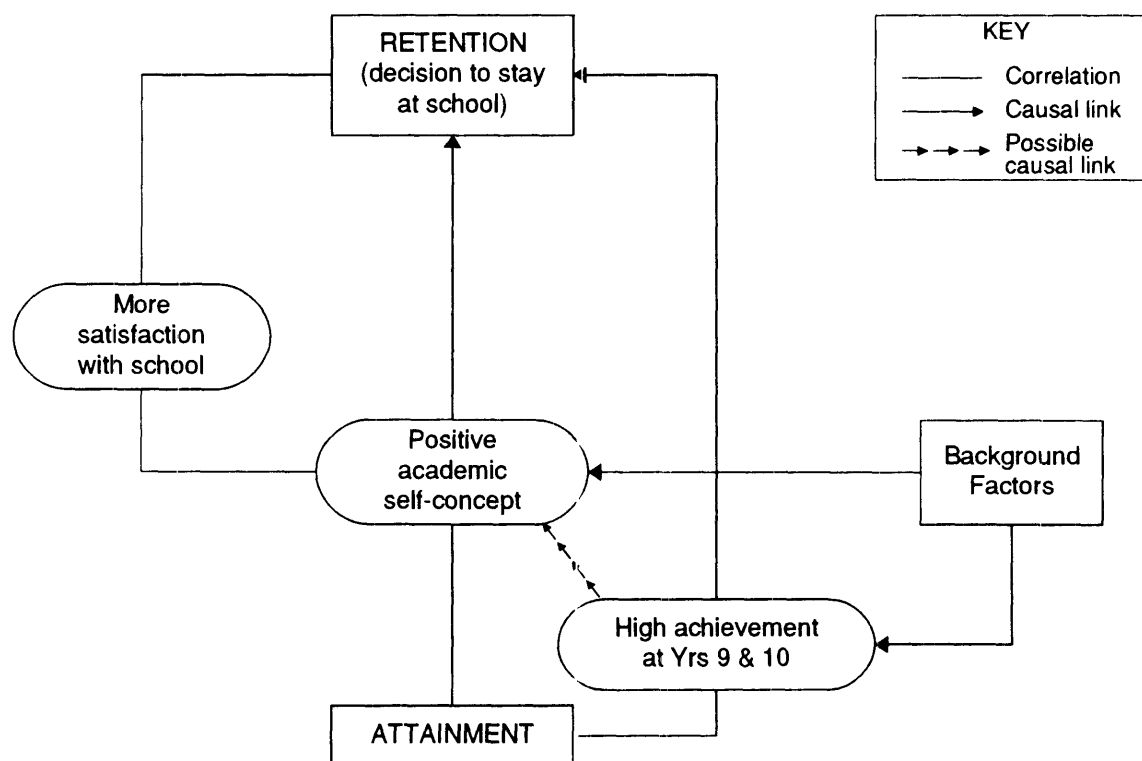
Figure 2.1   Interrelationships between the various factors identified in the literature as intervening between retention and attainment.

The question remains: "What are the background factors?"

The next part of this chapter reviews the literature and extracts factors which have been shown to have a positive effect on students' retention and attainment. It also

conceptualises the interrelationships between the various factors and the retention and attainment of students in general as outlined in Figure 2.1. This discussion is organised into two parts: firstly, factors relevant for students in general and, secondly, factors relevant for Aboriginal students.

In her analysis of variables related to Aboriginal students' success at school, Watts (1981, 1982, 1983) classified the non-student variables according to a series of environments in which students interacted with others. These environments included immediate family, extended family, community and school. This analysis of retention and attainment factors relevant for *students in general* follows a similar pattern. For example, family and community factors include parental expectations and encouragement, the socio-economic statuses of both the parents and the community and the type of school. In-school factors include students' interactions with individual teachers, their peers and the curriculum. Then, student related factors such as personality, views of self, desire to learn and succeed, career orientation, gender and attitude to and identification with school are examined. A similar analysis then focuses on factors which have been shown to positively affect the retention and attainment of *Aboriginal students*.

Family and community factors affecting the retention and attainment of *students in general*

Academic achievement among adolescents has been found to be associated with family cohesion and authoritative parenting. For example, Masselam et al. (1990, cited by Heaven 1994) found that adolescents who were making academic progress characterised their family as being more cohesive than did adolescents who were not making such good progress. Also, the studies by Steinberg et al. (1989, cited by Heaven 1994) indicated that three components of authoritative parenting facilitated academic performance in adolescents: parental acceptance or warmth, psychological autonomy and behavioural control. These generated *psychosocial maturity* in adolescents which engendered a positive attitude to school. Connell et al. (1982) described the influence of families in the following way:

> Families are thought to shape the educational careers of their young members in a wide range of ways: the extent to which parents care about schooling, the manner in which family members relate to each other (meal-time discussions, methods of discipline), their material provision (for example, of a quiet place to study), and their internal structure (especially the state of the parents' marriage).

(Connell et al. 1982, 185-186)

The following discussion of the interrelationships between family and community factors important in the retention and/or attainment of *students in general* has been divided into four broad areas: parental expectations and encouragement, socio-economic factors, the type of community and the type of school.

Parental expectations, encouragement and support

Power (1984) concluded from his study that family background variables were key factors in the decision making process associated with students staying at school. These background variables included parental expectations for further education for their children (Ainley and Sheret 1992a) and communication of these expectations (Warner-Smith and Skaines 1987). Generally speaking, students' intentions or aspirations agreed with what their parents wanted them to do (Poole 1985; Ainley and Sheret 1992a). Also important was parental encouragement to stay, regardless of how well the student was doing at school (Williams et al. 1987). For example, Power (1984, 123) found that supportive parents were more likely to have children who were satisfied with school and had positive academic self-concepts and, therefore, continued at school longer. However, Ainley and Sheret (1992a, 170) postulated that parental encouragement and support influenced retention "through a transmitted influence on achievement". In other words, parental encouragement and support led to improved outcomes at school which, in turn, led to students staying at school longer.

If Braithwaite's (1988) study is anything to go on, the vast majority of parents value education. However, studies have indicated that the level of parental encouragement was a reflection of the value the family placed on formal education (Williams et al. 1987) and the parents' attitudes to education (House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989). For example, an "overwhelming number of submissions" supported the view put by the Australian Parents Council that:

> parents' attitudes and expectations are a strong motivating factor in children's education...[and are] a major influence on their children's attitude to education and training beyond the compulsory years of schooling.

(House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989, 29)

There is some contention as to whether parents' attitudes and values associated with education are related to socioeconomic status. Although Power (1984) concluded that parental encouragement was largely a function of parental education, a significant number of parents who have not had what they would call a 'good' education have also encouraged their children to stay at school (see Connell et al. 1982, 37). Ainley and

Sheret's (1992a, 169) findings supported this latter view; they found parental expectations and encouragement were "quite independent of socioeconomic status", of which parental education is but one aspect. Despite this, Australian studies have shown some socio-economic factors to be important to students' retention.

Socio-economic factors

Several studies have indicated a positive correlation between students' retention at school and aspects of family socio-economic status, for example: parents' education (Poole 1983; Power 1984; Williams et al. 1980, 1987), fathers' occupation (Williams et al. 1980, 1987; Proudford 1992) and parents' career aspirations and expectations for their children (Poole 1983; Braithwaite's 1987). Statistics have illustrated this clearly.

> *Other things equal* some 50 to 60 per cent of persons from professional families complete Year 12. The rates for the children of unskilled workers are approximately half of this [emphasis in the original].

> (Williams et al. 1987, 44)

These findings are consistent with statements by the House of Representatives Standing Committee (1989, 29-30) that:

> ...the attitudes and expectations held by parents are closely related to their social status and background: ...children whose fathers are unskilled have about a 30 per cent chance of completing Year 12 whilst children whose fathers are in professional occupations are twice as likely to do so.... It is clear that most parents would like to see their children achieve success at school. Most often, however, their aspirations are moderated by experience. As the experience of those from the lower socio-economic groups in the community is most often of early school leaving, that too is the expectation they have of their children.

> (House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989, 29-30)

It was the *social* aspect of socio-economic status that appeared extremely important in students' decisions to stay at school or to leave. Parents of high socio-economic status socialised their adolescents according to the family's attitudes, expectations and beliefs about the need to complete Year 12; parents from lower socio-economic groups were unable to support their adolescents in the same way (Poole's 1983; Braithwaite 1987; Ainley et al. 1991).

Despite this, Williams et al. (1987) found that even when participation rates were adjusted for achievement levels, students from the wealthiest families were about twice as likely to complete Year 12 as those from the poorest families. From this they

assumed that "wealth as such affects participation directly, and that capable students from poorer families *are* disadvantaged" (Williams et al. 1987, 54). Abbott-Chapman (1987) put this another way:

> [A]s many as one third of those who discontinued their studies said that material disadvantage in a broad sense had been important in their decision to drop out. This finding is more marked than has been shown by previous studies. The financial aspects of staying on or dropping out are related not only to the real costs...but also to the *perceptions* of gain or sacrifice, especially among children of lower socio-economic status families [emphasis in the original].

(Abbott-Chapman 1987, 26)

Overseas studies have found differences in educational outcomes across categories of family socio-economic status (Williams et al. 1987). For example, the 1963 Robbins Report in the United Kingdom and the 1966 Coleman Report in the United States both "concluded that home and socioeconomic background were the major determinants of educational success" (Hatton and Smith 1992, 1). Similarly, children belonging to the 'higher social classes' passed more exams at a higher level than did students from the 'lower social classes', and there was "a tendency for the gap in attainment between the social classes to widen over the three years leading up to the public exams" (Smith and Tomlinson 1989, 282).

Some of the socio-economic factors identified in the literature were related to the communities within which families lived. Therefore, the next part of this section examines these.

Community factors

It has been suggested that the whole community environment can have an effect on a student's attainment (De Bertoni et al. 1987 cited by Armstrong 1987). Some studies have illustrated this by linking demographic and socio-economic factors to students' retention. For example, Braithwaite (1987) found that career related decisions were influenced by the local job market and the students' experiences during school organised work experience placements, both of which could reflect the local environment. Similarly, Abbott-Chapman (1987) noted that, particularly in Tasmania, residents of rural areas were grossly under-represented in post-compulsory education institutions.

Further evidence for this positive correlation between the environment in which students and their families live and the students' retention at school has come from a large scale descriptive study which used the Australian Bureau of Statistics *socio-*

economic index to derive a Year 12 retention rate for each postcode district throughout Australia (DEET 1987). The number of Year 12 certificates mailed to individual postcodes was compared with estimates of possible completers. The following hypothesis was proposed to explain the results:

> It is quite possible that the education expectation held for young people in the environment in which they live will influence their decisions with regard to completing a full secondary education.
>
> (DEET 1987, 13)

Within this context, the school is simply an extension of the community. Therefore, the type and location of schools can significantly affect the educational outcomes for students.

Type of school

The nation-wide data collected by the Commonwealth Department of Education since 1967 on apparent retention rates in different school systems indicated large differences between non-Catholic private schools, Catholic schools and public schools as well as between rural and metropolitan schools (Power 1984). In general, government secondary schools, particularly those in rural areas, had poorer retention rates than private sector schools. Abbott-Chapman's (1987) findings in Tasmania confirmed this. Power (1984) concluded:

> the type of school has an important direct and indirect effect on the retention rate of the school. The more academically oriented the school, the higher its retention rate. Indirectly as well, the type of school affects the level of parental encouragement and support which in turn influences the overall academic self-concept of the students.
>
> (Power 1984, 121)

Conversely, parents who have high aspirations for their children and who are prepared to encourage and support them at school are more likely to value academic success and choose to send their children to a more academically oriented school. In other words, there can be a mutual correlationship between the type of school and the level of parental encouragement and support.

In an extensive longitudinal study in the United Kingdom, Smith and Tomlinson (1989) have shown that the type of school which students attend can also make a significant difference to students' results in public examinations. The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia obviously agrees because it has obtained

permission not to release the names of the schools from which the top 100 or so Year 12 students come.

Thus, the links between a family's socio-economic background, community and student retention and attainment are extremely complex. Figure 2.2 conceptualises the interrelationships identified in the discussion above.
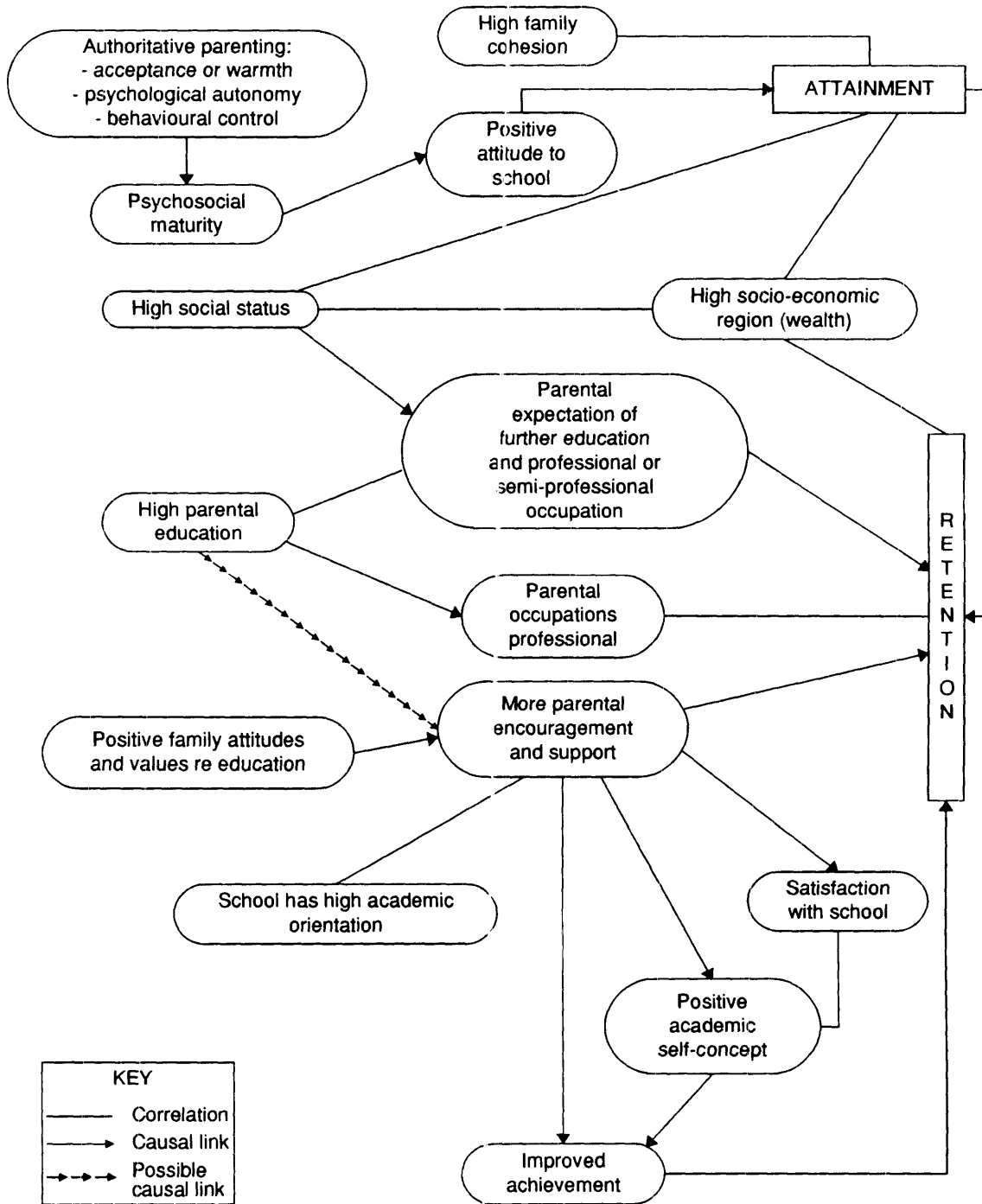
Figure 2.2 **Interrelationships between family and community factors identified in the literature as being associated with the retention and attainment of *students in general.***

As Figure 2.2 above indicates, the links between the various socio-economic factors and school retention and attainment appear to be mediated by a variety of intervening variables such as family cohesion, the type of parenting, the environment in which the family lives, the type of school the student attends, parental attitudes toward education, parents' aspirations and expectations for their children and parental encouragement and support. It is likely that:

> ...by themselves none of these factors completely explain the ways in which SES influences participation in education.... Each variable appears to be dependent on the others, so that in isolation no one variable can explain why a person participates in post-compulsory education and another does not.

> (DEET 1987, 13)

School provides a whole new environment within which individual students can interact with others. These interactions can affect the educational experiences of individual students and, thereby, also influence students' retention and attainment. Mortimore and Sammons (1987 cited by Hatton and Smith 1992), after a four-year study of inner-London schools, reported that most of the factors they saw as accounting for the variations between schools could be attributed to differences in school policies and practices that were within the control of the school staff, an area that is addressed in the following section.

School factors affecting the retention and attainment of *students in general*

Students' interactions with individual teachers, their peers and the school curriculum have been shown to be important in students' attainment and their decisions about staying at school. These are explored in this section.

Individual teachers

Teachers and parents might have considered the cognitive aspects of schooling more important than the affective aspects (Connell 1985; Ramsay and Clark 1990) but students felt that the affective areas were extremely important and had been largely ignored by schools (Ramsay and Clark 1990). For example, several Australian studies have suggested that relationships between students and teachers were more important than other factors in the school setting in determining the quality of the educational experience for many students (Batten and Girling-Butcher 1981; Poole 1983; Abbott-Chapman 1987; House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989; Johnston 1990;

Griffin and Batten 1992). Students felt that these relationships were important in providing them with a sense of personal efficacy and genuine interest in and satisfaction with remaining at school. Certainly, stayers and leavers have had different relationships with their teachers. For example, more stayers than leavers believed that teachers listened to students and encouraged them to express their views (Poole 1983) and that the schools (presumably teachers) encouraged them to stay at school (Braithwaite 1987). This could have been a function of better relationships that the stayers had with their teachers than anything else the teachers themselves were doing.

Research has also shown that individual teachers have made a difference in educational outcomes for some students, particularly for those students from socially or economically disadvantaged groups and those at risk of leaving school early (Abbott-Chapman et al. 1986; Abbott-Chapman 1987, 1990). When there were good interpersonal and working relationships between these students and teachers, the latter could inspire students to overcome social and financial barriers and to continue with their education past the age of compulsion. The teachers did this by creating enthusiasm for learning and advising students on how to go about continuing their studies, something most of the parents of these students were not in a position to do (Abbott-Chapman 1990). The House of Representatives Standing Committee (1989, 95) identified the principal of the school as a key person because it was the principal who set the tone of the school. The interrelationships between these influences and associated outcomes has been summed up in the following way:

> Individual schools can have a significant influence on students' decisions to continue their education.... A strong principal, inspirational teachers, and school-community relationships which encourage parent involvement, all contribute to an environment which is friendly to students.
>
> (Abbott-Chapman 1990, 2)

In terms of attainment, it has been shown that some teachers have helped students more than others. From one student's perception a 'good' teacher was someone who was successful at persuasion and who stimulated participation (Connell et al. 1982, 102), characteristics which are dependent on teacher-student relationships. More generally, Goodnow and Burns (1985, 65-69) identified three main hopes and expectations that students brought to their relationships with their teachers: the teacher will make learning possible, explaining things over and over again if necessary; the teacher will be human and friendly, able to relate to students on a personal level; and they (the students) will be accepted members of the class, whoever they are. Johnston (1990) also described some

'good' teacher characteristics which have been associated with good relationships with students:

> Caring, supportive teachers who encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, who are willing to form personal relationships, and who are sufficiently sensitive and flexible to meet the needs of individual students must affect the educational outcomes for all students in a positive way.

> (Johnston 1990, 37)

Smith and Tomlinson (1989, 166) found that, although praise was not necessarily associated with good progress, criticism could lead to slower progress. Johnston (1990) asserted that this was even more true at senior secondary level where:

> ...students require more confidence in their abilities to take risks, not worrying about coming up with the wrong answer, at least initially, and they need to persist in challenging, problem-solving tasks.

> (Johnston 1990, 25)

Facing failure is easier if there are good relationships with teachers.

Classroom environments, determined largely by the teachers, have also been shown to affect how well students succeed, and how they view their success or failure. For example, Baird and White (1982, cited by Cotterell 1990) showed that students could accept criticism of their ineffective learning tendencies, and learn techniques for taking control of their work, in a developmentally oriented task environment which contained supportive rather than coercive relationships. Further, Moriarty (1991) found that for many students levels of self-efficacy declined when they were subject to large-scale competitive learning environments but that, when teachers used small groups within the classroom as both collaborative and competitive learning groups, this decline in self-efficacy was significantly reduced. Moriarty's (1991) study highlighted the role which students' peers play in terms of retention and attainment.

Peers
A NSW Department of Education (1985) study revealed that school leavers' feelings were not only influenced by the teachers they had had, but also by their peers. Some recalled peer group conflict in Years 7 to 10 as a negative aspect of school, compared with more 'togetherness' in the last two years of primary school. Despite this, overseas experience has indicated that "friends become increasingly more important during adolescence" (Lackovic-Grgin and Dekovic 1990, 845) and, according to Johnston

(1990, 27), "Peer interactions have always been considered an important influence on educational outcomes".

Wentzel's (1991) review of the relations between social competence and academic achievement in early adolescence provided some insight into how peer relationships might improve students' academic performance.

> [T]he literature suggests that having friends to serve as academic as well as social resources can have a direct and positive influence on achievement outcomes at school. For instance, students provide mutual assistance by clarifying and interpreting their teacher's instructions, volunteering substantive information and answering content-based questions, sharing various resources...and modeling academic skills.

> (Wentzel 1991, 1067)

However, Johnston (1990) pointed out that there appeared to a gender bias in the influence of peers:

> For many girls, peer interactions have a detrimental effect on educational performance.... Girls often face a dilemma between getting the most from their education, and the priorities their peers expect them to pursue. Many girls perceive a considerable peer pressure not to achieve at a high intellectual level.

> (Johnston 1990, 27)

According to Simkin (1983), the bases of systematic relationships between students' membership of a particular kind of group (of their peers) and their commitment to success "can be manipulated by the formal organisational structure of the school" (Simkin 1983, 357). Given this, schools should be able to enhance the positive effects of peer group pressure and reduce the negative effects by recognising the breadth of the school curriculum and explicitly utilising all its aspects.

Curriculum

Since the mid 1980s more young people, non-academic students included, have stayed at school longer. Adams et al. (1989a), in a report commissioned by the Australian Government, found that from the teachers' perceptions diversity and responsiveness of the curriculum in the post-compulsory years were most important in ensuring that the new diverse cohort of students remained at school. These general perceptions have been confirmed by indirect evidence. Where Year 11 studies were tied to those in Year 12 and seen as a preparation for tertiary study more students dropped out of school at the end of Year 10. However, where the Year 11 curriculum was broader more students

stayed on for at least Year 11; the main reduction in student numbers was between Years 11 and 12 (Ainley et al. 1991, 71). Johnston (1990, 10) found that variations in curriculum may be more important for females than for males.

Despite the evidence above, there is still some contention as to whether students themselves see curriculum as a major influence on their staying at school. Although Relich et al. (1988) and Adams et al. (1989b) found that students did not think it was particularly important, the NSW Department of Education (1985) study found that many students were concerned with the usefulness of the curriculum.

> Of the wide range of subjects mentioned by respondents, Mathematics was the most frequently cited as being useful. English was the next most frequently mentioned, but only by the tertiary students and the employed people.... General knowledge was also felt to be useful. Reading and writing were the most frequently mentioned academic skills.
>
> (NSW Department of Education 1985, 20-22)

Curriculum has appeared more important as students progress through secondary school. For example, when Bradley (1992) asked students to prioritise possible changes to the school curriculum to make them keener to stay at school, they focused largely on those related to Years 10 and above. Students wanted the following: a more flexible timetable so that they could do a broader range of subjects, more opportunity for work experience, more hands-on experiences, more course and careers advice and more say in how the school was run. Supporting the students' emphasis on post school options, Griffin and Batten (1992) found that school structures which developed links with tertiary institutions resulted in improved retention of students.

In terms of attainment, Connell et al. (1982) argued that students' experiences with the curriculum were extremely important if students were not to be put off school by thinking they did not have the ability to continue. Similarly, Manning (1988) found that students were less satisfied with the curriculum and less sure of their ability to cope with its demands as they progressed through their final years of school. Although there is recent evidence that when students sense that school work is relevant, their achievement will improve (Ainley 1995), these students were concerned with more than just subject offerings or course content. According to Allen (1989):

> At the heart of the matter is the school curriculum in its broadest sense: what and how schools teach, the values and principles underlying what is taught and the assessment and evaluation of students' school performance.
>
> (Allen 1989, 12)

Other findings have supported this broad view of curriculum. For example, Williams et al. (1987, 98) found that differences in participation rates across achievement quartiles seemed "to be a function of what schools do." Further, in Tasmania, Abbott-Chapman (1987) concluded that the positive teaching and learning experienced by senior students at the state senior secondary colleges was associated with an increase in the retention rate relative to the non-government schools where senior secondary students were at the same school as junior secondary students.

Although Ainley et al. (1991) viewed curriculum as an intervening variable which shaped students' experiences at school, they felt that too little was known about how curriculum factors shaped individual students' educational plans or affected students' attainment. What we can say, from a review of the relevant literature, is that the relationships between all school factors and outcomes for students are extremely complex. This was recognised some time ago.

> On the general issue, our evidence is clear; schools are active and influential producers of educational outcomes. We have found large differences between them, and a range of powerful mechanisms at work within them: teachers's strategies, streaming and creaming, the impact of different curricula and changing catchments, the pattern of peer group life.... It is also quite clear that the school is not a sealed unit whose output can be measured and understood in isolation from its context. Educational 'choices' only make sense in terms of the relationship between a pupil's experience at school and her experience elsewhere.

(Connell et al. 1982, 187)

Figure 2.3 (see next page) conceptualises the interrelationships between the various school related factors that have been associated with the retention and attainment of *students in general* in the above discussion.
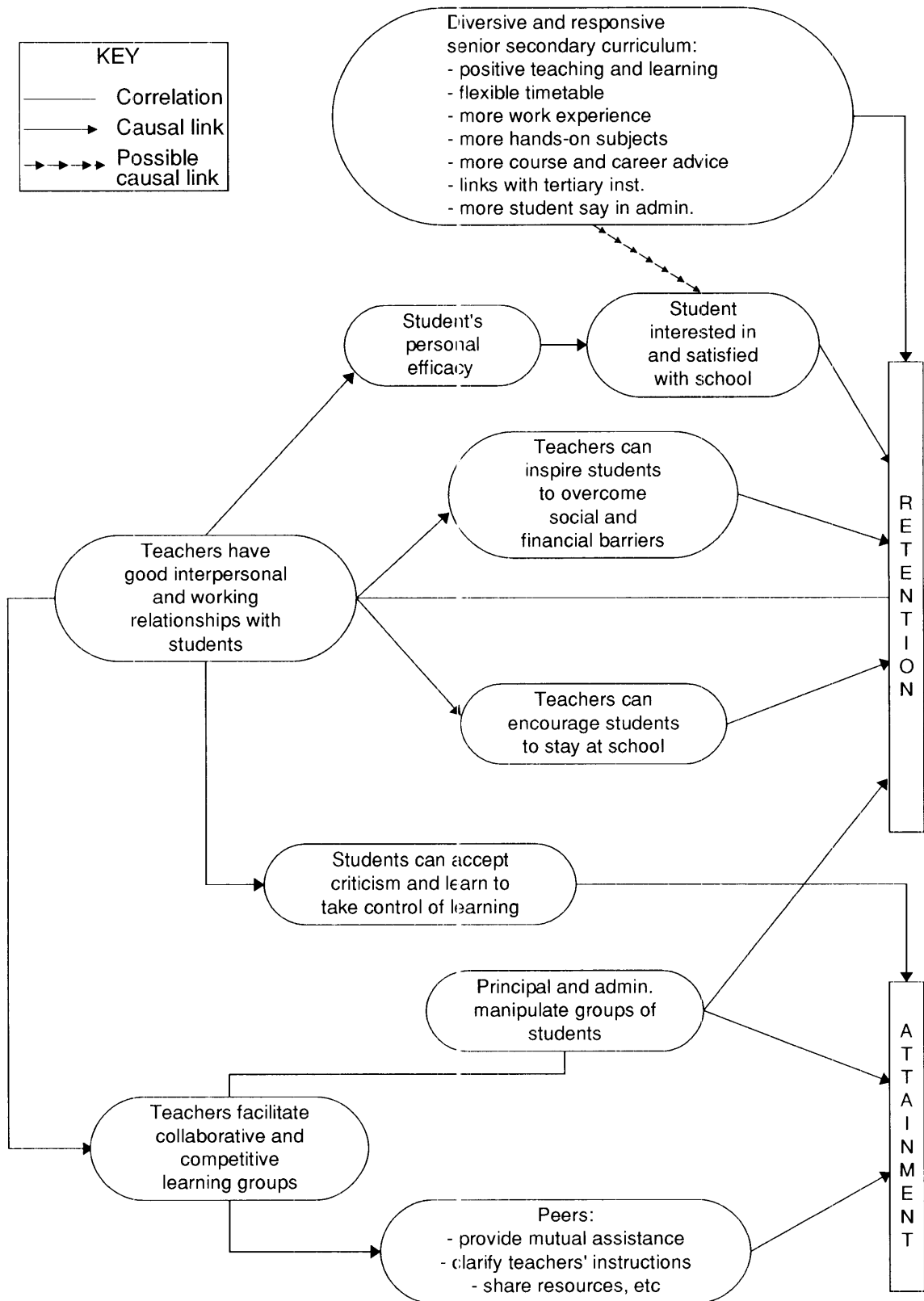
Figure 2.3 Interrelationships between the various school related factors identified in the literature as being associated with the retention and attainment of *students in general.*

How individual students relate to, and interact with, the family, community and school factors discussed above depends on the students' personal characteristics which have developed as a result of all their previous experiences. Those personal characteristics which have been identified as being important in the retention and attainment of *students in general* are examined in the following section.

Student factors leading to improved retention and/or attainment of *students in general*

Each student is an individual. His or her personality and personal characteristics are determined by both genetic factors and personal experiences, particularly experiences involving interrelationships with others people. How these personal characteristics develop is explored in more detail in the following chapter on *identity*. Suffice it here to remember that:

> ...people differ, and differ markedly, in outlooks, personal styles, interests, bodily development, and skills. And these differences do count in education.... [But], the closer we get to particular people, the more conscious we become of the extent to which their skills, interests and outlooks are developed in response to the circumstances in which they live, and cannot be understood if seen apart from that context.

> (Connell et al. 1982, 185)

Research findings relating aspects of personality and personal characteristics to the retention and/or attainment of *students in general* are examined below.

<u>Personality factors</u>

The extent to which personality factors have affected academic attainment and achievement motivation and thereby, indirectly, retention has generated a large body of literature. Some of this was reviewed by Heaven (1994). One personality trait shown to be directly related to academic outcome was *locus of control*. In general, students who believed that they were in control of events in their lives achieved at higher levels than students who believed that factors such as fate and chance played a large role in their lives (Heaven 1994, 107). Particularly among adolescents, three aspects of *social competence* have also been found to be related to academic attainment: socially responsible behaviour which enabled students to adhere to social rules and expectations and solve problems in adaptive ways, the ability to make and keep friends and the ability to plan and set goals (Wentzel 1991). These aspects of social competence are closely related to how students view themselves.

Views of self

A variety of studies have examined the relationships between students' views of themselves and their retention and/or attainment. Views of self have been conceived as: self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy and academic self-concept. The case for a causal relationship between views of self and retention has been shown to be strong. Studies by Power (1984) and Ainley and Sheret (1992a) indicated that academic self-esteem was a determining factor in school retentivity, even when allowance was made for actual achievement.

How students have viewed themselves has also correlated highly with school performance. For example, studies have established a close relationship between self-concept, self-esteem, and academic self-concept on the one hand, and school grades and achievement on the other (Finn 1989, 120). Further, Moriarty's (1991) initial testing, in examining *self-efficacy* as a mediating variable between learning environments and achievement, found a high correlation between students' self-perception of their past achievement and their ability to continue to achieve in the future. Interestingly,

> It is not necessary for the evaluations to reflect accurately the relative levels of ability or factual difference in the qualities possessed for it is considered that the individual's belief in himself or herself is sufficient to determine behaviour.

> (Partington 1987, 70)

One could, therefore, be tempted to predict that students with positive views of themselves would be more likely to succeed at school and that students who succeeded at school would be more likely to have positive views of themselves. However, as Finn (1989) clearly pointed out, the existence of positive correlations between the various views of oneself and school attainment did not imply that one caused the other, or *vice versa*. Also, self-perceptions did not always accurately reflect relative levels of ability or achievement.

Bandura (1986) developed a *theory of self-efficacy*, that students' evaluations of their previous performance levels were powerful indicators of their future predicted achievement levels. Ainley's (1995) conclusion that a positive academic self-concept could play a role in determining *achievement growth* supported this. However, "actual achievement may be more strongly related to expectations for success" (Berndt and Miller 1990 cited by Heaven 1994, 109) and therefore to students' desires to succeed.

The desire to learn and to succeed

Poole (1983),when she undertook a large scale study of two cohorts of students aged 15 to 18 years, found that there was a marked difference in motivation toward schooling and the desire to learn between the leavers and the stayers. Similarly, Harvey (1985) and Abbott-Chapman (1987, 1990) identified groups of students who said that they stayed at school because they had an intrinsic interest in learning and/or liked to study. Other groups of students were more pragmatic about staying at school; they saw the extra study leading to greater career choice and to improved job prospects (Cameron 1982; Ainley et al. 1984b; Braithwaite 1987, 1989).

Career orientation

Although research has indicated that higher attaining students had a greater preference for and expectation of higher status occupations (Saha 1982, 254-255), it appeared that career orientation was more related to students' retention than their attainment.

According to Harvey (1985, 266):

> The early years of high school are when students become committed to either early school leaving or staying on to attempt a further course of study.... The decision to become either a 'leaver' or a 'stayer' represents a critical event which locks students into particular sets of educational and occupational futures.

Harvey (1985) found that most students thought about the decision to stay at school long before they were forced to make those choices. Using a phenomenologically based theory of social action Harvey (1985) argued that people "can be guided by 'because-of' motives which attempt to prevent the occurrence of an anticipated undesirable state of existence while 'in-order-to' motives mobilize action to achieve life goals" (Harvey 1985, 268). In other words, students decided to stay at school to put off unemployment or to increase their chances of getting a job, or they consciously chose a life goal and stayed at school to help achieve it.

The view that there was a marked difference between the stayers and leavers when it came to career orientation has been supported by research. For example, Abbott-Chapman (1987, 27) found that a significant number of students related their decision to stay at school to the need for a qualification. Connelly (1989, 51) asserted that this was a result of public attention to "the established fact that unemployment rates are highest among those with the fewest or lowest educational qualifications". Further, the stayers saw school as part of their life-span long term goals with at least parts of school relevant to their educational and occupational futures; they expected to complete more years of

schooling in order to obtain more professional jobs and they expected school to prepare them for the world of work (Poole 1983; Harvey 1985). In contrast, the early leavers generally found school irrelevant to their future occupational plans (Poole 1983).

The commissioned expert report on the education and training of disadvantaged groups, prepared by the AEC (1991) Review Committee, related increased school retention to the increasing difficulty young people had in finding jobs.

> There is no doubt that a minority of young people are remaining at school because they perceive it as a necessary evil ('if you don't get Year 12 you can't get a job') or because it is an alternative to unemployment.

(AEC 1991, 135-136)

However, Johnston (1990) challenged this notion. She asserted that any such explanation was simplistic and incomplete because the dramatic disappearance of jobs for young people in the late 1970s and early 1980s was not associated with a parallel sharp rise in school retention. In addition, there appeared to be no direct correlation between youth unemployment trends and school retention rates on a local level (Johnston 1990, 6). DEET, in its submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee (1989) supported Johnston's view stating:

> There is a need for caution in assuming too direct a causal relationship between changes in retention and changes in the availability of jobs. Whilst the two are clearly linked, the nature of their relationship is by no means straightforward.

(House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989, 19)

According to Connell et al. (1982), a lot depended on how young people reacted because, "under conditions of youth unemployment, the relationship between the school and the labour market has become more ambiguous and complex" (Connell et al. 1982, 160). This has been complicated by gender (Saha 1982).

Gender

Saha (1982) identified gender differences in the small positive career effects staying at school had for students.

> Whereas the preferred occupations of both males and females are highly affected by Year 12 attainment...the same level of attainment has more than 56 per cent greater effect on male occupations than female.

(Saha 1982, 257)

This is interesting given that more recent studies have found that more girls than boys were completing Year 12 (Williams et al. 1987; Abbott-Chapman 1987; Cavanagh 1988; Johnston 1990; Ainley et al. 1991; DEET 1995).

A variety of reasons have been put forward to explain this gender difference in retention to Year 12. Abbott-Chapman (1987, 27) refuted the notion that substantial numbers of girls stay on past Year 10 because they have nothing better to do or because their parents want the schools to perform 'custodial' functions. Abbott-Chapman et al. (1986) examined the concept of ability potential and its relationship to retention at school. Using the total Year 10 school population in Tasmania, they found significant gender differences. Boys and girls were similarly represented in the *very high potential* group, but girls were over-represented in the *medium high potential* and the *high potential* categories. From these findings one would have expected to find more girls than boys in the final two years of schooling as they reached their potential. However, Abbott-Chapman et al. (1986) found that girls had a higher post Year 11 drop out rate than the boys and that proportionately less of them proceeded to university.

Ainley et al. (1991, 71) suggested that the differences in retention rates between girls and boys occurred partly because there had been a change in social attitudes regarding the education of girls and partly because boys had greater opportunities to study apprenticeship programs. Few would dispute the former assertion but, in relation to the latter, my personal observation in a regional centre of South Australia has indicated that the vast majority of boys (and girls) over the past few years have needed to complete Year 12 or a pre-vocational course in order to obtain an apprenticeship, even though TAFE apprenticeship courses required only Year 10.

Apart from differences in retention rate between boys and girls, a difference between how boys and girls perceive their own achievements has also been identified. Bornholt and Cooney (1993) asked students to rate their perception of their own performance and effort in English and Mathematics compared with that of most of the girls and most of the boys in the class. The results were consistent with traditional gender stereotypes in English; the girls rated their performance higher and effort lower than those of the boys and the boys agreed with this evaluation. The same was not true for Mathematics where the gender differences in perceived achievements and effort were not significant even though Foon (1988) had found that males rated their achievement in Maths and Science, the traditional male dominated subjects, higher than did females.

In spite of conflicting evidence as to how male and female students have rated their own achievements in various subject areas, there has been a difference in the paths boys and

girls have taken through the final years of schooling. For example, fewer girls than boys have undertaken Mathematics at senior secondary level. Johnston (1990) suggested that there are some reasons to be concerned about this:

> Beneath the retention rate data is a situation where the majority of girls have differential experiences from their male counterparts, make different decisions about their futures, face different barriers in achieving their aspirations and move along different educational and career pathways.... One obvious difference between the pathways of boys and girls in schooling is that of subject choices.... The first concern relates to the low participation of females in high-level mathematics and physical sciences...[as] these subjects provide a selective filter for entry to many occupations.

> (Johnston 1990, 19)

There may be links between this pattern of subject choice and attitudes toward success and ambition. For example, Poole (1983, 271) found that both boys and girls considered occupational and educational achievement as important aspects of success but boys considered themselves to be more ambitious than the girls. Boys were more oriented toward the extrinsic goals of achieving status and wealth whereas girls seemed to be more oriented to self-realisation, conceived in broadly humanistic educational goals. Power's (1984, 123) finding that girls were more likely to express satisfaction with school than boys supported this view. Satisfaction with school is reflected in students' attitude to and identification with school and each of these have also been shown to have an effect on students' retention and/or attainment.

Attitude to and identification with school

Ainley et al. (1991) and Ainley and Sheret (1992a, 1992b, 1993), after examining factors which influenced the quality of the students' experience in their middle secondary years in New South Wales, concluded that students with more positive views of school life were more likely to stay at school to Year 11 (Ainley and Sheret 1993, 84). In addition, most young people who stayed from Year 10 to Year 11 continued to complete Year 12 (Ainley and Sheret 1992a, 169). These findings confirmed those of Williams et al. (1980) and the AEC (1991) Review Committee that positive attitudes towards school were associated with continuing at school. According to Ainley et al. (1984b, 85), it was the *micro-organisational contexts of schooling* that determined students' *quality of life* at school that were important in students' retention. To this Ainley (1995) added that *general positive views of school* were also related to attainment, in particular, achievement growth.

Finn (1989, 123, 128-129) distinguished between two aspects of students' identification with school, *belonging* and *valuing*. Students who felt they belonged at school and

valued their experiences at school participated at school in a variety of ways. At a minimum they attended, were prepared for work and responded positively to teachers. More committed students also sought understanding, did more classwork and homework than was required and set academic goals for themselves. In addition to or sometimes in place of academic pursuits, some students became actively involved in social, extracurricular, and athletic activities and even in school decision-making. From this Finn (1989) developed a *participation-identification* model.

> According to this model, the chances of young people completing their secondary education are greatest when they participate in a range of school and class activities, develop confidence and identify with school.

<div align="right">(Ainley 1994, 6)</div>

Figure 2.4 conceptualises the interrelationships between all the student factors associated with retention and attainment of students in general that have been identified above, and points to the complexity of these interrelationships.
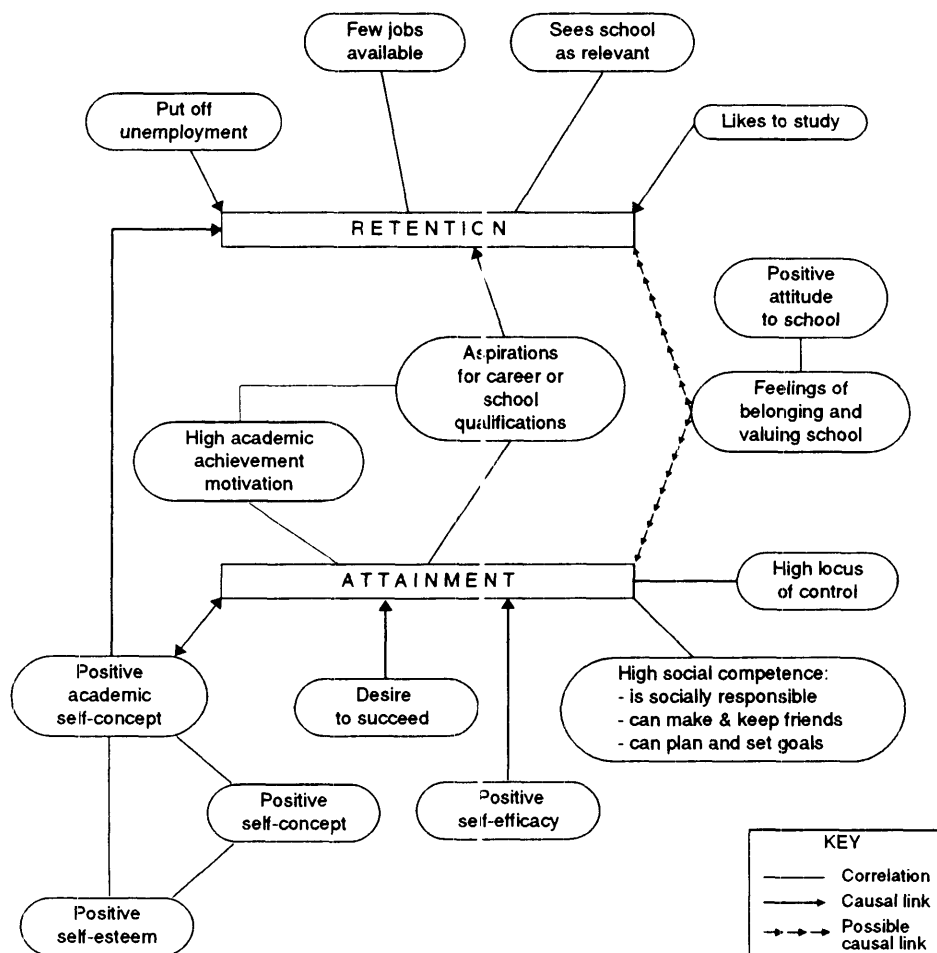
Figure 2.4   Interrelationships between student factors identified in the literature as being associated with the retention and attainment of students in general.

For Aboriginal students, this complexity is likely to be greater than for most non-Aboriginal students because of their very Aboriginality. Evidence from the United States has indicated that the relationships between various factors affecting black students' outcomes at school are more complex than for white students (Heaven 1994, 107). There is no reason to expect that this would be any different for Aboriginal students in Australia because:

> The identity which each student brings to the school carries with it value orientations and behavioural manifestations which, it is increasingly coming to be realised, function as criteria for success and failure.

> (Harris 1980, 43)

Despite this, or perhaps because of it, and the fact that Aboriginal students have been identified in some of the studies cited above as students who are most likely to leave before completing Year 12 (House of Representatives Standing Committee 1989, 8), there has been very little research into what motivates Aboriginal students to achieve success at school and stay beyond the age of compulsion. The following section examines the outcomes of this limited research.

Factors which positively affect the retention and attainment of *Aboriginal students*

The most significant study of recent years, particularly in terms of the numbers of students involved, has been that by Dennis McInerney (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992). McInerney was interested in what motivates urban and rural *non-traditional* Aboriginal students in mainstream educational settings, particularly the factors that were involved in their decisions to stay at school. He compared the motivation factors for almost 500 Aboriginal students with just over 1500 non-Aboriginal students, dividing the latter group into two: students whose parents had been born in Australia, and students whose parents had been born overseas. His initial factor analysis of the data separately within each group was followed by comparisons across the three groups. McInerney found that for some factors there were significant differences between the different groups of students, and particularly for the Aboriginal students.

What follows, initially, is an analysis of McInerney's findings and those of other usually smaller scale studies that relate mainly to the retention of Aboriginal students. The data are organised in a way similar to that for the previous analysis concerned with students in general. Then, because identity appears to be integral to Aboriginal students' success

at school, a separate part is devoted to this. In order, the following sub-sections examine factors related to: family and community, school, peer group(s), views of self, career orientation and gender. The relationship between Aboriginal identity and success at school is also examined.

Family and community factors

Sykes' (1986, 32) discussions revealed that Aboriginal parents have an "extremely intense desire for their children to benefit from education".

> However, most Black parents, as well as most Black students, rarely look to education for monetary gains. Indeed, reasons given for encouraging their children at school centre mainly on their future ability to be able to 'help their own people' and to 'make a contribution to their own community'.

(Sykes 1986, 32)

McInerney's (1990a, 1991, 1992) study supported this view. He found parental encouragement and support and the perceived value of school, by both parents and students, to be significant external factors contributing to Aboriginal students' decisions to stay at school or to leave. Similarly, Day's (1994) small group of academically successful Aboriginal students at the senior secondary level in Darwin recognised the important role their family had had in supporting and encouraging them. In addition, the students felt that pleasing their parents and sometimes their extended family was also a very important motivation. The parents of Day's (1994) students had extensive *school-related cultural knowledge*. They believed that individual efforts were of vital importance and that education was the key to success. Some put significant effort into communicating this value to their children. For example, early on they had insisted that their children do homework so had provided appropriate facilities for this and when their children had much more homework they made allowances at home for them (Day 1994).

Socio-economic factors have also been shown to be related to Aboriginal students' motivation. For example, Scott (1987) found that parents of high achieving / aspirant Aboriginal students were more likely to be employed and working permanently. This is consistent with Davina Woods' (1994) report that early analysis of work in the middle years of schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children "suggests that more affluent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are succeeding, where as [sic] their less affluent counterparts are not" (Woods 1994, 7). More affluent Aboriginal parents were also more likely to have related positively to their children's schools and seen the relevance of much of the school curriculum.

School factors

Allen (1989) perceived the school curriculum to be very important in determining whether or not Aboriginal students succeeded.

> For by and large the school curriculum embodies the values of, knowledge and behaviour of the dominant middle and upper classes of Australia, which in turn are predominantly white, monolingual and have a Christian and European derived culture. The students who do best at school are those who fit into this cultural pattern. They learn better, achieve success and behave predictably.... 'Success' of course is defined in terms of assessments related to that curriculum.
>
> (Allen 1989, 12)

This has put many Aboriginal students at a distinct disadvantage. Regardless of how much effort schools have put into helping Aboriginal students achieve success at school, if the culture on which the curriculum was based remained foreign to them they would have found it extremely difficult to gain entrance to tertiary education or be seen to have achieved success.

McInerney (1990a, 1991, 1992) found that it was important for staff to accept as a norm that Aboriginal students should/would continue at school beyond the age of compulsion. Aboriginal students were sensitive to teachers' attitudes and these became important factors in students deciding whether to stay at school or to leave. Similarly, a *supportive school environment* was important.

Fanshawe (1976) proposed a description of an effective teacher of adolescent Aboriginal students:

> [T]he teacher who will effectively facilitate the growth of adolescent Aboriginals is likely to be warm, encouraging, demanding, stimulating, responsible and systematic; ...he will have a positive attitude to his Aboriginal students, valuing them as people, respecting their culture, being free from racial prejudice, and being confident in their ability to achieve demanding but realistic goals set for them; ...he will be knowledgeable not only about the subjects he teaches, but also about Aboriginals, Aboriginal adolescents and Aboriginal culture; ...he will be a clever strategist, fitting his wide range of instructional techniques to differences in the learning styles of his students; and...he will play with proficiency the role of facilitating the learning of Aboriginal students, being an innovator, and work in harmony with the Aboriginal community and the co-workers in his educating team.
>
> (Fanshawe 1976, 19-20)

Fanshawe (1989) then followed up with Aboriginal students Kleinfeld's (1972) findings with Indian and Eskimo students. Kleinfeld (1972) had concluded that to improve

student performance it was important for teachers of minority students to make realistic demands of the students, be prepared to establish personal relationships with students, provide individualised instruction, and use positive non-verbal communication to convey acceptance and encouragement. Fanshawe's (1989) findings provided strong support for Kleinfeld's (1972) model of teacher effectiveness, particularly in terms of the importance of the personal warmth of teachers. Interestingly, Fanshawe's (1989) data also supported O'Keefe's (1989) suggestion that teachers' warmth and demandingness were just as important for non-Aboriginal students.

Not much has changed since then according to Walsh's (1993) more recent study which recorded suggestions from Aboriginal students about how teachers could help them succeed at school. They appreciated teachers who gave clear explanations, were firm and thorough, provided individual help and support with work, believed in them and had high expectations for them. The Aboriginal students said it was very important for them to have good relationships with their teachers if they were to be comfortable at school and be able to succeed. The students recognised the need for schools to provide inservice for teachers so that they were aware of these issues. The students also made a few suggestions about school organisation: keep those Aboriginal students who want to succeed together as much as possible, presumably so that they could support each other; provide academic support in a separate room; and provide more counselling support for sorting out problems students might have.

As with teachers, relationships with peers have been shown to be very important in Aboriginal students' retention and attainment.

Peers

Scott (1987) found that the peer group could affect Aboriginal students' staying or leaving decisions and the stayers' attitudes to school and, thereby, indirectly affect these students' attainment. McInerney's (1990a, 1991, 1992) study supported this; positive peer influence had a direct effect on the staying or leaving decisions. In fact, several of Day's (1994) stayers said they had chosen friends on the basis of their attitudes to school. The stayers believed that they had been able to resist peer group pressure to drop out of school because they were consciously aware of this influence, and that they and their friends could positively influence each other and even become friendly rivals (Day 1994). In order to do this those students needed to have positive views of themselves.

Views of self

Chadbourne (1987) explained why some Aboriginal students have more negative self-concepts and lower self-esteem than non-Aboriginal students.

> Compared with their white counterparts, Aboriginal pupils are confronted
> with a more negative mirror image because they get more negative feedback
> from 'significant' and 'generalised others' (as a result of low achievement at
> school and damaging ethnic stereotypes in our society). Therefore,
> logically, other things being equal, they must develop lower self-esteem
> than do white students. Furthermore, it can be argued, anyone doubting the
> validity of this reasoning need only look at the negative self-reports made
> by Aboriginal children and the self-denigrating nature of much of their
> personal demeanour.

(Chadbourne 1987, 80)

However, Chadbourne suggested that any results of research purporting to demonstrate the validity of this *logical* argument should be approached with caution because there were a variety of ways in which Aboriginal students could refute the argument and succeed at school despite the suggested impediments (Chadbourne 1987, 81-82). Despite this, the perceived need to improve Aboriginal students' motivation and self-esteem has provided the impetus for special programs at some schools (see Courtney 1989, for example).

Day (1994) found that his students had strong personal and Aboriginal identities, and believed in their own ability to succeed. These enabled them to stand apart from their peers and react positively to negative community perceptions of Aboriginal people.

> All the students spoke of their abhorrence of the negative stereotype of
> Aboriginal people which they believe is prevalent in the wider society....
> The negative stereotyping seems to provide these young people with the
> motivation to prove it wrong by their own actions and achievements.

(Day 1994, 103-104)

This confirmed McInerney's (1991) finding that Aboriginal students' *self-reliance* (defined as self-concept for the task of learning) and *confidence* were major determinants of their attitudes to staying or leaving school. Similarly, Scott (1987) found that Aboriginal students' aspirations and achievements were directly related to their levels of self-esteem. Students with high educational aspirations and achievement tended to show higher levels of self-esteem, had occupational aspirations and firm vocational plans.

Goal directed values and career orientation

McInerney (1990a, 1991, 1992) reported that for Aboriginal students goal directed values were possibly the most important factors affecting their decisions to continue at school. Although intrinsic motivation (comprising task orientation, striving for excellence and goal-directed behaviour) did not discriminate between those who stayed

beyond the years of compulsion and those who did not, it strongly predicted junior secondary school students' intentions to continue with school. McInerney's findings about the importance of *intrinsic motivation* are supported by those of other studies. Walsh's (1993) Aboriginal students at one urban school said that one of the things that drew them to school and kept them there was the desire to learn. Burt (1991) found that this desire to learn was mainly pragmatic; Aboriginal students recognised that their personal plans for the future had helped them stay at school. Day (1994) confirmed that goal directed values or career orientation were an important motivation for staying at school. Most of his students had very definite individual goals, although some were leaving their career options open. However, there were some gender differences in how career orientation and other factors already examined influenced the staying or leaving decisions of Aboriginal students.

Gender

Since the early 1980s more Aboriginal girls have stayed at school into the senior secondary years. In the mid-1980s in New South Wales the ratio of Aboriginal boys to Aboriginal girls stabilised at about 44:56 compared with an approximate 49:51 ratio for all students which more accurately reflected the sex distribution of the Australian population (Cavanagh 1988, 23). More recent data (DEET 1995, 69) indicated that, Australia wide, the situation had not improved by 1992.

Analysis of survey data collected in 1985 and Higher School Certificate (HSC) results suggested that Aboriginal girls were more likely to achieve satisfaction from the HSC than were Aboriginal boys. This may be related to the fact that they achieved significantly higher than their male peers (Cavanagh 1988, 24-25). McInerney (1990a) also found that, although the major predictors for both male and female Aboriginal students staying at school were broadly the same, in general female Aboriginal students were more positively inclined to stay at school than their male peers.

Recent data (DEET 1995, 69) indicated that there have also been gender differences in the patterns of attrition: "There is a rapid decline in participation by indigenous males in Years 8 and 9, while the major decline for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women occurs a year later between Year 10 and Year 11."

From his studies, McInerney (1990a) concluded that not all external factors in the retention of Aboriginal students were equal.

> Attitudes and feelings of the students are...very important, and the data
> suggest that experiencing support and encouragement at school from both

teachers and peers as well as perceiving value in school will lead to positive attitudes to completing Year 12. But when it comes to the bottom line parental influence is fundamental.

(McInerney 1990a, 679)

However, Poole (1985) provided a clearer picture of the complexity of the interrelationships between these and other factors that have been shown to be important in the retention and attainment of Aboriginal students.

> The majority of findings...are clearly embedded in theories which suggest that factors associated with class, gender and culture of origin are the most powerful influences on the lives of individuals. Studies of within-class variations do suggest, however, that the individual does have some say in constructing his or her own pathways.... The choice of which action to carry out at a particular time, which goal to pursue, is based on possibility-processing structures which include interests, values, ideologies, and self-concept.... Perceived options and pathways for self are closely related to social environmental constraints.

(Poole 1985, 197-198)

The importance of identity has also been identified in the literature, particularly in relation to students' attainment. For this reason, *identity* is the subject of the next chapter. Suffice it here to say that students' Aboriginality can influence their whole approach to non-Aboriginal schooling and others' perceptions of their success at school.

Aboriginal identity and success at school

Sykes (1986) found that Aboriginal people did not necessarily see success and achievement in the same way as non-Aboriginal people. One of her interviewees expressed this in the following way:

> Aboriginal people haven't got the background to appreciate just academic achievement, because we don't have many. Pure academic success? I don't think that's considered success in the Black community - people want to see application.

(Sykes 1986, 106)

Even more important was the retention of their Aboriginal identity, both at a personal and a community level. One interviewee commented:

> I think success for Blacks, well, the way I look at is, just by mere survival in a racist community...for one to survive here is a damned success, a big achievement.

(Sykes 1986, 104)

The idea that, in order to succeed at school, Aboriginal students must first be secure in their identity has permeated much of the literature on Aboriginal identity. Jordan (1983), in her study of Aboriginal identity among students, identified some components of *success* in the Aboriginal *world* that were agreed upon by a large proportion of those she interviewed.

> 'Success' was associated with 'strong-mindedness' (The phrase used again and again was, 'You have to be strong in the head'). Strong-mindedness in turn was seen as based in a clear sense of identity, with the desire to chase connection, however tenuous, with tribal origins [emphasis in the original].
>
> (Jordan 1983, 3)

Buck McKenzie (cited in Pring 1990) also made the link between Aboriginal identity and success at school very clear.

> What I always stress for the future is you must have education.
> Realistically, you can't live traditionally, you can but you've got to go hand in hand with whitefellas.... Education is the main thing. Relevant education. For Adnyamathanha kids, first thing, they must be proud to be Aboriginal. I believe you can work from there.
>
> (Buck McKenzie cited in Pring 1990, 78)

More recently, the Australian Education Union (AEU) publication *Creating an Education Nation for the Year 2000* has accepted as a 'given', that "an individual student's security with her or his indigenous identity is essential to the successful completion of formal schooling" (AEU 1995, 7). This view has been supported by overseas studies of retention / dropout among American Indian students. After examining a variety of studies, Ledlow (1992) concluded:

> Although 'culture' itself may truely be a significant factor in student success in school, it may be that the culture in the student's background, not in the school curriculum, is significant. There is some evidence from the research...that a strong sense of traditional cultural identity...provides a student with an advantage in school.... [This may be because] they have strongly developed identities and do not need to 'resist' White culture to have an identity.
>
> (Ledlow 1992, 34)

Aboriginal students with strongly developed Aboriginal identities have been shown to have other advantages. For example, Jordan (1984, 246) found that while the students in her study had "internalized negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people in general, they

[could distance] themselves from these negative typifications." Similarly, Day's (1994) Aboriginal students who were succeeding at senior secondary school had strong personal identities and they and their parents had a strengthening pride in their Aboriginal heritage, culture and history.

> This growing pride is accompanied by an anger at the perceived negative stereotyping of Aboriginal people held by the wider society and the media. For some, this negative stereotyping has become a motivating factor to succeed and thus prove it wrong.

> (Day 1994, 102)

In other words, the very act of proving the negative stereotyping wrong strengthened their own Aboriginal identity, particularly if they were still struggling with their identity.

According to Parsons (1977 cited by Harris 1980, 36-37), interrelationships in the school setting, particularly in the classroom, were "critical in terms of both identity formation and the relationship between identity and achievement." Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found this to be the case in the United States. If black students were to succeed academically at school they first had to learn how to cope with the burden of *acting white* because most black people had had it instilled in them that academic success was the prerogative of white Americans; to succeed academically at school was seen as assimilation into the majority world at the expense of their own culture. "This orientation embodied both social pressures against striving for academic success and fear of striving for academic success" (Fordham and Ogbu 1986, 177). A lot of the pressure came from black students' peers. Much the same has been true for Aboriginal students in Australia. For example, in Day's (1994) study the Aboriginal students were conscious of negative pressure from their Aboriginal peers and had to consciously resist this.

Relationships with teachers have also been shown to be important in identity development and academic success for Aboriginal students. The AEU (1995) pamphlet implied the importance of these by indicating some ways in which positive relationships with teachers could be achieved:

> [T]he education and training of more AIEWs and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teachers is vital. It is also important that pre-service teacher education and professional development for teachers in service includes cross-cultural awareness training, how to teach Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander studies, combatting racism and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy.

> (AEU 1995, 7)

Similarly, Hudspith and Williams (1994) stressed the need for teachers to be aware of and sensitive to the extent of the cultural differences between themselves and Aboriginal students. They also stressed the importance of using Aboriginal role models to strengthen Aboriginal student identity and present non-Aboriginal students with alternative non-stereotypical models. They proposed five major goals for teachers to enhance Aboriginal students' self esteem and identity in the classroom, and provided some strategies for achieving these goals.

1. Ensure a safe and predictable environment.
2. Relate home/community experiences to school experiences.
3. Build positive/affiliative relationships with students.
4. Facilitate positive relationships between students.
5. Facilitate congruence of student/teacher goals and ensure achievement is recognised by student, parents and school.

(Hudspith and Williams 1994, 34-35)

Given the already documented interrelationship between factors that lead to improved retention and attainment, it is likely that most if not all of the factors mentioned above in relation to attainment also relate to retention.

Figure 2.5 conceptualises the interrelationships between the various factors that have been identified above as impacting on Aboriginal students' retention and attainment.
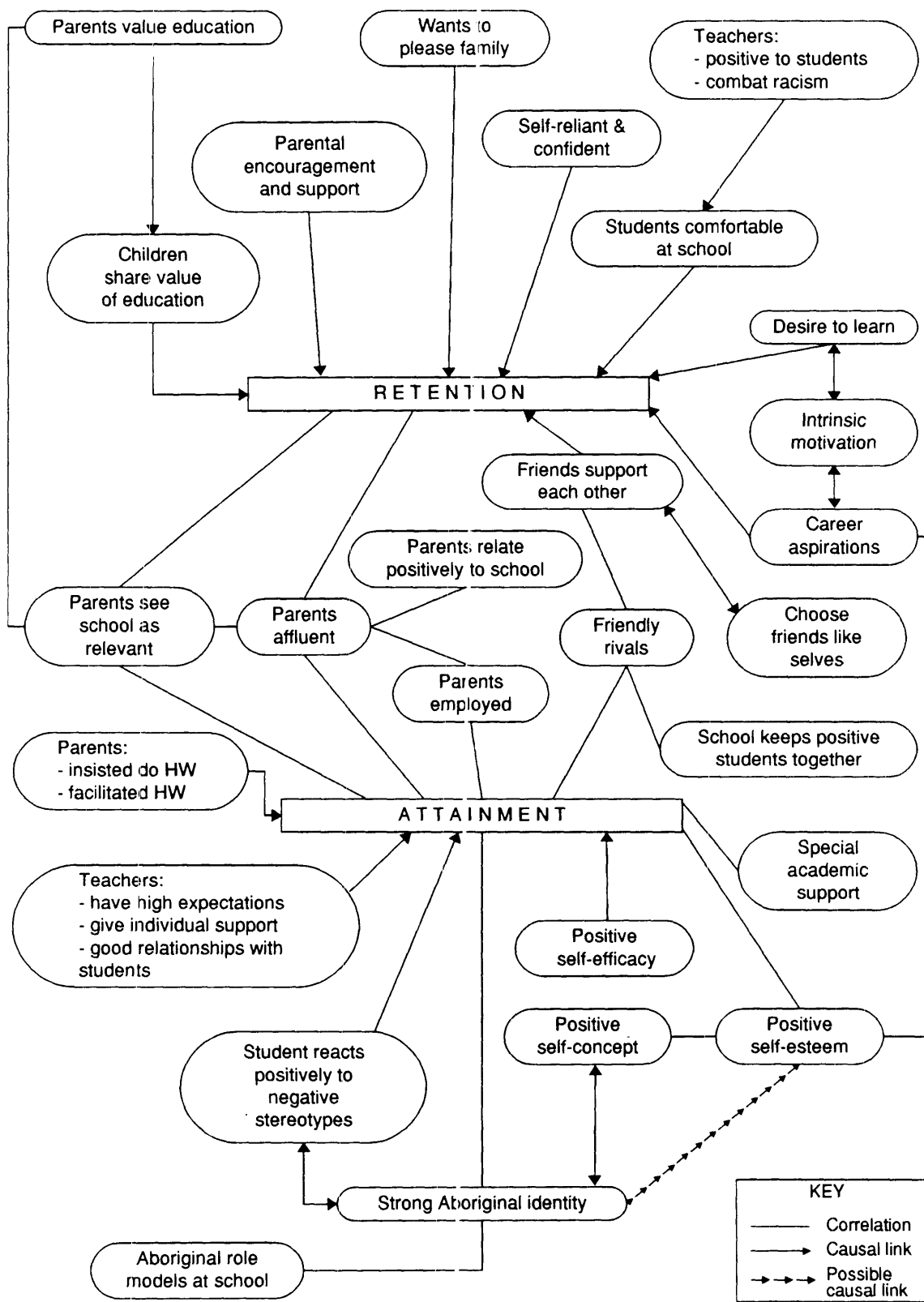
Figure 2.5 Interrelationships between all factors identified in the literature as being associated with the retention and attainment of *Aboriginal students.*

Summary

The chapter began by examining the relationships between retention and attainment. This provided a basis for the ensuing discussion of a variety of factors identified in the literature as being related to the retention and/or attainment of *students in general*, and the complex nature of the interrelationships between the various factors. Parental expectations, the value parents put on education, and a variety of socioeconomic and community factors have been found to influence students' decisions about staying at school and their attitude to work at school. At state schools, in particular, relationships with individual teachers and peers have been shown to affect both retention and attainment, whereas the curriculum offered by the school appears to have more effect on student retention. In addition, students' personalities, their attitudes to school, their desire to learn and succeed, their career orientation and their gender have all been found to be significant factors in students' retention and attainment. However, all the factors identified "are affected by others in an interactive manner that bedevils clear identification and ascriptions of causality" (Braithwaite 1989, 46).

For *Aboriginal students* intrinsic motivation, self-concept and self-esteem, identity and other personal characteristics have been shown to be particularly important. Family factors, relationships with peers and individual teachers, and the supportiveness of the school environment have also been found to be significant. However, differences in methodologies, the number of studies and the scale of the various studies may also account for the smaller number of factors that have been identified for Aboriginal students. Apart from McInerney's study, much of the research on *Aboriginal students'* retention and attainment has been small scale, relating to particular groups of students. Therefore findings are non-generalisable. In comparison, research on the retention and attainment of *students in general* has frequently been large scale, inclusive and generalisable.

Interrelating with all of the factors mentioned above, as well as being extremely important in its own right, appears to be the strength of Aboriginal students' identity as Aboriginal. Therefore, the following chapter explores various aspects of identity and the relationship of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality to the retention and attainment of Aboriginal students.