



MAP4U Murdoch University

The BIG PICTURE ACADEMY Research Project

Promising Practices: What students and parents say about learning in a Big Picture context.

Combined School Report 2

September 2015



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

www.murdoch.edu.au

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Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the Australian Federal Government as a Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) Project Grant (2012 – 2016) administered by Murdoch University and entitled Murdoch's Aspirations and Pathways for University (MAP4U) Project.

We gratefully acknowledge the support and commitment from all staff at the schools participating in this research. We express our sincere appreciation to the young people who gave so willingly and generously of their time and knowledge in helping us to better understand student engagement and aspirations. We would also like to thank the parents who have supported this innovation and their commitment to their children's education and those parents who have participated more directly in interviews.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the contribution of Big Picture Education Australia.

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About the Big Picture Academy Research Project

The Big Picture Academy (BPA) research is part of a larger research project funded by the federal government under the direction of Professor Andrew Taggart of Murdoch University and called “MAP4U” or Murdoch’s Aspiration and Pathways for University project. As the name suggests, the MAP4U project seeks to increase the numbers of students moving into tertiary education from a low socio-economic communities in outer metropolitan Perth, Western Australia.

The BPA research investigates the implementation of the BPA project in five schools in the relevant region. In that project, Big Picture Academies are introduced/supported in three schools and a whole-school Big Picture orientation is supported in two schools. Also included in the research project are two additional schools which have been following a Big Picture approach for a number of years.

The Research Questions

1. What are the processes and consequences of establishing a Big Picture Academy within existing school structures?
2. How do student engagement, learning and aspirations develop in a Big Picture Academy?
3. How does the Big Picture Academy influence teacher learning?

This research is made possible thanks to the ongoing support and commitment of schools, staff, students and parents. We trust that the feedback from our study will provide educators and interested parties with some interesting and useful information. The continued collaboration allows us to continue this important research into the role of Big Picture Education at the local, national and international levels. What we seek is a better understanding of what works best for students and their teachers in terms of engagement, deep learning, aspirations and success. As well, it will contribute valuable knowledge to our understanding of the conditions that need to be created and more widely sustained to support progressive school reform.

Executive Summary of Findings

These findings are developed from an analysis of a second round of interviews of years 8, 9, 10 and 11 students, who commenced a Big Picture education experience in Term 1, 2014. They attend one of five Big Picture Academies/Big Picture inspired schools in a low socio-economic region in Western Australia. Parents were interviewed for the first time during the second round of data collection conducted in Term 4, 2014. In this report, the findings from the second round of data collection are reported together with findings from the first round of student interviews. Given longer student involvement in a Big Picture education experience the initial themes have become more nuanced and additional themes have emerged. The various themes resonate in different ways for each student in their particular school context.

STUDENT THEMES

Disengagement – alienating experiences of mainstream schooling

Round One finding

A subset of students find it difficult to engage with mainstream school curriculum and instruction. The reasons range from a perceived lack of support, too much pressure, disruptive classrooms, and lack of relevance and flexibility.

New insights

Parents are concerned about the education their child receives. They want it to be appropriate for the individual as well as providing their child with what they need in order to be able to move into the workplace and/or further education. Many of the parents interviewed believe that mainstream education did not always serve their child's needs. These parents were supportive of innovative forms of education.

Engagement – taking ownership of learning

Round One finding

Students are enthusiastic about the opportunity to negotiate curriculum and instruction. They respond positively to having a greater say over what and how they learn.

New insights

The majority of students interviewed appeared to be at least if not more engaged than when they started in the Big Picture Academy/inspired school. However, while this was true in general, a few students had not maintained their previously expressed enthusiasm and interest.

Exhibitions – a site of learning and connection (New Theme)

Round Two finding

Exhibitions play a key role in enabling students to gauge their learning and develop new skills and confidence in presenting their learning to others. Exhibitions are highly valued by parents who were consistently impressed with their child's learning and capacity to express their learning.

Relationships – respect, trust and care

Round One finding

Students value the closer relationship with their Advisory Teacher because they feel connected and supported.

New insights

Students continue to identify a close and supportive relationship with their Advisory Teacher as an important cornerstone of their learning. For many students the acceptance and interest shown by the Advisory Teacher is unusual, facilitating a sense of belonging and trust. A few students found their relationship with the Advisory Teacher was not working as well as it was at the beginning of the year. However, they recognised it as still being qualitatively different from the usual teacher/student relationship. Students felt more connected to their Big Picture peers than in mainstream school settings, arising out of the smaller class size and increased time together.

Affective – well-being, self-worth and self-efficacy

Round One finding

Students feel happier and able to support each other. Students feel better about themselves and this often extends to improved relationships with their families.

New insights

Students and parents are noticing improved happiness and sense of self-worth extending from the student's experience at school, to home and beyond. This appears to be coming from various sources including the student's academic success and enhanced social connection (both at school and in learning out in the community). This enhanced sense of well-being is especially marked in those students who were most alienated and disengaged from mainstream schooling. However, there are students at all schools demonstrating enhanced well-being and happiness in their Big Picture environment.

Transformation – developing independence

Round One finding

Students recognise the importance of directing their own learning and behaviour. Students describe increased confidence in dealing with school and their futures.

New insights

Students continue to gain confidence in a variety of domains such as their capacity to learn, presenting their learning to others and engaging in out of school experiences. Students growing self-reliance is facilitated through the recognition that they have a greater responsibility for managing their learning coupled with the implementation of various strategies to achieve that. Most students were appreciating the challenges, although a couple of students found the degree of responsibility too much and wanted more scaffolding.

Real world learning – connecting to people in the community

Round One finding

Students identify valuable learning as taking place when they move into the community and engage with people and authentic tasks.

New insights

Students engaged in a variety of learning experiences in the “real-world,” facilitated through the school. Only a minority of students were able to engage in fully developed Internships. Those who did engage were inspired, clarified their career goals, and learnt many important skills. Students who were not able to participate in a fully developed Internship often found the experience unsatisfactory and disengaging.

Post-school plans – looking to the future

Round One finding

Students want to engage in learning that allows them to explore their interests and their future career aspirations. There is important learning from this supported exploration.

New insights

Continuing engagement is evident as the students explore post-school options. For some students, greater clarity has emerged and they have identified clear pathways to achieve their chosen career. For others, the possibilities have increased, making choice more difficult.

Learning about learning – self and others (New Theme)

Round Two finding

A subset of students were able to take a “bird’s eye” view of their learning and describe their meta-learning. Being placed in the Big Picture learning environment where they are required to be more responsible for their learning has highlighted for them their learning strengths and limitations. They identify a capacity to use this knowledge to help them in future learning.

Implementing a new school design – a complex process (New Theme)

Round Two finding

Some students and parents from one school had concerns over the process of implementation and the readiness of the school for the new design. There was also uncertainty as to how participation in Big Picture would impact future education possibilities.

PARENT THEMES⁴

Parent-school relationship – becoming more personal

Round Two finding

Parents highly value regular contact with the Advisory Teacher. They compare it favourably to previous experience in mainstream schooling. The informal contact by phone, email and being welcome to visit the class enables parents to feel informed and part of their child's education.

Availability of Big Picture – extending access

Round Two finding

A subset of parents expressed a belief that Big Picture schooling was a model of education that would benefit all students and should be more widely available.

Interrupting intergenerational and structural disadvantage – turning things around.

Round Two finding

A subset of parents related to their child's struggles in mainstream secondary schooling based on their own negative experience of secondary school. They know that mainstream schooling disadvantages certain groups of young people and believe that Big Picture schooling has some capacity to turn this around.

Traditional schooling and innovative school design – tensions present

Round Two finding

A few parents were concerned with the absence of the mainstream educational practices that they were familiar with. They were concerned at a possible negative impact on their child.

THREE KEY THEMES

1. **There is an acknowledgment that mainstream schooling or a 'one size fits all' approach to education is not working for a significant cohort of students.** In response some students actively chose to enrol in a different way of doing school where they felt a greater sense of ownership, belonging, and relevance. Others were "pushed" out of mainstream education into the Big Picture alternative.

2. **Personalised approaches to education benefits student engagement.** Throughout this research we heard time and time again about the positive effects of personalisation. These attempts to implement the Big Picture design have resulted in students who are enthusiastic about learning, are developing enhanced relationships with family and peers and are growing confidence and capacities to manage their own learning.

3. **School change takes time, perseverance, resources and leadership.** Attempts to unlearn and learn different ways of doing school, for students, teachers and parents alike, is a complex process involving a deep understanding of the nature of school change and the interconnections between school culture, structures and practices. Pivotal to this process is a willingness to engage in self-reflection to understand and improve practice. Along the way, there are tensions and contradictions as participants negotiate new ways of thinking and acting. Leadership which facilitates the Big Picture Academy/oriented school to achieve greater fidelity to the Big Picture design supports enhanced student engagement and learning. Student concern and dissatisfaction arises where their experience is contrary to the promise in the Big Picture design.

This report highlights the profound importance of engaging with new modes of thought (and thoughtfulness) around the ways we do schooling. Simply doing more of the same, only more intensely, does not seem like a good option to us given the challenges facing students at the beginning of the 21st century. Based on the evidence presented by the young people and their parents in this report we can confidently say that listening to what works best for students is a promising start.

⁴Parents were interviewed for the first time in Term 4, 2014 so all parent themes are new to this report.

1. Introduction

This *Combined School Report from Round Two of interview data collection* provides a preliminary analysis of the qualitative (interview) data obtained from students in the second round of data collection in the Big Picture Academy research project.⁵ Five schools are involved in this part of the research project. The students interviewed commenced 2014 in a Big Picture Academy or Big Picture oriented school, or arrived soon into term 1, 2014. They chose this option for various reasons identified in Research Brief No. 5.⁶ Some of the students were effectively pushed out of their mainstream school. Others were looking for an educational experience that would allow them to pursue their interests. Having spent almost a year in a Big Picture environment it is informative to listen to their experiences again. To what extent have the hopes and expectations they voiced in the first round of interviews (Term 1, 2014) been realised? To what extent has the promise been delivered on?

What has happened before?

In Term 1, 2014, four students were randomly selected from each Big Picture Academy/oriented school according to date of birth, making a total of 20 students interviewed across the five schools. The oldest, youngest and two students closest to the median age were interviewed at each of the schools. Where schools had a new Big Picture class starting in 2014 the students were drawn from that class (four schools). These students were in Years 9 and 10. One school was not organised in this way and the students interviewed were drawn from across the student body – students from Years 8 – 11. A first round of interviews with students occurred in Term 1 with one student being interviewed very early in Term 2. The analysis of that data has been documented in individual reports for each school and a combined school report.⁷

The Big Picture Academy research project sits in a funding context designed to raise and support the aspirations of secondary school students from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁸ We saw in the analysis of the first round of interviews (Research Brief No. 5) that some students were looking for ways to clarify their post-school plans. Other students, who already had well formulated plans, were looking for support to realise their dreams and hopes. As the academic year unfolded for them, they were able to attend to and further their aspirations. We continue to explore the notion of aspirations in order to understand better what a *pedagogy of aspirations* might look like.

The key research questions guiding the analysis of the student data is: “How does student engagement, learning and aspirations develop in a Big Picture Academy?”

Second round of data collection

In Term 4, 2014 the same students selected for interview initially were interviewed for a second time. In addition, where possible a parent of each student was also interviewed. In total, 17 students were interviewed and 13 parents were interviewed (a minimum of two from each school). This report provides an analysis of those interviews.

Three of the original 20 students interviewed had left the school or the Big Picture Academy (from two schools) by Term 4, 2014 and one student was unable to be interviewed despite repeated attempts. One of the exiting students was able to be interviewed prior to her leaving at the end of Term 3. From informal discussion with teachers it appears that two students not interviewed in this round had disengaged from school. NOTE: One of these students has fully re-engaged in 2015.

⁵ No teacher/school data is included in this report.

⁶ Choules, K., Down, B., Hogan, J., Carr, D., & Stone, H. (2015) Promising practices: what students have to say about learning in a Big Picture context. Report from Round 1 of student interview data. *Research Brief 5*. Big Picture Academies Project. MAP4U Murdoch University.

⁷ Choules, K., Down, B., Hogan, J., Carr, D., & Stone, H. (2015) Promising practices: what students have to say about learning in a Big Picture context. Report from Round 1 of student interview data. *Research Brief 5*. Big Picture Academies Project. MAP4U Murdoch University.

⁸ See description of the MAP4U project at https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/murdochs-aspirations-pathways-university-project-map4u/?doing_wp_cron=1423210648.6372709274291992187500

Approach to the analysis

The themes that were identified in the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data* are reported here with additional depth, some changing emphases and at times a divergence of experience, informed by both student and parent perspectives. Further themes have emerged to give us additional insight into the experiences of these students in a Big Picture education environment. Our findings are reported here.

This qualitative data provides some insights into the experiences of these students (and their parents). We continue to approach the investigation by listening to what young people have to say. And in this report we also listen to what their parents are saying. The perspective of a significant other of the student can clarify, validate or develop the student's story. It acts as a form of triangulation to the student voice.

Finding a way to present student voice in this report was a challenge as each school has a unique student body and has introduced Big Picture for school-specific reasons. In addition, the fidelity with the Big Picture model varies significantly across schools – some schools having only a loose orientation, other schools being able to implement more of the Big Picture distinguishers.⁹ The students interviewed are individuals with their own histories and personalities. They have each had their own individual experience of a school year in a Big Picture environment resulting from factors unique to the student, elements particular to the school and aspects common to the Big Picture model. There are some aspects of the student experience that are clearly linked to the particular school context and as a result we hear similar stories for all the students at that school. Other aspects appear to be clearly idiosyncratic to the individual student and not shared by other students. It has been a challenge to present the student and parent voice in a way that does justice to each individual, and to the schools. The result is of course imperfect.

It is important to keep in mind reading this document that none of the academies/schools is truly Big Picture design in terms of fidelity to all distinguishers. Each school is doing what is possible within its particular context. Students comments about their experiences thus relate to the Big Picture model as applied in their school rather than in its ideal form.

What happens next?

A final round of data collection for the BPA Research Project is scheduled for the second half of 2015.

We know that we can learn a lot by listening to what young people have to say about their education and what works best for them and why. We offer this report as a way of informing educational practice and the policy making process.

⁹ See <http://www.bigpicture.org.au/schools/big-picture-school-distinguishers-0>

2. Findings – what are students and parents saying?

In this section we report on the general themes and findings of the research emerging from the student interview data. We structure this section around a general description of each theme; followed by a statement of the key findings; illustrated by a sample of student comments. Parent interview data is included where this elucidates a new perspective, challenges or explicates the students' comments.

Disengagement – alienating experiences of mainstream schooling

General description

This theme recognises that for a subset of young people mainstream secondary schooling is not a hospitable place for learning. Students can experience intimidation, bullying, exclusion and discrimination, both from students and staff, based on personal factors (such as appearance and language) and social factors (such as class, ethnicity and gender). Furthermore, the pedagogy, curriculum and organisational structures of large high schools can alienate many students who are unable to see the relevance to their lives or future careers.

Round One finding

In the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data*, it was found that “A subset of students find it difficult to engage with mainstream school curriculum and instruction. The reasons range from a perceived lack of support, too much pressure, disruptive classrooms, and lack of relevance and flexibility.”

New insights

Parents are concerned about the education their child receives. They want it to be appropriate for the individual as well as providing their child with what they need in order to be able to move into the workplace and/or further education. Many of the parents interviewed believe that mainstream education did not always serve their child's needs. These parents were supportive of innovative forms of education.

We did not explicitly seek additional information from students on this theme in the second round of interviews. However, the perspectives of the parents on their child's experience in mainstream school were sought. Strong evidence emerges of parents' keen desire for their child to receive an education that connects with their child's needs.

Parents describe some reasons mainstream school didn't work for their child.

There was a lot of... kids that mucked around a lot, so it held him back and he didn't want to come to school anymore... He actually was a bit afraid coming to school at times... He said “Mum I think I need to have protection on me because it seems like a really rough school.” So the Big Picture was something which was a bit smaller ... they focused more on what it was that he wanted to do, and he got more one-on-one support, than a big classroom setting.¹⁰

Parents describe the inflexibility of mainstream schooling and the resulting anxiety.

Last year in class she would be finished things three or four periods before everyone else and then she'd sit there and get frustrated. And then she'd start panicking that she'd missed something... She created her own stress... Because she's quite a high achiever and she expects a lot from herself and sometimes I think that created stress for her when she knew deep in her heart that “yeah this is good I've done this but...” Then she would feel “it's a waste of time just me sitting here I could be doing – working on another subject or something like that.”... With Big Picture you can you think alright English isn't working for me at the moment I'm going to swap to maths and then come back to it... So it works both in the classroom and at home for her.

Parents describe the consequences of mainstream schooling for their child and others like them.

The majority of these kids were probably never given a chance at a normal school and then to come here and I

¹⁰ Note: The quotes in this report include examples from each of the students and parents interviewed. Not all possible quotes have been used. The quotes are illustrative of a particular aspect of each theme and are chosen from a number of possible quotes.

suppose they all feel like they're wanted and they've got somebody... The majority of them... they would never have made it. They would have been somebody on the street... I can see the school is turning – and kids thinking they're nobody and they're somebody.

Parents describe their child not being seen as an individual.

Well he wasn't going to school, he was enrolled, he wasn't attending and it was getting worse as the time progressed. The attitude I was getting out of the mainstream school he was in was that ... they have umpteen amount of students and he was just one in a crowd.

Parents want their child to be treated as an individual and not limited by streaming.

[At the local secondary school he] did not conform... He didn't adjust very well to a very structured disciplined school system... it's his fault too he didn't get along with the teachers... I like [the educational approach of this school] but in the end I know my child. I didn't want him to be judged and to be selected in whatever [streamed] category... [With] streaming... they're stuck for the rest of their life doing a trade that they don't like. My opinion is you educate them, you let them make their choices...

Engagement – taking ownership of learning

General description

Engagement is a broad theme and includes how the students feel about their learning, their interest and enthusiasm and their general endeavour and output. A desire to participate is a starting point from which a deeper commitment to learning is possible. This theme recognises the importance of relevance, rigour and relationships to student engagement – both within and outside the school.

Round One finding

In the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data*, it was found that “Students are enthusiastic about the opportunity to negotiate curriculum and instruction. They respond positively to having a greater say over what and how they learn.”

New insights

The majority of students interviewed appeared to be at least if not more engaged than when they started in the Big Picture Academy/inspired school. However, while this was true in general, a few students had not maintained their previously expressed enthusiasm and interest.

Students identify a variety of freedoms as being important – including choosing interest projects.

I like that there's freedom to choose what you want to do in the day... We have our interest projects each term so that's usually to do with what I'm interested in... Last term it was a community improvement project so I did it on this weed killer that I don't like and also last term I did it on a band that I'm interested in... It was about the lead singer mainly. I focused on him and what he does and what type of singing techniques he uses and also like tattoos and stuff...

Students describe becoming engaged in learning subjects (even those they dislike) when they are supported by an Advisory Teacher and motivated by their career goal.

My attitude [has changed]. I thought, and I probably still think, that maths is a waste of time but I probably need it with the job that I want so I just thought about what I want to do... Personal trainer. Money wise and like personal training people and times. [I would use it for] figuring out costs – for equipment... I worked on the maths more [since we last spoke]. It's hard because I don't like it but I actually have a teacher that understands me so it's getting easier. She understands maths more than other teachers. She actually spends time explaining things further. She is explaining different techniques and the ones that I find easier she will teach me more on that bit. I was getting very low scores and now it's gone right up. Above half. [It feels] good, I've never been good at maths.

Students describe support from their parents facilitated through discussion of the Learning Plan and Exhibitions.

They [parents] take an interest in my learning plan. They like to know what I'm doing and then at my Exhibitions we'll talk about how I'm doing in subjects... When I bring [the learning plan] home for them to sign, usually with my mum

we'll talk about what I'm doing and why I like to do that. So we have a conversation about that.

Students describe the pleasure from following their interests.

I definitely wouldn't have had it any other way. I love doing Big Picture, it's been awesome. It's just gotten better through the year... Just being able to explore your passion, not being bound by a set curriculum... what you want to learn, that aspect of it.

As with all learning, we don't find a linear progression. Even while remaining engaged, situations arise that cause students confusion and concern, thus providing opportunities for deeper learning.

Students identify how exercising choices about their learning can affect their engagement, academic output and their learning..

It's been fairly good. But over the second semester I have been not as focussed as I have been in the first semester and I'm not sure why that is but I think I took... on too much of a workload – had too many separate deadlines. In first semester we had one project that we linked in for our four mainstream topics, whereas I asked [Advisory Teacher] if I could try something different in second semester. I asked if I could have four smaller projects each as one of the subjects... The problem with that is I didn't know which one to start with and then... I lost direction and just wandered about for a bit. [On reflection,] I could have either stuck with the original one topic or if I was really determined to do four I could have like just started with one at first. Yeah it just got overwhelming and got less work done because I was focussing on too many different things and once and I ended up just dropping... them... It happened this term and last term as well like but it's been less bad as it was last term... this term it's been better but still not as good as like first semester... I suppose my work is like – it just hasn't been of such a high quality as it was in first semester.

Students explain how they address obstacles in deep learning.

I'm doing a meal plan, a week-long meal plan and pricing it up so that people will have an idea of what kind of food you need to be eating and what price it will come to. I've got breakfast lunch and dinner for each day of the week and I've just researched those recipes online and looked at all the ingredients and found the price of those ingredients. The only thing is that I didn't divide it by how much I would need... which would be I think really hard, and... I don't know how to do it, and I've already finished everything so that means I have to go back and that would take a really long time to do, because it's already taken the whole term. So I just stopped that for a minute and then have moved on to an essay on reasons why people go vegan.

For some students, tensions arise between expectations and reality in what they want and what they get. This challenges student engagement.

Students express tension between their engagement, teacher instruction and doing their own work.

If I'm doing an essay, she'll say, "why isn't this in it, well put it in it" and then she'll put something else in it and it's like, what's that, this isn't, like you're telling me to do my own work but this isn't my own work. And then I get graded for it and I'm getting a bad grade, I'm like is this my fault, you don't know because I don't understand what's going in there, and then when you ask what it is, they're just like, "oh yeah it's just this or it's just that," and you're just like, but I still don't understand. When you do your own learning plan they add onto it and they add on harder things and it gets, that's where you lose you incentive because that's not what I wanted to do.

Parents are generally very pleased with their child's increased engagement and see it supporting enhanced communication, responsibility and output. They attribute the increased engagement to the flexible, interest-based approach of Big Picture.

Parents connect student happiness with their ability to have some control over their learning.

I think she's enjoying that she gets to choose what she's learning about... It makes it a bit more interesting for her.

Parents see a more sophisticated engagement with learning and increased communication at home.

She's not coming home saying "We've got this piece of paper and got to tick all the boxes and fill it out and answer the questions and draw a graph and research on the internet", it's more about "Oh I think I'm going to go this way,

but I'll research this and I've researched that, what do you think mum?" And she'll ask us a few questions and get some ideas... She's starting probably the second half of the year to bounce things off us more and engage us more, rather than going: "I hate this stupid maths homework". It's a different attitude to her homework and a little bit more engaging with us... the way that she approaches this with us or even tells us about it... her brother is doing it the other way [mainstream] and we're like "Do your homework", so there's completely two different approaches to the two kids.

Parents see their child's engagement leading to increased communication at home.

I'm extremely happy [he's in Big Picture]. I've noticed [he's] come out of his shell a bit more. He's not a very social kid... Finding the passion... is something that he could just talk about for hours. It's definitely a career choice later on down the track... I think being able to talk with him about school, what he's doing, the communication is definitely a lot more open and I think he enjoys sort of focussing on his work.

Parents see freedom and responsibility as supporting their child's engagement and hard work.

I think he knows when he has to push himself and when he can... not be uptight for his presentation. I can see that he's definitely working a lot harder because he knows that he's responsible for his work.

Parents express some concern at their child's level of engagement.

We were a bit dubious because we were a bit worried he just wanted to do it to hang out with his mates. And also we know the way he is. He's a bit shy to get on the phone and talk to people and that sort of thing. And whenever we try and get involved ... he doesn't respond very well to that either. He's a bit cagey about giving out information and letting us be involved in what's going on for him. So... from that point of view we were quite dubious. And some of that has actually turned out the way we expected – he's not got as much out of it as he probably should, and that's largely because he hasn't pushed himself and he hasn't let us push him either.

Exhibitions – a site of learning and connection

General description

Exhibitions are the opportunity for students to present their work to their Advisory Teacher, peers and family. It is one of the ways they show they are meeting their learning goals. Exhibitions are a central part of the authentic assessment that is a Big Picture distinguisher.

Round Two finding

Exhibitions play a key role in enabling students to gauge their learning and develop new skills and confidence in presenting their learning to others. Exhibitions are highly valued by parents who are consistently impressed with their child's learning and capacity to express their learning.

This is a new theme emerging from the students' reflections in Round Two interviews. The emphasis placed on this design feature of Big Picture education by students in their reflections means that it warrants a section of its own. The majority of students comment on the learning facilitated through having to present their work to peers and family.

Students describe the benefits of being able to present their learning to others.

I like doing [Exhibitions] because it's a way to present all the work you've done and the knowledge just isn't in here, it's actually out there and people can see you and what you're learning... My parents come and then the rest of the Advisory are there... [They] give me good feedback... Normally have a lot of questions and I answer them, a few technical difficulties, but that happens.

Students identify a move from anxiety to comfort with Exhibitions in front of peers.

[For my first Exhibition, I] ended up doing a private Exhibition because I'd had an anxiety attack and couldn't do it. But mum came in and I just sat in the front room with [Advisory Teacher] and explained what I had done that term and just did a little private Exhibition. And in the 2nd term I did exhibits and I did baking so I studied a bunch of different desserts and stuff that... I wanted to make... and 3rd term I decided to continue with baking because I was really interested in it... I did a... public Exhibition with... my friend... Mine was on little intricate desserts

and I made... 4 different desserts that were very difficult and spent all night making them. And we just held it at lunch and people from mainstream [teachers and students] could come in and try out and see what Big Picture was like, so it was interesting... [It went] quite well. The deal was that they had to ask me a question on my learning that term, so they could get a piece of food... I thought it was a really, quite creative way to do it, so then it's not like I wasn't, I could say that I had learnt stuff, so that was quite fun and it went quite well... My mum [was there] because dad was out at work...

Students value the challenge of being asked to present to a group of visiting teachers.

My first Exhibition, it was actually the day that all the other Big Picture teachers came to the school. I did that in the conference in front of all these strangers. I think there was 25 odd people and I was quite nervous but I think it benefited me quite well... because I'm quite afraid of public speaking. That really did help me – getting so many different adults – not just people I know, their feedback on the Exhibition... We handed out feedback forms... and they just wrote down and then they came and spoke to me afterwards and they were really encouraging and it was really good and I'm quite lucky that I got to do that... I'd only found out an hour beforehand that all these people are here. "This is the day you booked your Exhibition, would you mind doing it front of everyone" and I'm – "oh okay." So then I'm stressing but - nah it was really good.

Students identify the learning and self-awareness that comes from Exhibitions.

[I've learned] that I can speak in front of people well, that I can do all of this work through the term and at the end of the term I can present it to people without feeling judged.

Although the majority of students saw Exhibitions as a key aspect of their learning in Big Picture, not all students are comfortable with the demands of an Exhibition. A heavy cost was identified by one student and another was needing greater support.

Students identify the learning from Exhibitions as well as the challenges.

[Exhibitions] have been really good. I've been really stressed out for them before... If I was going to leave [Big Picture], that would be why. [At the end I feel] relieved that I finished them... I think I've done pretty well... I probably speak in front of an audience better and learn more about what I'm talking about, because I have to do it without actually anything, so you learn more.

Students feel they needed more scaffolding and less independence.

But you always feel under pressure at Exhibitions... We got an outline of Exhibitions of what we should do but they never made sense. They never got explained to us. That's the down fall of Big Picture, you have to do everything yourself, and they think that's good for you because you're going to have to do that in Uni. But in a way it's not, because we're still younger, we haven't... been through year 11 and 12 developing those skills of learning things by themselves. You can't just put the pressure on to year 10, on to a younger student with such an impact, it is a really big impact.

Parents are pleasantly surprised with their child's performance at their Exhibition.

He did much better than I expected... Because I didn't think he'd put too much effort in to what he was doing... He did quite well in each of them... [I was pleasantly surprised] that he knew what he was talking about, he'd done some work and he'd presented it well... As I say, all of it was better than expected.

Parents see their child's engagement and hard work resulting in learning that is not possible in mainstream school programs.

Her presentations are just – I love it, it's amazing... She just puts her heart and soul into it but she makes it on a personal level as well and I think that's brilliant. And she brings her friends in on it and she brings her own personal life, not just to education. I like that [about her]... She sees it as a big picture. And you know I think that's opened her eyes a lot. She's looks at it as a whole... She gets her point across as well, like you wouldn't be able to at school, you know the usual education. This way she gets to make choices herself and decisions and she gets her point across in her way. So I think she feels like she's listened to better over here... It's opened my eyes. She's doing really well... Yeah I thought she would get really shy and not want to speak but she does, it's really good. I

actually enjoy watching it and seeing what she's learnt. And she puts it all out on display and she goes forward and then she goes through her plan at the end. It's like "wow you know you've got it all planned out and you don't need me."

Parents are learning about their children through the Exhibitions and feel happy seeing their child growing in confidence.

From knowing him as a very shy kid who wouldn't get up, he's standing at the front now, and I actually recorded him... and he's doing really well... I find that his confidence has improved... It makes me feel really happy, very emotional too, I cried when I saw him standing there, and the things that he's written too about – because many things I didn't know about how he felt as a person and when he stood up in front he expressed how he felt and his problems, and his struggles, which I wasn't aware of.

Parents see a new, more confident side to their child through the Exhibitions.

To get up, actually get up and talk in front people he's always been a bit shy about that... With these presentations... and things and Exhibitions he's coming out of his shell a lot more... I've been to all of them... It's good, really good... [I was a bit surprised] that he's able to get up and communicate so well now... I know he knows what he's doing... but actually being able to... get it across the people, I think he's doing extremely well.

Relationships – respect, trust and care

General description

Relationships refer to the broader beliefs, dispositions and behaviours that exist between and among staff and students. The connection between relationships and learning is a key dimension of this theme. Stable, positive relationships appear to flourish in smaller schools/programs where students have an opportunity to interact daily with their teacher and peers. These relationships provide a secure foundation for learning at school and in the world beyond.

Round One finding

In the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data*, it was found that “Students value the closer relationship with their Advisory Teacher because they feel connected and supported.”

New insights

Students continue to identify a close and supportive relationship with their Advisory Teacher as an important cornerstone of their learning. For many students the acceptance and interest shown by the Advisory Teacher is unusual, facilitating a sense of belonging and trust. A few students found their relationship with the Advisory Teacher was not working as well as it was at the beginning of the year. However, they recognised it as still being qualitatively different from the usual teacher/student relationship. Students felt more connected to their Big Picture peers than in mainstream school settings, arising out of the smaller class size and increased time together.

There was a recognition by students from all schools of the high level of connection that they had developed with their Advisory Teachers.

Students appreciate that teachers provide one-on-one support and stay with them.

We do get one-on-one time with the teachers, which I do appreciate because we never got that with the mainstream teachers. And they stick with you. If you don't get something, they don't just move on. So they stay with you, help you get it, and know that you have learnt it before you move onto the next thing... [Each week we have about an hour with the Advisory Teacher.] We just go over what we need to do for the week. I think it's called Advisory meeting and everyone that's in that Advisory, we get told what we need to finish, what we need to do, what's expected of us. And sometimes after classes we have one-on-one time, about half an hour to an hour, talking about what we need to do ... and they'll sit with us and show us how to do it again if we didn't get it in class.

Students link close, supportive relationship with Advisory Teacher to strong academic performance.

I'm doing really well. I'm sitting on A's in both... that I do and what I've really thought has helped me with that is that you sit down with the teacher to mark your assessment. So you're discussing if you think you deserve that and

yes or why not. I think that's really helped as well because you're getting that one-on-one feedback straight away and you know exactly which part he's talking about. That's really helped me to [know] what I have to do differently with any further assignments and everything.

Students identify enhanced student-teacher relationships based on connection and trust.

I like Big Picture with the connections, our teachers, they're like our friends. We've had fights in our class, plenty of them. We've had lots of fights, screaming matches you know, but at the end of the day we've kind of developed a family in there and you know that's what happens... Being comfortable, yeah.

Students notice the changing nature of the student-teacher relationship.

I think [the relationship with the Advisory Teacher] was better in the 1st term... I know this is my fault but I just, I procrastinate a lot and then she'll nag me a lot, but that's what meant to happen. But I know that I can get the work done when I, in my own time. But she's just seeing me sitting there talking to friends, so doesn't look all too good I guess but I still can have good talks with her.

Students appreciate the complexity of the student-teacher relationship.

[Having one Advisory Teacher] it's good, it's the same thing, it's not always having to change and getting used to people, like new teachers and their different ways of teaching. But then I guess it can also be... if you don't understand the way he's explaining something and he kind of doesn't [have] another way to explain it then sometimes having other teachers you can ask them stuff. I still can do that with my other teachers down in the Year 9 block.

Enhanced relationships with their peers was commonly expressed by students across the schools.

Students discuss the benefits of enhanced openness and diminished competition with other students.

I've really enjoyed ... the sharing. When we were just in the general program it was hard to share your ideas and the way you wanted to do a project because you all had to do the same thing and if you're sharing all your information then... people start to take your ideas and then it's not really your own anymore. With this because we're all doing the same topic but we can choose to take on a different part of it and in our own way so the great thing with sharing is that you get ideas from each other, that you can put into your project but you're still producing a different product... After we'd done our first couple of projects people started to do the same sort of things just for the different information and then we all sort of sat down in our Town Hall we call it with our group circle and we talked about what it was that we wanted to do and then gave each other ideas of how we could produce it. So there was just a lot of sharing ...

Students discuss the benefits of staying with the same cohort of students.

It's definitely more comfortable than in a mainstream class because you're more familiar with the people in it... which is handy for certain projects as well. ... If you have to do a speech or presentation it's like you feel more comfortable doing it in front of them because you're more familiar with them as opposed to mainstream where you're slightly less familiar.

Students recognise changing classroom dynamic.

Most [students get on well] and then there's – I'm not certain actually because sometimes people get along very well and then like the next day they're at each other's throats. So it's a very interesting dynamic in the classroom.

Students identify the benefits of the program for their family relationships.

With Big Picture, mum and I have got quite close as well because I need to talk to her about what I'm doing and see if she has any ideas which has really helped as well because she sees things differently than I do and it's great to have that discussion. She's very supportive so that helps as well... she's going to have different views on things that I might not see and we're not always going to agree but it's good to have that discussion – because you build from that.

Here we have the opportunity to see the views of parents. Parents appreciate the social opportunities that a small school provides.

Parents appreciate the key role of the Advisory Teacher in supporting their child's learning.

I think [the Advisory Teacher] is pivotal to it, him personally because he has very much taken it on board and he hasn't let it go and he hasn't let the kids go and he hasn't let the program go, and... he's always there... He's like the little axis that will keep it spinning and keep it moving and keep the kids' momentum, and they've got no reason to think that he's abandoned it or moved on to do other stuff... He's very passionate about it and he knows what he's talking about... and he really believes in it. He's always talking to the kids, always asking them and always seeing how they're going and letting them be that independent, but encouraging them and bringing them up, so I think he's very pivotal to the program.

Parents value the Advisory Teacher's support and enthusiasm for their child's interests.

She's great when he wants to get into doing these outside school programs because she's right behind him. So he doesn't feel like trying to push on his own to do these things so and that's good and she gets excited for him which is really good as well. I've never seen any other teacher do it before.

Parents understand the importance of the relationship between respect, equality and learning.

The way they did it here was more of a college learning experience where it was an equality thing not a hand over fist ruling and it seems to work well for [him]. He shows tremendous respect when he talks about the teachers here, which is a fantastic thing to hear from a fifteen year old child, any fifteen year old child so... The fact that they're given that kind of respect from the people who are trying to teach them something will probably help them soak it in.

Parents appreciate the key role of the Advisory Teacher in supporting their child's learning.

I think [the Advisory Teachers] are fantastic. They have such a good relationship with him. Sometimes I hear things from them and I think "wow"... I think in mainstream they don't get that one-on-one attention and I think the kids that maybe aren't doing as well aren't getting that one-on-one. It's a very personal [relationship].

Parents value their child being well known by the Advisory Teacher.

I'm very happy... especially with his Advisors. They're brilliant and [name of Advisory Teacher is] great and she really helps him a lot I think and helps him follow his own direction... I think [Advisory Teacher is] great because she's the one I've mostly had to do with and I think she really helps him help himself. She gives him great advice and sets him in the right direction but she doesn't do anything – doesn't do the work for him... [In mainstream] if he didn't understand anything he would never put his hand up and say "I don't understand can you explain it to me." Whereas here if he's got a one-on-one with [Advisory Teacher] he can ask her, he feels comfortable to be able to ask her for direction... I guess he doesn't feel like he's just one of the desks down the back.

Parents see their child engaging socially with a wider cross-section of students.

They gelled really nicely, yet they're not completely dependent on each other... They're all different kids that have come into this program and they're kids that perhaps wouldn't have sat together at lunch time or had anything to do with each other... But I like it because they interact with people that they possibly otherwise would not have, and it's not through judgement or gender or who's clever and who's not, it's just because they're all part of something else and they chat and interact... She comes home and says "Oh we're doing something in a group", and it might be a couple of kids she's never done the group with before, but it's never been "Oh, I've got to work with him or her", it's just matter of fact and "I'm working with them today", so it's very good.

Affective – well-being, self-worth and self-efficacy

General description

The affective dimension refers to the connection between a young person's sense of self-worth, self-efficacy and general happiness, and their capacity to be a contributing member of a school community.

Round One finding

In the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data*, it was found that "Students feel happier and able to support each other. Students feel better about themselves and this often extends to improved relationships with their families."

New insights

Students and parents are noticing improved happiness and sense of self-worth extending from the student's experience at school, to home and beyond. This appears to be coming from various sources including, the student's academic success and enhanced social connection, (both at school and in learning out in the community). This enhanced sense of well-being is especially marked in those students who were most alienated and disengaged from mainstream schooling. However, there are students at all schools demonstrating enhanced well-being and happiness in their Big Picture environment.

We can see from the comments in this section that the Big Picture approach is working for these students. They respond from the heart.

Students reflect on their sense of well-being.

I'm being friends with everyone. I'm getting on with the teachers good. I'm happy with my work. I'm happier. It's just the attitude that I get from school, I'm taking it back home.

Students express a sense of self-efficacy resulting in increased happiness.

[I've been getting] A's and B's, since C's and D's and E's. [That feels] really, really good, it makes me a little happy inside, that I can actually achieve something.

Students describe their enjoyment at coming to school now.

I like school a bit more – [I] like waking up in the morning and getting dressed and catching a boring bus to school because I know that when I get to school it's not going to be as boring.

Students feel proud of themselves and their work.

At the end of every term I'm always amazed how much work I've done. It doesn't feel like I've done much work throughout the term but you have to present it all so... you feel quite proud at the end of the term.

Students describe increased capacity and desire to look out for others.

[What I have you learnt about myself since we last spoke is] that I can come out of my shell a lot more and be more confident... Out in the schoolyard recently in the last few months, I've been standing up for, if I just see anything happen to littler kids, I'll step in and be, "Can you leave them alone?" And in the 1st term I was never, before Big Picture I'd never would have been able to do that and... [when I do that I feel] proud, because my little sister's in Year 9 and she gets picked on quite a bit because she's, she doesn't really have any friends. So sometimes I go and sit with her in the library because she just sits by herself in there.

The students' enhanced self-worth and happiness does not go unnoticed by parents.

Parents observe an improved sense of well-being in their child.

I think because he has low self-esteem and I think he hides behind the hair... I think he started to feel a little bit more confident and the hair's actually off his face. At one of his presentations he stood in front of the class and he had his hair off his face and you could see he was oozing a little bit more confidence in himself which is great.

Parents observe their child's willingness to share their work.

He wants to show me how well he's been working and I think that sort of gives him a bit of ambition to get it all together.

Parents are pleased to see their child happiness at school.

As far as I can tell it is working very well for him... The fact that they were able to follow... their interests rather than sit through classes of things they're not interested in... I also knew that he would fit in very well because he likes working on his own... When I read about it I thought "oh this is brilliant, this suits him to a tee." [It's not that mainstream wasn't working], it was working – he's always done well in school... But the first day he walked out of the Big Picture he had the biggest grin on his face that I've ever seen... He's never walked out of school looking like that before, that's when I knew... I'd done the right thing and that this was for him... I'm very happy with the choice yeah and I'm very happy with how he's been going.

Parents observe an improved sense of well-being in their child.

She's happier and that makes me happier. She's learnt coping skills and again it makes my life easier. And look if [she] and I aren't clashing that's one less child I have to clash with... her and my relationship has just gone through the roof. It's just amazing.

Transformation – developing independence

General Description

Transformation refers to the idea of a fundamental change in the way students perceive themselves and their experiences with the world. Transformative learning occurs when students become aware of having a limiting or distorted view about themselves or others. It involves interrupting the way things are and instead, imagining alternative identities and futures.

Round One finding

In the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data*, it was found that “Students recognise the importance of directing their own learning and behaviour. Students describe increased confidence in dealing with school and their futures.”

New insights

Students continue to gain confidence in a variety of domains such as their capacity to learn, presenting their learning to others and engaging in out of school experiences. Students growing self-reliance is facilitated through the recognition that they have a greater responsibility for managing their learning coupled with the implementation of various strategies to achieve that. Most students were appreciating the challenges, although a couple of students found the degree of responsibility too much and wanted more scaffolding.

Students identify growing capacity to express themselves in an environment of respect.

I have grown a lot of confidence now that I've been at the school because I've been able to speak my mind and have them understand that and respect me... I realized that I'm not going to get anywhere in life if I'm always behind everyone else if I don't speak up. Because I'm not going to achieve anything if I do that and I need confidence to be able to do what I want to do... It was a long process. It was a little odd at first because I didn't feel comfortable but I just realized that – fake it until you make it – and did it like that.

Students recognise that all students have responsibility.

You have a responsibility but you sort of don't too because everyone's more so independent.

Students feel more confident managing their own workload.

At first it was kind of difficult because we had time management and I couldn't really concentrate very well because I had all these distractions everywhere and I didn't know what to choose because it wasn't set out. But I have learnt how to manage my time and I know what needs to get done and hopefully it gets done by the end of the week or whenever it's due... I am a lot more confident being left alone and I do what needs to get done.

Students identify growing independence and a willingness to tackle new experiences.

I think it's just been great as well to see how people get out of their comfort zone to try new things and how well they actually do with that.

Students recognise and value their increased maturity connected to increased levels of responsibility.

I'm only 15 but I've learnt so much that I never would have thought... about working with adults... and how things can be flexible and I think it helps you grow up as well because... you're expected to be able to be mature enough to do things and ... it's just helped me grow so much.

Students recognise the maturity required to manage their own workload.

You don't have a teacher... saying do this now ... you've got to be strict with yourself in a way to make sure you stay on task and do everything you have to do and do what needs to be done at home with there no being set homework – you've got to be quite a mature person and be able to stick to what you have to do and not just slack off because there's no rules as such.

Students reflect on their increased desire and capacity to take on new behaviours and activities.

My attitude towards things has grown a lot. I never like sport but now I'll actually join in and try stuff and run around and play a game. [It feels] really good. It's better than just sitting there and getting in trouble for not joining in. [Before,] I think I was just lazy and didn't like running around. [Now] I quite like it; it gets all my energy to good use. I've got lots of energy.

Students engage in previously avoided behaviours necessary in the workplace.

[Last interview] I wouldn't look at you – I would just look around everywhere else. He [unofficial workplace mentor] told me to give eye contact and just look at them. It's weird because they're looking at you back. If I get told that I need it then I think about it and then it will just happen. I have changed since I started here. [I've changed in] a good way so that it's easier for me to get a job or something because I can look at the person and I don't have to look anywhere else. You have to talk to them.

Students feel new confidence to show who they are to peers and teachers.

I'm more confident about showing my real personality around people... I've got friends that will actually accept my real personality ... [With the teachers] every now and then I feel like my real personality... I joke around with them and socialise quite a lot. [They respond to my real personality] pretty well, like friends which I quite like, I like having friends.

Students describe their growing sense of responsibility and the positive impact on family relationships.

Mum's started trusting me a bit more and she is more happy with me in school and giving me a bit more freedom for after school times... Because I could trust in myself and go by her standards with being at school... attendance and my grades.

Students explain how engagement leads to improved trust with their parents.

[This year I've learnt that] I can actually do the work. [In mainstream] I wasn't interested in doing it. I'm willing to go into class and do work now. All the time. Dad thinks it's good.... he's seen my report.[He came to my Exhibition] He was surprised. He's a lot more lenient now because I'm actually going to school and doing my work. [That feels] good. I'm allowed to go out after school.

Students recognise growing organisation, application and confidence.

I'm a lot more confident. I'm more organised. I've organised my work now. What else? I tend to do a lot more work than I used to, instead of being unsure and asking questions.

Students acknowledge the need for hard work and effort.

You can't whiz through high school. I thought Big Picture would help me whiz through high school, no way. They tell you it's easy... but you're your own person... They can't tell you it's easy. You've got to do it for yourself and make the decision if it's easy or hard.

Students identify a move from anxiety to security when presenting in front of peers.

I'm a lot more comfortable around the people that are in Big Picture now. We have a few very popular people that I used to be intimidated by, but they're really nice and they talk to me and I talk back and stuff... I feel just a lot more accepted and comfortable... So when I was presenting for the 2nd and 3rd term I didn't really feel anxious at all because it was just in front of my friends, that's how it felt.

Students describe growing self-assuredness.

I used to be very dependent on having friends and last term I had a period where I didn't have any because we got into a big fight. And I realised that I can be happy without depending on having these people with me all the time. And I found that I liked gaming on computer, so I did quite a lot of that and I went to the beach a lot by myself... We're all friends again now, which is good, but just if I don't have them again I know that I won't be so sad without them... And if I need to I can even make new friends... [I have made] quite a few [new friends this year both in and out of Big Picture]... I usually go up to Perth on the weekends and I made quite a few new friends up in Perth. I used to be able to not even talk to people in Perth but just come out of my shell I guess.

Parents' often expressed pleasure at the transformation they observe in their child.

Parents see their child gaining independence and confidence.

I'm pleased that she's shown her independence in it. She does come home and do her homework... and she does want to finish it and she does want to see her projects through. I think she's handling it quite well... I think she likes that independence as well where she can pick things and take her interest with it.

Parents recognise their child being more open and willing to express themselves.

[She] is a very closed person, always has been... And when it comes to conversations about anything remotely personal it was like a step back but now she'll come to me and she'll email me throughout the day... Even when it comes to boys and things like that she quite openly talks... She's a different person. It could be age as well but she's just more confident in herself and more happy in herself and more free to speak... And I can see it with all the kids in there that their confidence has just [blossomed].

Parents see their children developing the capacity to self-regulate.

She says she gets angry so she can leave the class – go and punch the bag and then go back to class and it's forgiven. She just says she can't be bothered so she will just walk out and chill out for a bit and go back in before she snaps. That is something that she never would have done, she would have hit somebody. [She is learning] control – a whole lot of control.

[The teacher will tell me] we've let him sort it out the way that he normally does, which is he'll find a corner somewhere and he'll sit there and by himself and calm down and that works for him which is what they let him do here and he's happy after that he's good. He'll go back to what he was doing and life's wonderful again. So that's good that they see the individual for the individual and allow them to work through the way that that suits them, that's helpful to him.

Parents recognise their child's increased capabilities and feel pride in their child teaching their peers.

He's done some good things there, there's no doubt about it... One thing that really surprised me – and I guess one of the first things I realised he was coming out of his shell where he actually gave a class, and it was on the spectrum... to the other kids in his Big Picture class. And I thought I just can't see [him] standing up in front of people and giving a class – and not only if he can do that, being able to bring it down to a level where everyone in the class can understand. Because he assumes people know too much sometimes – he'll just start talking and ... go straight over... He doesn't seem to have that empathy with people sometimes ... he doesn't understand why they don't get things... But apparently he did brilliantly and everyone in the class said they understood some of it at least, and some students understood most of it, and they got a lot out of it... We were worried he didn't have those skills at all, or not developed enough to do that sort of thing... I would have been terrified standing up in front of a class at his age and doing it.

Parents appreciate improved communication and relationships with their child.

[My relationship with my son has been] a lot better than what it's normally been... I think it's from his... confidence, he's getting a lot more confidence... I think because this group that he's in at school, whether it's the teachers or his friends, I find that... he's communicating a lot more with me. So we're getting on a lot better at home now, that's nice.

Parents see their child transforming and slowly coming out of their shell.

He had a haircut as well. For years I've been trying to get him to get a haircut so I'm happy... To see [him] standing up in front of the class talking was really exciting because he's very shy and sort of likes to keep to himself. I would probably like to see him interact a little bit more in the group but it's his first year and I'm sort of hoping next year he'll yeah come out of his shell.

Parents notice improved communication with their child.

He talks a lot more now because he never used to talk about what he did in maths and what he did in English and that sort of stuff, whereas he communicates with me a lot more now about what he's doing and what's happening at school.

Parents note their child's increased pride and determination to stay at school.

You can see he's had a huge change since he's been here ... Huge difference. [He's] got pride in his school work but he's never had that before. He's excited to do it and the only time that I've ever heard of him from the people here slacking off was the things that were outside the classroom which was a complete and utter change. And I tell him all the time now how proud of him, that the fact he's not just decided he's going to change he actually went ahead and do it and that's really difficult to do... So he's done really well, really well I'm very proud of him. He comes home and tells me when he finishes set areas of learning that they're doing and that he's actually gone on to start the areas that they're not supposed to be starting for another week or so and how ... he's taking on more schoolwork than what he's been handed so yeah, which is also new. He's got pride in what he does now, everything that he does now... The pride that shows on his face now especially when he talks about it he gets excited and he actually wants to finish high school, never thought that was going to happen... The fact that we found this place was just an absolute miracle.

Parents note their child's increased capacity to focus on their school work.

He's focused and you can see it... [He's] always been the type of kid that'll stick his finger in every pie and – but he never focused on it... yes I'm going to give that a go, yes I'm going to give that a go, oh that was great ... but he's getting his focus back now because it's getting into the things and sticking with them which is something he didn't do before ...

Not all positive transformation was sustained over the year.

Parents noted their child opening up and engaging with others then slipping back.

So it has been good for him in a way, it has opened him up a little bit to other people. But he's still a bit of a recluse in a lot of ways... For a while there he did seem a little bit more outgoing and a little bit more switched on perhaps... I think he's sort of slipped back.

Real-world learning – connecting to people in the community

General description

This theme describes the ways in which students are learning in community-based contexts that allow them to interact with people, places and objects outside the school. Students learn how to negotiate their way in the adult world through a range of strategies including informational interviews, shadow-days, Internships with expert mentors, authentic tasks, and Exhibitions.

Round One finding

In the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data*, it was found that “Students identify valuable learning as taking place when they move into the community and engage with people and authentic tasks.”

New insights

Students engaged in a variety of learning experiences in the “real-world,” facilitated through the school. Only a minority of students were able to engage in fully developed Internships. Those who did engage were inspired, clarified their career goals, and learnt many important skills. Students who were not able to participate in a fully developed Internship often found the experience unsatisfactory and disengaging.

Students identify learnings from their Shadow Days.

[I went to a health professional], because at a point I was interested in [a health profession]. I still am and that could be an avenue I can pursue... Learning a little bit about it and how everything sort of works, it really helped. So going to the [health professional] and helping out there was pretty cool, I just did that for two days and just really stood there and watched how he did things... [In school I did] some journal entries and filling out the Internship thing, and then the next Internship was mainly to do with art, and that was up in [name of town at] the cultural centre. And basically I just sat there and listened to this [artist] talk to all these little kids for however long, I sat there and drew things.

Students identify the ways in which Internships contribute to their learning.

My Internship was actually with [an official]... I was helping out in the office. I think I quite benefited from that... It

was really interesting. It's just so amazing to hear the sort of people that they get coming in about their questions or stuff that's going on with them... It's not one of the safest jobs in the world. I was in there one time and then you have a red button under the desk that you push and it gets the police to come and escort someone out and that was actually quite a scary experience... There was a guy. He was just getting quite a bit frustrated... You get quite nerve racking. But I really enjoyed that experience... I was lucky enough for them to ask me to deconstruct and improve their youth kits. I'm currently still working on that because that was quite a big job but I'm finding it great how I get to have some input in it and talk to people around my age with what they want, because they're all written by men in their 40's or 50's.

Students step up to what is required on Internships and learn, even in complex work environments.
I [did] an 8 week Internship at [business that I'm interested in]... It was really good. I got to do heaps of different stuff there [not just cleaning]... It was also putting new stock out on the floor and helping with the customers. So that was pretty good. [I learnt that] I really don't like talking to customers... Most of the time the staff were pretty close, so if they saw me and I was with a customer they'd come over and help. But most of the time I could give them an idea of what they wanted. There was a few where I was really confused... I didn't know how I could help them... By the end of it, I wouldn't say good at it, but I was better than when I started... Probably [the experience] would help ... most jobs in the future... Most of the stuff I learnt was to do with how the workplace is, so coordinating the lunch time so there's always someone at the front desk and that sort of thing.

Students value informal opportunities and identify vital learning for their future careers.
At the start of Term 3 I was helping out with my mum's personal trainer. And he was telling me all about different exercises and what to do if I want to [become a personal trainer]. He made me clean a lot just because he couldn't be bothered doing it. I would go in the mornings and then I would just come to school late or I would go on the weekends and help him. [It was my idea. I approached him. I felt] good because I did it myself and I didn't have to have mum to be there all the time... He knew that I wanted to do personal training because mum talks about me and my sisters a lot and I just went up to him and said I want to learn how to train people and he said "yeah because you need it because you're not a people person"... That brung me out of my shell... I need to learn to talk to people properly.

Students recognise increased knowledge and capacity to engage with adults.
I still have trouble with, actually speaking to adults, when I have to ring up places to find out information about something. I still have a bit of trouble with that because I'm nervous... [But] I've been speaking a lot more and more knowledgeable, so I know more things when I speak; I'm not scared. Because when I used to talk before I didn't know what to say, so I mumbled a lot.

Obstacles got in the way for many students and they were not able to experience Shadow Days or Internships. Others were not clear how the experience linked to their learning. Students who did experience irrelevant Shadow Days and Internships tended to feel disillusioned.

Students find the process of getting an Internship difficult and feel insecure.
But everywhere I also tried, they were just like, what's Big Picture and I couldn't give them an explanation. Then they just were like, "oh nah it's okay we don't you know need you to come here." Nobody went with me. It was like I had to find my own transport there. I had to go there, I didn't know anybody. I think one of the most things it was unsafe, really unsafe. I was going to the middle of [outer suburb], I've never been to [that suburb] in my life and I was trying to find a place on my Google Maps... If my phone had died I would have... had to catch a bus. If I'd have run out of money... nobody to call, I wouldn't have really known what to do...

Students don't understand the link between the Internship and in-school learning.
I wasn't asked to [do any in-school learning around the Internship]. We just fill in our diary entries and that's it... They're just kept in our diary. They just, "I want to see your diary." They say they'd read, I don't understand, are they allowed to read them, are they not allowed to read them? We're meant to put our thoughts in there. We put our experiences in there but that's it. I put pictures in there of like Shadow Days I've done, excursions and stuff. They never get marked they just are there... it's just a book.

Students want to get out of Internships they didn't choose.

I do have [an Internship] at a café... All I do in there is just chop up stuff – oh that's about it – clean and sweep. I'm not really cooking in there, just prep. And I don't really like it. I want to get out of it... [I've been doing it for] a term and a bit... [I'll finish it] when I find another place... I haven't [incorporated anything from the Internship with my learning in the classroom]... Because that's not really my chosen thing to do... [I'd like to do an Internship at] maybe like a game studio or a working site for carpentry... Maybe something with astronomy, as well.

Students experience Internships of little interest.

I did briefly work in the canteen for a little bit but that's only because I couldn't find anywhere else to work and that was only for I think seven weeks.

Students identify short times and lack of interest in Shadow Days/Internships.

I have [done an Internship] but I haven't really, because my schedule in general is pretty busy. So, like outside of school it's pretty busy because I have [sport] and work... [Have the Shadow Days/Internship helped in thinking about career?] Not really because... if it's not something that you really like, you're not really there for a long time; you're only there for like a week or three days or something.

Students identify the challenges of getting an Internship.

For the [design of software] I haven't really done any Internship... [I've been exploring it] but it's difficult because it's such a confidential field, everything has to be kept quiet. So an intern learning about the [software] could be a problem for the confidentiality... I've tried to [make connections in the industry] but it's... quite a hushed field.

Students haven't been able to get out on Shadow Days or Internships due to nervousness.

I have searched [Internships] on the internet when I've been doing my other [interest projects]. I always would follow up on the internet, but then wouldn't go through with it, because I was nervous about going on an Internship. But I'm contacting [a designer]... or [Advisory Teacher] has, about shadow-day, so we'll probably ring her tomorrow I think.

Students haven't been able to get out on shadow-days or Internships due to lack of positive response.

I didn't [go out on shadow-days or Internships although] I applied for a few... A lot of them just weren't up for Internships... [I applied for a food manufacturer] and this time I've applied for one at [an animal place], but they said... that they wouldn't be wanting people to come in and just be there and then having to teach about [animals] and stuff. They said I could come in over the weekend and check it out though, so I might do that.

Parents have varying opinions on the opportunities for real world learning.

Parents see the value of real world learning supporting the acquisition of workplace skills.

[The school does] Muay Thai every Thursday where she trains and she's a lot of help, she helps the instructor out. And I think that's due to the teacher that does it. And just from what [she] said she is actually the one that helps and she corrects everybody. So [she] helps the students out which is a teaching role for her but usually she wouldn't ever do that. [She wouldn't have done that before] No way.

Parents see the value of real world learning in developing their child's confidence.

It's very nice, especially going out with her Internship. I think it's really helped, because I noticed the difference with her in the beginning of the year she was so nervous going out on her Internship, and a couple of times got a little bit upset, but then by the third and fourth term she was great; off she goes.

Parents see the value of Internships, despite initial reservations.

He decided to [apply] and originally they said they couldn't get in because... they liked them when they were 15... [He] ran around himself and got himself onto that, which showed a bit of initiative to do all that... He's enjoyed the Internship. I was a bit sceptical to start because it meant him missing a day's school – a day a week... I think that he got on... and they really looked after him and let him see things and explained bits to him, which is probably as important to learning... I was very surprised at how well he's adapted.

Parents acknowledge the difficulty finding a mentor for specialist areas.

There's been some good things about [Big Picture]... things haven't worked out the way he liked I think. And that's been largely because he's a little bit shy I think and he hasn't really put himself out there enough. But also the sort of thing he's interested in there's just not that much availability to have mentors in that sort of field ... quantum mechanics and that sort of thing.

Parents play a role in helping their child find an Internship.

In the end I had to step in... Because she wasn't doing anything about it, she wasn't getting it... And I was like hoping that she could get it herself but in the end I just said "alright why don't you just ask your boss."... You want to work with animals. It's not what she wanted to do but it was something you know... And I says to her let's just get you an Internship to start. And she's loved it; the boss actually reckons that she'll make a really good [animal worker]. So she might change her mind but it's still working with animals you know, she loves her animals...

Parents are engaged in trying to secure their child an Internship.

We're trying [to get him and Internship]. I do understand that's very important but it's very hard because he wants to do computers and I'm not sure on how to sort of go about trying to get him into something like that... We have had a bit of help yeah from the advisors... [Advisory Teacher has] helped with the resume and so we're going to go to [computer business] and see – even if he does volunteering work just to get a bit of experience... It's very hard and he doesn't want to try anything else.

Parents see their child enjoying being out in the workplace and searching for greater relevance.

He did one of the work experiences up at [military place]... and that was in the [yard] but he still really enjoyed it, really loved it and he's sort of interested in going back next year and doing... something to do with engineering I think... It's a bit more in-depth... He would have rather have got to do something more mindful.

Post-school plans – looking to the future

General description

This theme captures the students' plans and goals for their imagined future. It includes the ways in which students think about their future careers and the extent to which schools support them or not. It describes some of the conversations, strategies and experiences that appear to assist students by linking their present learning with future possibilities.

Round One finding

In the *Report from Round 1 of student interview data*, it was found that "Students want to engage in learning that allows them to explore their interests and their future career aspirations. There is important learning from this supported exploration."

New insights

Continuing engagement is evident as the students explore post-school options. For some students, greater clarity has emerged and they have identified clear pathways to achieve their chosen career. For others, the possibilities have increased, making choice more difficult.

Students are getting excited exploring future options.

I did a project actually this term on a technical specialist. My sister's boyfriend works for a company that deals with [the environment]. They use chemicals to make the grounds and all that better so it can regrow and flourish and stuff. And I was thinking about getting an Internship there but I have to study for and get degrees in those areas to even consider... It was a part of our case study for English that we had to interview someone, make a poster on all the details, and a brochure on all the details, how to get into that career. And I chose the technical specialist and it was lucky that I knew someone that had that job. So it was easy to get an interview and ask all my questions... It got me excited. It was definitely something I would be interested in pursuing as a career... I think I need to get a degree in some science department, either biochemistry, chemistry, chemical engineering. I've got to look at my poster again...

Students describe being unsure what to do after high school.

I've looked at the Navy so many times or Army... I think I might go into the Army or Navy but I don't know what I'd do. I don't really know what I want to do so I can't really make a decision at the moment... hopefully it will hit me at year 12...

Students anticipate the benefits of undertaking an Internship to their future.

I haven't done an Internship yet but I'm hoping to do one... I'm not sure yet [where to do it.] I'm still looking at places... I'd like to look at somewhere that's like something to do with the [culture or media] or something; I'm

interested in [that]... There's a [media organisation] so maybe I'll look into that... I know that if I do an Internship it will help to see if I would like to pursue that as a career so that's why I'm hoping to do something that I'm really interested in.

Students describe growing clarity through their continuing exploration of future career options.

Coming into Big Picture I had no idea what I wanted to do and that was part of the reason I thought it would be good for me. Two months ago I decided what it was that I wanted to do and I've done all this research into universities and I'm feeling a bit more confident now as well going into my further years of school. Having our Internship and our Shadow Days it gives you the chance to go and try out your things. All the things I thought I wanted to do turns out I didn't enjoy.

Students describe new career options thus making future decisions more complicated.

Doing the careers stuff with the teacher and going on the Internships has actually made me realise there's so many things I want to do, so it's actually made it harder.

Students describe having their eyes opened through exposure to new careers.

[Furthering my future] has been a problem for me because I still have no idea what I want to do... And one of the excursions we went to in Big Picture actually gave some insight into what I might want to do. It was very interesting because it had nothing to do with what I enjoyed normally... For the majority of my life I've always wanted to do something in the field of science or mathematics. We went to I think it was Careers Expo in Perth... and we saw I think it was an arts area – like digital areas like media and it looked very interesting... He was modelling a character and it seems like something that would definitely be interesting to do as a career. So it's definitely an eye opener yes.

Students describe their continuing exploration of future career options.

I've made a couple of changes. There's a carpenter which I think I said last time I wanted to do and I wanted to be a Navy man ... Carpenter and the Air Force... a brickie is a good job for good money but also bad for your health. The Army – I still quite like that but... I just don't feel like doing that kind of stuff anymore. But the carpenter I quite like it's the creative. I can do certain type of sculptors and different types of furniture... The Air Force I got into not long ago because of my aunty, she got me flying lessons for my birthday. I went... and did a bit of carpentry there and that went well for a bit. I built some planter boxes and ... we ran out of wood. [It was a bit frustrating] because ... I was really stuck onto carpentry at that time. [I did some bricklaying but it was] not as fun as carpentry. It gave me an idea of which career I should go for... The coordinator has got me a Try-A-Trade. It's one day out onto the workforce and give it a try. I [will try out] carpenter. [That will be my first day in the workforce this year. I feel] excited.

Students who hadn't been out in the workplace were looking forward to doing so.

I want to try out beauty and childcare. [That will happen] next year. I get certificates at the end of year 12 so that will help open more opportunities.

Students explain their growing awareness about what they want to do and how to get there.

[Things have been going] fine, a lot of realisation. Realisation you know where you are, what you're doing, what you're going to be doing... I'm glad I came into Big Picture because I know where I'm going now, I know what my track is, I know how to get there and I have more incentive to get there... That is the only thing I've gained, is realisation of where I want to go in life... Just through, because this program's associated with Murdoch, it gives us pathways and we ... and takes us onto excursions to Unis and she gives us documents of things we can try out, all that sort of stuff. [Advisory Teacher] talks to us about it all the time, and it's just after all the conversations you just generally know where you're going... Thinking of becoming a Marine Biologist, Veterinarian or Zoologist, or like I'm hoping to do my animal studies and hopefully a Marine biology course... I'm going back to mainstream.... To gain ATAR... I don't think staying in Big Picture is the right choice for me.... The realisation of wanting to be like what I want hasn't just come from Big Picture... I love being around water and the things water are truly extraordinary. It... would be an ideal career for me I think.

Students are choosing their pathway independently.

I handed in notes to mainstream by myself... I selected my courses by myself... I looked up on them, like on Uni websites on what I need to study to go into my courses ... Chemistry and Maths, so I ... Chemistry and Maths, and

I done dance because I really do enjoy my dance... so ATAR dance, if it's something I like doing hopefully I get a high score.

Students describe clear plans for the future.

I'm still pretty happy with [the decision to come to Big Picture. I] don't think I'd ever go back to mainstream... [In] 1st semester I saw my specialist outside-of-Big-Picture-activity. I did IT and I really enjoyed IT and I got really good grades, all A's and I was thinking about going to TAFE and doing a Cert 3 in IT next year... In the 2nd semester... there's 3 different Cert 4's, so I was planning on doing the Cert 3 and then seeing how I feel about that and then choosing which Cert 4 I wanted to go with... and I'm also looking to get a part-time job while I'm going to TAFE.

Students describe the steps needed to achieve their chosen career.

There is a [computer] company that I do want to join but they need two years of working in the gaming industry beforehand to join them, so I've been looking at maybe when I graduate from university and get my degree is going over to [Sydney] because there is a company over there that makes [what I'm interested in]... I've been looking at Murdoch University just because of how kind of close it is... [It] offers the courses I want... I think I need an ATAR result in English of 70 or more and then WACE and a lot of other stuff I can't think of off the top of my head... I've been up there on the opening days – the opening day for this year and I also went up there for I can't remember what it was called but it was an event where four students from each school went up and got to look at the courses for the media side of it.

Students describe the steps they have taken to secure their desired career.

I secured a course next year for a Cert IV... two days a week on Thursday and Friday [at TAFE] and then I'll be here for the rest of the week... A Cert IV in [IT]... For year 12 [2016] I'd be looking to do another cert... Cert IV, maybe Cert III and/or further the Cert in [IT]... I want something to do with computers... I have thought about university and that's why I'm actually getting the Cert, I want to either further the Cert or get another, acquire another Cert and go onto university... Murdoch's probably the most available.

Students discuss their changing future career goals and related learning.

Many things have changed [since the beginning of the year]. My chosen topic has changed. I'm now looking at the carpentry to do for a future job. And all my learning goals have changed towards that now, which is furniture, and the topic in furniture is chairs. So I've just been designing a few different things... researching them, what different chairs there are, how much weight can a certain chair take... The different legs that there is, how it's built and what materials it is... I put an application to TAFE, but I didn't get accepted because there was too much people in it. So I spoke to my teacher and she rang up someone, and apparently I'm on the waiting list now... I'm still going to be here [Big Picture], but go to TAFE for two days... A game developer, software programmer, or stuff like that with computers... I just researched what they are... I do like games and computers... Oh and another one I wanted to do, I researched, is becoming an astronaut... that's a big thing to do that... That's like my dream job. I'm not sure if I'll get it.

Some students find that their career plans take them out of Big Picture.

Students identify their next step in securing their future is to return to mainstream schooling.

Yep [I'm happy to be going back to mainstream next year] because I'm doing all ATAR subjects so I've got a lot of work ahead.

Some students wonder whether Big Picture will enable them to achieve their goals.

Students are unsure whether Big Picture is the best option for them next year.

[Big Picture has been] really, pretty good but I'm not sure if I'm going to stay or leave still... I've changed my mind again on what I want to do and I think I want to be creative, to the creative side, to my art, and either way I can get through an art course in TAFE or uni something. I really don't like Exhibitions. So there's like plusses and negatives to both sides... I am glad I am made that decision [to come to Big Picture], even though it would have made things easier if I probably stayed out there, because then I wouldn't have this decision of whether to stay in here or leave, because I wouldn't have had that option, it would have already been made for me, and I wouldn't know any different.

Students describe added requirements when moving from Big Picture to further education.

I have applied for the TAFE course that I want to be going to next year, and they have, well they haven't said that I'm in, but they've replied asking for my school report and stuff and I've given it to them. And since I'm in Big Picture and the TAFE course requires a maths score and I didn't do maths in the 1st term, we have to make one up from the work that I have been doing math wise and so we're in the process of doing that now.

Students express uncertainty with their immediate future.

Oh, at the beginning I was happy with [Big Picture], but now I'm still unsure. I'm now unsure just in case it doesn't work out for me and I'll have to go back in mainstream. So it's all confusing, and that's how I feel – and nervous... I'm a bit unsure with it now... Just in case carpentry doesn't work out and I need to go to university, I don't know how it's going to help me over here... Because in Big Picture we got a sheet that said it, like WACE or ATAR, and I had to choose WACE, so I'm not sure what happens if I don't want to do it anymore, I want to get ATAR... So I'm a bit confused now... I'm pretty nervous about [getting into TAFE] because if I don't get accepted, I don't know what's happening... [I feel] very comfortable [with the option of going back into mainstream], just in case it doesn't work out.

Parents have a range of views relating to the focus on “real-world” learning of Big Picture. Many are supportive and identify benefits.

Parents value the focus on the future and the resulting conversations with their child.

We talk a lot about her Internship and where she wanted to go or what she wants to do. So we talked a lot more about an Internship than schoolwork. [Internships generated a lot of conversations around her future.] Yes, absolutely. She's unsure what she wants to do, and by a couple of the Internships that she's had, she's been to [a number of related workplaces connected to what is her passion] which she loved, and she also enjoys her schoolwork. She wasn't too keen on the [first one], so it was really interesting to see her. She enjoyed it, but she enjoyed other things more... I'm looking forward to her being able to do more of that to see where she wants to go, and what she wants to do when she leaves school.

Parents value the focus on future careers and the student's resulting engagement.

Now she's come here she's all career focussed and everything like that but I really just wanted her to be at school and to make something of herself. She wants to be a personal trainer; now she wants to be a diesel mechanic all in the year... She wants to travel and with that she wants to have a good job where she can travel... and that's positive in itself.

Parents see their child moving towards their career goals.

[What he does in the future] will definitely be something in IT... He's had his eye on university ever since he was this high. He's so excited that this is giving him the opportunity to get there. He's always been really good at maths and science... Not that his results would show that much because he's missed half the exams [for health reasons] in the last couple of years and they just haven't given him the exams and then given him marks that are not included in the exams, so it doesn't reflect. With [Big Picture] he's not to worry about that. He's just worried about getting on with what he's doing and what he wants to do and where he's going... He's not going to sit down and do nothing and just plod along, he's looking for things all the time that are going to expand.

Parents describe Big Picture as enabling their child to pursue their career goals.

I don't think he would have been where he is today [accepted into a Cert IV at TAFE] if it hadn't been for this program, I'm sure he wouldn't have been... He still would have been doing good in school – but he would have just been one of the numbers and he wouldn't have enthusiasm.

Especially in situations when the student's Internship is not what they are interested in, parents question their child being out of school on Internships. Some prioritise traditional school learning and the mainstream markers of educational achievement. Some would like additional career support for their child.

Parents know about their child's current plans.

He's enjoyed [Big Picture]. But as I say, I think he's gotten a bit frustrated now because it hasn't quite worked out the way he wants... I think he got to the point where he thought “well next year I want to go and do 6 ATAR, so I might as well be doing that now”... I think for him [Big Picture] hadn't turned out the way he wanted and he sort of

almost gave up on it. I think he was hoping to go straight back to mainstream this term...And I think that was what he was expecting to happen... Well, we thought he might be doing it, but he hadn't got enough work done apparently for his portfolio.

Parents' views are respected and Internships not pursued.

And I believe that they're listening to my views and [my child's] view. They have encouraged him to do Internship but in the end when it wasn't achieved or he was a bit stressed... I stepped and I said "He doesn't really know what he wants to do." He's a typical male and I said "No, just let him worry about high school." He's done... work experience [in a trade] and he hated that so he already knew that there's no chance of him going through as a tradie... No matter what, he will get his high school diploma... He needs that piece of paper and if he gets a certificate on top of that and if he wants to pursue after high school that's great. If he doesn't he might go somewhere else.

Parents want their child to receive more individual career based support.

He's still not... 100% "yes that's what I'm going to do." I think he needs a bit more guidance... Maybe see a careers teacher and ... maybe get a bit more information about what it is that you want to do, or have a few more programs running in at school, because he wanted to do carpentry but we struggled in finding a place for him to go and do work experience. And the school didn't find one. So he ended up going to a coffee shop... He had to go and do something that he didn't like doing. He doesn't like doing what he's doing. Nobody wanted to take him on [in carpentry], and because I don't know anyone here, it was a bit hard. I even went down to the Institute of Technology and asked if someone that they knew, and they didn't, weren't much help at all... I'm worried that if he doesn't have enough marks that... it's going to keep him behind. I do want him to have a career. I want him to have a trade... That's my fear. And I feel like there's not enough... maybe information given to... [him] or other kids. They need maybe more information on careers that are out there. Not just the typical standard jobs. To let them think that there's other things that they can do, like thinking – outside of just being a carpenter or an electrician or – that there's many other things that they can do with, whatever skills they're good at.

Learning about learning – self and others

General description

This theme describes students' growing capacity to step back and reflect on the learning process itself. This involves the students' learning about their own learning and their learning about the learning of others (teachers, other students, mentors and parents). Students are developing an awareness of the challenges and possibilities of learning in an innovative personalised environment.

Round Two finding

A subset of students were able to take a "bird's eye" view of their learning and describe their meta-learning. Being placed in the Big Picture learning environment where they are required to be more responsible for their learning has highlighted for them their learning strengths and limitations. They identify a capacity to use this knowledge to help them in future learning.

This is a new theme emerging from the students' reflections in Round Two interviews.

Students explore strategies for dealing with overload and find some success.

When I realised that there was too much... I had to drop like quite a few of the projects I was doing or in some cases I changed what the project I was doing, and that's when I started working on it properly when there was less things to do.

Students identify "learning how to learn" as their greatest learning.

[Overall] it's a good year – I would say it has been a good year... It's not really about the content I've learnt. Like here it's about how I've learnt to deal with learning that's made this a good year... So I learnt that I'm not very good at multitasking. So I learnt that I'm better at learning from one thing at a time and applying myself to that one thing as opposed to applying myself to multi tasks... The content is intriguing. Like the content is interesting but as I said it's more like it's been less interesting than like I guess learning how to learn... Well I've learnt that I'm not very good at setting timetables and deadlines. ... If I wanted to be broad and vague about it I would say that I'm

not very good at organising. I'm very disorganised with my work and usually when I do a project I usually like leave it to the very last second and then do it all at once. I think that's because the pressure kind of galvanises me into action.

Students identify learning through disappointment and disorganisation.

The second [Exhibition] was with [the Advisory Teacher] and I think that was when I... tried to become more organised. I had a goal to become more organised and it kind of flopped... My third Exhibition was interesting... As I said before I failed with most of my projects. Because I had less work I managed to be able to go more in-depth into the one project that I did have. That was actually quite fun talking to them in the Exhibition because it was about my science project and I not only got to explain what I did but why and how I did it and things like that... I think [my parents] found it somewhat engaging at the very least because they were – even [the Advisory Teacher] was asking me questions constantly about my project.

Students have a growing awareness of learning through exploration.

If anything it's... about self, like organisation... being here and having access to the things we can access, for example like just the books and stuff and you know anything we could really get our hands on we do. I have a whole portfolio of things of organisation of things you need to do, certain things, courses, backwards tracks. And I've done that by not just asking questions, by going on websites, printing it off, asking teachers to get them for me. And I haven't really told them about this portfolio. I've just been concerned about it because, you know I'll need it later in life and that's why I did it.

Students learn from Exhibitions they were not happy with.

My last one wasn't very good because I wasn't prepared... It went for about ten minutes and that's it, and the work I did wasn't finished... I just talked about that, and then they kept talking about how to improve... So I just incorporated that into now. So I hope my next one is going to be much better... I'm preparing now. I've already organised them... What to say and the work I have, everything because we need all of the work from the year... [I'll be showing] my architecture work, I've got the carpentry work, and we've been given little tasks, English tasks, so I have some of that which was pretty big, as well... [I'll show different work] and different learning goals ... [The third Exhibition I knew it wasn't going to be so good] I said that in there... I wasn't prepared... So this time I'm not going to say that... I'm going to say I was prepared, I did a lot of work and organisation... [I've learnt] to organise a bit better, prepare, and not just go in there and make stuff up on the spot... [I've increased confidence] just opening up a bit more, and... saying stuff out loud, speaking clearly. On the first one I was a bit quiet and didn't look up as much, as whereas the other ones I have.

Students are required to learn how to learn through greater autonomy and responsibility.

One of the first things I discovered is that without having the set guidelines of what I have to do I will go on the research stage for ages getting so much information when I don't end up needing it but I just explore so much and spend so much time on that part because I find it so interesting... I've got all this extra knowledge that's great for me but it wasn't really needed to produce the product... [I needed to] shrink it down instead of going on for hours... I've been getting a lot more confident with that and finding that it's getting better... In my future products after that one what I've done is... written myself a list and guidelines for myself to stick to. In that way I've set out what it was that I want to do in this product... Once I've done all that if there's more time then I can always go back and look at that... I just decided to do that for myself.

Students are learning about themselves.

I've learnt that... I get stressed out easily, that I'm not exactly that fond of speaking in front of people, even though apparently I'm not even that bad... that I change my mind a lot, and probably still going to change my mind when I'm older.

Students are becoming more systematic in taking notice of their own learning.

I learn from everything I do in my life really because before I thought of [my passion] as a past time hobby... Now I view it as something that's teaching me in a way... [I'm learning] how computers work really. How to gain processes and everything and the formulas and everything it has to do to get the final result... The majority of it is me doing it myself like testing... playing... recording but then a benefit is me doing it online as well.

Students reflect on the need for further maturing.

I was the only guy in there too. I have no problem with the girls that were in it, it's just that I don't really relate with them that much. But you sort of have to get over that eventually, but I just didn't at that time.

Implementing a new school design – a complex process

General description

This theme recognises that implementing a new school design within a traditional school is a slow process requiring new learning from all parties involved. During the initial process of implementation of a Big Picture Academy it is to be expected that students and parents could experience some uncertainty and observe areas needing further development.

Round Two finding

Some students and parents from one school had concerns over the process of implementation and the readiness of the school for the new design. There was also uncertainty as to how participation in Big Picture would impact future education possibilities.

This is a new theme emerging from the students' reflections in Round Two interviews.

Students feel there is a lot to learn about Big Picture, it takes time and commitment.

Nobody actually knows what Big Picture is here... They're telling us things now that they're going to do for next year, and it's like, "but why didn't we get that?" I think they came in too early. They just didn't have enough experience as we would have all liked. I've had plenty of students in our class thinking we were guinea pigs... just testing out Big Picture on us... "Explanation" was a big loss this year... Nothing was explained, nothing was told of what we were going to do or what we were going to face, what we were going to achieve... They didn't know what they were doing. It was a new year, they'd only had a little bit of training. We don't get explained our learning plans, we don't get explained what each thing means, we don't get explained what we need to do and how we need to do it. Why we need to do it, what do we get for it. Our grading, I've never had that explained to me... A big change, it went from positive to negative.

Students express uncertainty about their immediate future.

At the beginning I was happy with [Big Picture], but... I'm now unsure just in case it doesn't work out for me and I'll have to go back in mainstream. So it's all confusing, and that's how I feel – and nervous... I'm not really sure... just in case carpentry doesn't work out and I need to go to university, I don't know how it's going to help me over here... We got a sheet that said... WACE or ATAR, and I had to choose WACE, so I'm not sure what happens if I don't want to do it anymore, I want to get ATAR... I'm pretty nervous about [getting into TAFE] because if I don't get accepted, I don't know what's happening... [I feel] very comfortable [with the option of going back into mainstream], just in case it doesn't work out.

Parents appreciate the need for learning about innovative educational approaches.

The other thing we're a little dubious about was it being the first year, so the students are kind of the guinea pigs... It takes time to build up resources... where you've got contacts for different areas for mentorship and things like that. So we were a little bit worried about that. And I'm guessing over time that'll get better and better anyway... That's not meaning to be hard on the way things are... It's the first year, everyone's finding how things go, that's all I meant... If someone is interested in something there's 3 or 4 people down the track ... can approach straight away rather than actually going and canvassing people and trying to get someone... What he's interested in is so limited anyway. ... he doesn't like getting on the phone and ringing people, and every time we pushed him he'd sort of push back.

3. Findings – what are parents saying?

In this section we report on the themes and findings particular to the parent interview data. We follow the structure used for student themes with a general description of each theme followed by a statement of the key finding illustrated by a sample of parent comments. Because parents were interviewed for the first time in round two of the data collection all these themes are new.

Parent-school relationship – becoming more personal

General description

This theme relates to the crucial relationship between the parent of a secondary school student and the student's teacher, other school staff and the school as an institution. It captures the importance of this relationship in the eyes of the parent and the ways that the school can enhance or hinder it.

Round Two finding

Parents highly value regular contact with the Advisory Teacher. They compare it favourably to previous experience in mainstream schooling. The informal contact by phone, email and being welcome to visit the class enable parents to feel secure and part of their child's education.

Parents identify the ease with which their child and they approach the Advisory Teacher.

If she's [child] got any questions or if she's unsure of something she'll say to me "Mum can we go and see [the Advisory Teacher] and ask a question?" Or if I'm unsure I'll ask her and if she doesn't know we'll go and see [Advisory Teacher] together. [Interviewer: Would that be possible in mainstream?] Oh God no, no. [In the past] when it came time for the three way interviews... [because she is a high achiever they would say] "No we don't need to see you." There was one time... I said "Oh I just want to touch base" and [the teacher] said "What for?" Whereas [the Advisory Teacher's] door's open anytime. Flip him email even and that sort of thing. Before it's like "What do you want to see me for?" And sometimes you just want to chat and see how they're going. I can do that in here... [Student initiated a 3-way contact. She] would never have done that before.

Parents feel welcome at a Big Picture school – a change from mainstream school.

[In the previous school] we didn't interact with the school really... They only contacted me when she was in trouble... [At this school the interaction with the school is] good. I have met her first teacher... She let me know that the kids were able to go to her because they didn't feel comfortable with coming to ask parents or whatever. You walk in the door and you get greeted and everyone is nice to you and the principal will talk to you.

Parents describe being more involved in their child's education.

I've been at the school a lot more which is a good thing... I do like to be involved. And I've felt that I've been able to get in touch with [Advisory Teacher] a lot and I can send her an email whenever I want and she'll get back to me. And she'll keep an eye on [my daughter] herself personally. You know, if I want her to push her, she'll push her. Or else if she's slacking a bit and she'll let me know and then I'll push her a little bit further. Things like that and definitely more interaction with the school.

Parents appreciate a closer relationship with the Advisory Teacher.

When he was in mainstream we really didn't know what was going on because he didn't communicate a lot with us and I never saw him with a book at home, his bag only had his lunch in there, so I'd always say "Don't you have work to do?" so he didn't do well at all end of year 9 – whereas now the input is I have a good relationship with his teachers and they communicate with me a lot more, they let me know what's going on, what [he's] up to. So that's a lot better.

Parents welcome more regular communication with the Advisory Teacher.

[In mainstream school] I was getting phone calls from teachers telling me that [he] needed to do his school work and that I needed to do something about that... Constant messaging I was getting saying [he] wasn't at school. It was always negative feedback and "we've had a problem with your son, this has happened with your son"... [Here] we have meetings with the teachers once a term. If there is a problem that [he] had a hard time with the day I do get a phone call from his teacher and she lets me know – you know this happened... But all I get from his teachers is good news... even happy news. It's not just "oh [he's] got a delightful attitude", it's "[He's] full stop delightful, he's doing so well". Which is something that you don't usually get out of a teacher: "he's doing so well."

Parents appreciate feeling welcome in the Big Picture classroom.

It's great to come into the class. I can pop in any time I like, but I sort of said to [him] I'll let you know before I come because I want to have that sort of you know relationship with him. It's just being able to ring and say "Is everything okay?"

Parents value that the Advisory Teachers really know their child and gives them detailed feedback.

I love the feedback that I get at the end of the term... It was a piece of paper, it's all typed up – very detailed on [his] presentation; what he could have improved on but yeah generally very detailed.... it was very personal... and it was very detailed and I think these Advisors... they really know [him] and that's great as a Mum to know.

Parents appreciate the closer relationship with the Advisory Teacher.

I know everything that's going on and I enjoy talking to [the Advisory Teacher] and getting feedback. [We talk] at least a couple of times a month... Which is a lot more than I'd have spoken to other teachers ever... [I talk with her at school about] how he's going... And what he's up to... I have spoken to her on the phone a few times as well.

Availability of Big Picture – extending access

General description

This theme captures the vision that parents have for the availability of the Big Picture approach for other secondary school children, based on their experience with a child in the Big Picture Academy/school.

Round Two finding

A subset of parents expressed a belief that Big Picture schooling was a model of education that would benefit all students and should be more widely available.

Parents see the value of the Big Picture approach for their other children.

Big Picture is what my son needs... [In other educational approaches] you're still in a class of 30 and you're still just another number. If every year level could be Big Picture that would be [great].

Parents believe the Big Picture approach can benefit the whole school.

I had one major problem with schools, that it's pretty much, square pegs in round holes and not every child's the same, yet the learning structure is pretty much the same for most kids. I know there's different levels of maths and you can do an advanced class... Something like this they're... not all the same pegs in the same holes. They can fit where they neatly fit and feel comfortable and learn in a different way and learn in a way that suits them... Learning and researching and just the different interests... I think something like the Big Picture should be a norm not just selected out for a few... I think it should be more across the board... I think a lot of kids could benefit from that learning style... I think it should be across the board.

Parents believe the Big Picture approach can benefit all students.

I'd like to be able to go and see them all, all the kids [do their Exhibition] because I find it really interesting just – to hear what they're doing and to be so excited about what they're doing... I'm just over the moon that it's actually – was here, I couldn't believe it because I've not heard of it before... It's a pity that every school's not the same.

Interrupting intergenerational and structural disadvantage – turning things around.

General description

This theme identifies the persistent pattern of social and educational inequality. Parents acknowledge their own disadvantage and desire more for their children. Further, they are able to draw links between their own disengagement from schooling and their perception that Big Picture provides a means for deeper engagement in learning.

Round Two finding

A subset of parents related to their child's struggles in mainstream secondary schooling based on their own negative experience of secondary school. They know that mainstream schooling disadvantages certain groups of young people and believe that Big Picture schooling has some capacity to turn this around.

Parents indicate their desire for something better for their children than they had.

I didn't want her to be another statistic with no job and getting benefits. I didn't want her living off the system basically and I was a teenage mum and that's not something I would want for her either. So I want what I wanted for myself I want for her, and this is doing it.

Parents believe they would have benefited from Big Picture when they were at school.

I wish this [Big Picture inspired school] was around [where I went to school] – this was an opportunity. I left school at 14 ... so I didn't have any qualifications and I just got those through working... So you've got to go to school to get where you want to be.

The majority of these kids were probably never given a chance at a normal school and then to come here and I suppose they all feel like they're wanted and they've got somebody... The majority of them... they would never have made it. They would have been somebody on the street... I can see the school is turning – and kids thinking they're nobody and they're somebody.

They were going to have her up for assault in [the mainstream] school... She got racial stuff thrown at her every time and it just got to the point where she had had it.

Kids come [to this school] because for starters they've got low self-esteem... A lifetime of heartache.

Traditional learning and innovative school design – tensions present

General description

This theme recognises the tensions and concerns that can arise when an innovative approach to schooling is introduced. Traditional practices (e.g. grading, set syllabus) and ways of evaluating educational success (e.g. exams) are not found in the Big Picture approach.

Round Two finding

A few parents were concerned about the absence of the mainstream educational practices that they were familiar with. They were concerned at a possible negative impact on their child.

Parents identify some tension between subject-based learning and assessment and a student-centred approach. *I think the worry is that your kid, because he's not learning the structure of a normal school... you're worried that they're missing out because... to pass an exam you've got to be given that particular information and that's why people do it, but what we have noticed is he will now learn for himself... He does get on the internet and research things... and he's left more to his own devices, or expected to gather the information using his own devices. So hopefully he's benefited from that... I think he does do his work... so it suits him.*

Parents worry that their child missing out on the standard curriculum but acknowledge the likelihood of disengagement in mainstream schooling.

I'm a bit worried he's fallen behind a little bit with some of his maths and science. I mean, his knowledge for science is way beyond what he's studying here, but he's not picking up the fundamental things is what I'm worried about... he's going off at a tangent way beyond where he's ever going to learn stuff in school, and then he's not picking up the basics to see him through perhaps later on. So I'm worried he's missed out on a bit of that. But he probably would have to a certain extent anyway, because he probably wouldn't have paid as much attention ... switched off probably ... weren't doing interesting enough stuff perhaps.

Parents worry about the lack of mainstream school curriculum.

I did actually have a few concerns because at one stage [he] wasn't doing Maths and English but the way the teacher explained it, that it's incorporated in the Big Picture, but I also wanted him, I felt like he was struggling a lot in Maths, because he wasn't doing that as a core subject. So that was my biggest concern is for him still to do the Big Picture but also to be in a Maths classroom, I didn't want him to drop that.

Parents worry that the absence of exams might be to the child's disadvantage.

[It might] make a difference when she goes to Uni because then she will have to sit things like that [exams] won't she... So it's not getting her ready to sort of go through the testing periods. I'm not saying she needs it but I'm just a bit concerned about it thinking, like if she starts Uni and they start to test her. And it starts to get hard, will she panic because she's never been in that predicament?... The nerves ... I was thinking maybe something could be put in place where she could learn that kind of thing... to get them ready for that because that is something that they will have to do... Apart from that I'm not worried. I know she's smart and she's smarter than her own good, always has been.

Parents want to know more about how their child is progressing.

Generally we're happy. I find it hard to know how she's going academically we don't really have a lot to compare it to. And she's not very forthcoming in what she's learning and how she's learning it. She's a bit of a closed book... [The Exhibition] kind of showed what she'd been doing throughout the term but I didn't feel that I got a real understanding of how she was achieving... It's a bit tricky... I could see what she'd been doing throughout the term but – as to what she'd actually learnt... It was a bit unclear.

4. Concluding remarks

This combined report draws on the experience of students and their parents to describe and explain the implementation of a Big Picture Academy within a traditional school structure and the introduction of a Big Picture orientation within two small alternative schools. The intent is to find out how students understand, experience and respond to a more personalised approach to learning. In pursuing this research we deliberately adopted a methodology that created a space for students to have a say about their experience of schooling and from their vantage point, identify the productive practices that need to be created and more widely sustained to enhance student engagement in deep learning. In short, this report seeks to generate empirical evidence about what works best for students (and their schools, teachers and parents) and what doesn't. Underpinning this research then is a deep belief that students know well what goes on in their schools. Thus, gaining access to the stories of young people through interviews and observations provides us with a better awareness not only of the problem of student (dis)engagement but the ways in which schools can be reinvigorated to enhance student learning and aspiration.

In these concluding remarks we want to draw together some key themes of this report while providing a foundation for future thinking and action. At the risk of oversimplification, there are three key themes running through this report. First, there is an acknowledgment that mainstream schooling or a 'one size fits all' approach to education is not working for a significant cohort of students. Students in this research spoke candidly about the limitations of their previous school experience and how it interfered with their learning. The reasons are varied but we hear accounts of boredom, irrelevance, bullying, and poor relationships with teachers and peers to name a few. In response some students actively chose to enrol in a different way of doing school, where they felt a greater sense of ownership, belonging, and relevance. Others were in effect "pushed" out of mainstream education and have found themselves in a Big Picture oriented school/program.

Second, personalised approaches to education benefits student engagement. Throughout this research we heard time and time again about the positive effects of personalisation. The fact that students have some say and control over what and how they learn appears to be a significant factor in their (re)engagement. The opportunity to pursue their learning in the community through Internships is seen by students as an important advantage in thinking about their future careers and life. Students acknowledge the central role of relationships especially with their Advisory Teacher, peers and mentors as crucial influences on their learning. In summary, the strong engagement that is evident from most of the students is linked to personalised learning,¹¹ to Exhibitions,¹² to their relationship with the Advisory Teacher,¹³ to getting out into the "real world,"¹⁴ family involvement¹⁵ to freedom to pursue their future goals and the support they receive to do.¹⁶ These attempts to implement the Big Picture design have resulted in students who are enthusiastic about learning, are developing enhanced relationships with family and peers and are growing confidence and capacities to manage their own learning.

Third, school change takes time, perseverance, resources and leadership. Attempts to unlearn and learn different ways of doing school, for students, teachers and parents alike, is a complex process involving a deep understanding of the nature of school change and the interconnections between school culture, structures and practices. Pivotal to this process is a willingness to engage in self-reflection to understand and improve practice. Along the way, there are tensions and contradictions as participants negotiate new ways of thinking and acting. The 'old culture' is never far away - traditional assumptions, behaviours, beliefs and practices continue both overtly and covertly as new ideas and innovation come into play. It is apparent in this research that where school leadership is strong, stable and supportive school change is more likely to occur. Leadership which facilitates the Big Picture Academy/oriented school to achieve greater fidelity to the Big Picture design supports enhanced student engagement and learning. Student concern and dissatisfaction arises where their experience is contrary to the promise in the Big Picture design.

¹¹ Big Picture distinguisher 3. One student at a time.

¹² Big Picture distinguisher 4. Authentic assessment.

¹³ Big Picture distinguisher 6. Learning in Advisory and distinguisher 7. Trust, respect and care.

¹⁴ Big Picture distinguisher 2. Learning in community.

¹⁵ Big Picture distinguisher 10. Creating futures.

Regular dialogue between students, teachers, parents and school leaders is crucial to ensuring participants are supported through the process. To assist in this task there needs to be a set of practices that allow participants to have the time and space to raise awareness, develop plans, gather evidence, reflect and take action. Indeed, it takes a village to raise a child. This report highlights the profound importance of engaging with new modes of thought (and thoughtfulness) around the ways we do schooling. Simply doing more of the same, only more intensely, does not seem like a good option to us given the challenges facing students at the beginning of the 21st century. Based on the evidence presented by the young people and their parents in this report we can confidently say that listening to what works best for students is a promising start.

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This research is funded by the Australian Federal Government as a Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) Project Grant (2012 – 2016) administered by Murdoch University and entitled Murdoch's Aspirations and Pathways for University (MAP4U) Project.

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