

The influences on decisions
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The Influences on Decisions: A study of Year 12s.

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There has been a long held fascination with the vocational aspirations of high school students. Throughout the decades from Frank Parson's (1909) seminal exploration of vocational choice, other researchers, such as Super (1957), Carter (1962), Poole (1983), and Ainley and Sheret (1992) have mapped the aspirations and expectations of youth.

More recent interest, particularly from government and business, has been stimulated by a number of important issues. First, Australia, as with other industrialised nations, has seen an increase in youth unemployment with recent census data suggesting 40 to 50 percent of our youth aged 15 to 19 are unemployed (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1992). Second, the massive increase in retention rates to Year 12 has not been met by an

increase in the proportion of youth participating in higher education (eg., Williams, Long, Carpenter & Hayden, 1993). Youth are staying on at high school yet are faced with reduced opportunities to enter the workforce or higher education. As social and behavioural phenomena such as aspirations are not static there exists a requirement for researchers to continually monitor the changing nature of such phenomena. Without such monitoring policy decisions are made in a 'knowledge' vacuum and based on outdated conceptions of the phenomena. This is never more urgent in the present economic, social and political environment were the educational system is being asked by policy makers to "take a more direct role in facilitating young people's progress through school to further education, training and employment" (School Council, 1994, p. ii). Such demands necessitate a monitoring of the changing nature of the post-high school intentions of youth, and the influences on their decision making process. This study aims to be part of such an ongoing monitoring. It explores the post-high school intentions of final year secondary students, and their perceptions of the influences that have helped or hindered their decision making process. The research details a complex model that integrates psychological and social and economic influences. The findings are placed within the context of Bandura's (1977, 1986) triadic model of self-regulated behaviour. As such, it explores the phenomena of aspirations in terms of environmental, behavioural and personal influences.

The Influences on Decisions.

Decisions about what options to undertake after leaving high school are a result of a complex network of psychological, social and economic influences - direct and indirect, deliberate and fortuitous, contemporary and historical. Self-knowledge, educational, occupational, genetic and early childhood influences are part of this complex system that shape career development, choice behaviour, self-identity, and career identity. Exploration of the influences on aspirations are often explored from two perspective's, an historical view, exploring the development of career aspirations (eg., Gottfredson, 1981), or a model that describes the contemporary influences on decisions, influences at the point of decision (eg., Wilks & Orth, 1991). Though the time frame is different both approaches have similar descriptions of the narrowing of aspirations from an initial broad conception (eg., I want to study) to a more specific conception (eg., I want to be a literary critic) through the influence of internal and/or external forces. For example, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) propose a three-phase model of decision making regarding student choice of college. The first phase is a predisposition stage in which students' attitudes and influences aid in their decision to

attend further education or not. During the second phase the student searches for information and the forms a 'list' of institutions. Finally, the third phase sees the student narrowing their 'viable' choices and the determining which college to enter.

The types of influences described in the different approaches to career decision making can also be defined along two broad dimensions. The first type are generally social-psychological in nature and include discussion on aptitudes, self-knowledge, self-concept, decision making competencies, parental encouragement, and the influence of peers (eg., Carpenter & Western, 1982; Martin & Dixon, 1991; Super, 1957). The second stream of research explores the structures of society that influence decision making. For example, research in Australia has highlighted the influence of social class on the educational and occupational aspirations of youth (eg., Marks, 1992). Despite the existence of these two streams of research, it is acknowledged by some that both individual psychology and wider environmental and structural factors influence the decision making process. For example, Mann, Harmoni and Power (1989) argue that decision making is limited by powerful environmental forces, such as parental expectations, the school organisation and ethos, and peer or societal expectations, while Ainley, Foreman and Sheret (1991) reported that the decision to remain at school is often influenced by family economic status, parental encouragement and education, and the availability of alternative Year 12 pathways.

While historical and contemporary models of decision making may differ in time scale such models often describe long term influences, for example, parent, peers, and advice of significant others, though the primary influence is often held to be parents (eg., Brittain, 1963; Martin & Dixon, 1991; Wilks, 1986). Closer to the point of decision research has indicated that other influences begin to operate. For example, Gothard (1985) noted that educational experience (eg., teacher expectations, the curriculum and the school attended) are increasingly important to the individual decision maker as the decision process nears resolution.

Bandura's (1977, 1986) model of "triadic reciprocal determinism" offers the researcher a method of analysis on the influences on decisions that goes beyond previous models that rely on describing personal psychology and /or the environment. Bandura suggests that personal factors, such as intellectual ability, environmental factors, such as economic conditions, and behaviour, such as previous choices, interact in such a way that they allow opportunity for the individual to control their own destiny, while concurrently setting limits to self-direction.

For a more thorough review of the theory refer to Purdie, N. (1994). Self-regulated behaviour: Some theoretical issues. Paper

presented at Annual Conference of the AARE (27 Nov to 1 Dec, 1994). University of Newcastle, Australia.

Most importantly, personal factors include not only the personal psychology but what the individual brings with them to the situation while the introduction of 'behaviours' into the model emphasises the dynamic and interdependent nature of human actions.

Why examine influences on decisions?

There has been a great deal of research that has explored the role of parents, peers and other personal and structural influences on the decision process. This may suggest to some that there is no need for further study as much must already be

known. It is argued that nothing could be further from the truth. The changing nature of relationships across the lifespan of the individual, let alone the generational changes, require us to re-examine our assumptions about the influences on the decision process.

A case in point is the relationship between parents and the decision maker. In terms of the lifespan of an individual the relationship between that individual and their social world can alter. For example, Musgrave (1989) suggests that individuals pass through a 'career' of socialising contexts, beginning with the family and extending to the school, a widening circle of peers, and ultimately passing into employment and their own family. Consequently, while the decision maker may initially be influenced by their parents through modelling and advice, they soon develop a wider social network that may lead to conflicting, compensatory or supporting influences. The popular view suggests that parents and adolescents, in particular, are in conflict over decision situations. This view reflects a probable generational change. During the 1960's researchers reported value conflicts between parents and adolescents over occupational aspirations (eg., Coleman, 1961; Carter, 1962). Since this period the industrialised world has witnessed an increase in the number of students staying at school, and, for a wide variety of reasons, a greater value placed on education. More recent research indicates that the 1970s and 1980s showed adolescents not far removed from their parents in their eager acceptance of conventional adult norms and career patterns (Brown, 1990). The stereotype of conflict between adults and adolescents, reinforced by research from the 1960s, has not been supported by recent research. Changes in schooling, the economy, family structures, and perhaps in the adolescent sub-culture itself, have raised questions as to the relevance of current decision making models often developed within a framework of economic rationalism or based on outdated research from the 1960s and 1970s. Models are also often based on the decision making processes of managers and individuals who

have already made the transition from school to work rather than the adolescent decision maker. An urgent reappraisal of decision making for the important transition between Year 12 and the post-secondary world is required. Rather than assume that family, the education "system" and peers influence decisions, and that the decisions are rational, we must ask if there are other factors which we ignore at our peril, if the relationships are more complex than previously assumed, and if our counselling and information provision helps or hinders students.

Method

Participants

A total of 48 final year secondary students (24 male and 24 female) participated in the study. Four male and four female final year students (Year 12) from each of six purposefully selected government schools were randomly chosen to participate. From this group, a male and female were randomly chosen by the researcher to participate in an individual interview. The remaining six were interviewed in a focus group format.

The Schools

The schools chosen were six coeducational government schools. They represented distinct geographical and socio-economic areas within the metropolitan region of a large Australian city. The schools were selected on the basis of student enrolments, means of access to employment and educational opportunities (eg., rail,

car, bus), and distance to the Central Business District. The schools were contained within four major corridors of development identified through census data detailing growth in housing and population.

Material

An interview schedule involving eight open-ended questions was used to direct both the focus groups and individual interviews. Prompts for each question were also provided to explore issues that may not have arisen through discussion. The interviews and focus groups were videotaped in order to maintain a record of discussion.

Setting

A school counselling area or classroom was used for the focus group and individual interviews. The seating was arranged in an informal manner with the students in a semi-circular formation around the video camera. Students were asked to seat themselves where they wished.

The interviews were conducted over the period August to September. Students had already applied for entry to university

and TAFE and were preparing to sit their mock final year exams.

Procedure

Students asked to participate in the focus groups and interviews were asked for their prior consent with letters sent home to parents/guardians for their information and approval. No student refused. The focus group and individual interviews were mediated by the researcher who also operate the video camera. The discussions and interviews were of approximately 40 minutes duration.

The students were informed that they had been chosen to participate in the discussion as part of a research program on decision making about post-secondary options. It was stressed that the research aimed to explore the way students arrive at a decision and was not concerned with whether they had made a decision or not. The researcher informed the students that if they had no objections the conversation was to be videotaped to allow the researcher to concentrate on their discussion. If there were no objections the video-recorder was turned on in view of the students. No objections were made. The students were then asked to introduce themselves, first name only, and to provide a brief description as to what their current decisions are regarding what they wish to do after they finish Year 12. The researcher then guided the students into the interview schedule.

Findings

The findings presented describe a general picture of the influences on adolescent decision making. The influences are described in terms Bandura's (1977, 1986) conception of personal, environmental, and behavioural influences. Figure One presents an overview of the influences on the post-secondary aspirations of the Year 12s interviewed.

Figure 1: A diagrammatic representation of the influences on the decisions about post-secondary options obtained from interviews with Year 12 students and structured according to Bandura's (1977, 1986) model of self-regulated behaviour.

The Personal

There are a number of distinct areas of personal influences that are suggested from responses to the interviews. Gender, ethnicity, and individual expectation of success, are important influences on the decisions of youth both in the personal and environmental sense. Of these influences gender was perhaps the most pervasive personal influence on aspirations.

Gender operates in two ways, through sex-typing of male and

female roles evident in the aspirations of the interviewees, and an apparent difference in what males and females thought was possible. For example, in line with other research findings and government reports, males and females equally valued entry to university (eg., Schools Council, 1994), however, the language used by males and females to describe their university aspirations was quite different. Through the verbal and non-verbal language females were less certain about achieving entry to university and less specific about they wanted to study than their male counterparts. For example many females used statements such as: "If I got into university"; "I'd like to go to university to study social work". In contrast, though still generally uncertain about achieving university entry, males appeared to be more certain about entry than most females often using terms such as "I want" and having more specific ideas about their study areas.

The relationship to TAFE entry was quite different. Seventy five percent of the responses indicating TAFE was an option were provided by female participants. They saw TAFE as a preferred or only option for next year and were quite specific in their courses of study (eg., I'd like to go to TAFE and do Associate Diploma in Accounting). In contrast, the majority of males saw TAFE as an alternative to university entry or work, generally if all else failed, and were less certain about what they would study (... get a job, or go to TAFE probably).

It can not be concluded that males and females are different in their degree of certainty, only that they show differences in their public display of certainty. It is possible that females were more reluctant to express their feelings of success in the public forum of a group interview, or to a unknown male researcher, while males may have been publicly overconfident. Gender was also an influence in the sex stereotyping of occupational and educational aspirations, though such a circumscription can be ameliorated by the support or ignorance of significant others. The majority of males and females nominated 'traditional' roles within society, for example, dental assistants, social workers, nurses and teachers for females, and, pilot, accountant, mechanic, or signwriter for males. Few individuals made the break into non-traditional areas of interest. Those that did either faced hostility from parents, though rarely peers, or had chosen areas where little was understood about the aspiration by either parents or peers. For example, a female from a school within a predominantly lower socio-economic region wished to be a panel beater. She faced extreme pressures from her immediate and extended family and especially her father. However, it was apparent that she was determined and received enough support from her peers to persevere in the face of this hostility. There also appears to be a greater degree of non-traditional aspirations from females who had definite ideas about TAFE as an option.

Although few students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds were interviewed it was apparent that they had stronger views about their post-secondary aspirations. Males and females interviewed had clear pictures of what they wished to undertake. Some of these were obviously internalised parental views. For example,

the male ethnic Chinese student who was going to study accountancy due to parental pressure despite his interests clearly lying in the sciences. Not all such students were so obviously influenced by their parents though parents were important to such youth and they were not reluctant to indicate parental influence.

Tied into the concept of gender and ethnicity was personal expectation for success. It has already been noted how females appeared less certain about entry to university in comparison to males. It can not be concluded that males and females are fundamentally different only that their public statements of personal expectations differ. Participants may have been reinforcing another sexual stereotype where males are rewarded for stating expectations that are accurate, and females criticised for stating "high" though realistic expectations (eg., Marsh, 1989). Such statements of success may also reflect the relationship between

This concept of personal expectation was reinforced when discussing repeating Year 12. The few students who had considered repeating, and described this as their likely scenario desired to obtain entry to a specific university course but felt that their current progress would be highly unlikely to gain them access to the course. Those that were repeating for a specific purpose felt that they could obtain entry for a "lower" course but that it was not worthwhile to do so as it would delay their entry to a preferred occupation. Such personal expectations appear to be fuelled by the environmental influences that operated on an individual and which the individual has internalised. For example, the students who seriously considered repeating were from middle class socio-economic or ethnic families whose parents valued education as a means of succeeding.

The personal influences described here represent only the tip of the iceberg. Certainly other individual differences, such as ability and information processing skills, are important influences in the decision making process. More important to students was the role of environmental influences.

The Environment.

The environment surrounding the individual decision maker is dominated by their relationship with school, family and peers. Within the school individual teachers, subjects of study, subjects of interest, school location, and work experience, all influenced the decision process.

Perhaps one of the most important influences on the decision process of youth are their experiences at work, either through school based programs or part-time and/or casual work. Many students found work experience more useful in delineating what they did not want to do.

I did teaching. I used to like teaching but once I did work experience I didn't like it. Everything turned me off

Experience gained through part-time/casual work was seen to be helpful in providing skills in obtaining jobs, seeing how the real world works, obtaining financial independence and access to those with knowledge.

The influence of school also featured heavily in the discussions of youth about their post-secondary intentions. One of the most influential of the 'school' factors was the subjects studied during the period of schooling. There appeared to be two forms of subjects at school, hurdle subjects and interest subjects. Interest subjects were those that students' felt matched their

interests for post-secondary work or study. Such subjects were seen to provide a basic appreciation of a field, particularly the more applied fields such as art. The hurdle subjects, more often core subjects such as English and maths, were generally seen as helpful not in their content but in what they allowed the students to undertake once they finished school. It appeared that few students were engaged in interest subjects. The vast majority were studying hurdle subjects that they felt would provide them with access to opportunities beyond high school. Some expressed dissatisfaction with this state of affairs but most were resigned to the nature of the upper school curriculum.

You've got subjects that do help you. Say you've got Human Biology, like I know its really interesting and I was really good at it, and if you're interested in humans and like how it works, how they work and everything then, you know, that might help you become, 'Oh yeah, I want to become a doctor' ... but overall I don't think it helps you choose what you want to do. A lot of things that you do in school don't have anything to do with what you're gonna do after you leave school so I don't see what's the big deal.

For those with more defined interests other experiences at school, such as participation in plays and excursions, were seen as valuable insights into the real world.

Teachers played a multiplicity of roles in the decision process of youth. They influenced decisions both as an individual and as a member of the teaching profession. Teachers were often seen as providers of information on TEE and TAFE entry subjects, ie.,

getting through the hurdles, and for keeping students on track. Where students had an interest in the subject of study (eg., as a post-secondary option) younger teachers were preferred in the classroom as they offered the student more recent ideas and experience about the area. Older teachers were preferred for hurdle subjects as they were seen as having the experiences necessary to keep students on task and help them through the process.

Individual staff members within the school provided different degrees of support. Many adolescents commented on their relationship with Youth Education Officers, apparently seeing them as removed from the role of Teacher to one of support provider. Often YEO's were seen as providing a reasonable, reliable and approachable source of information especially for those who are progressing down the decision track, or for those who perceived they had problem, such as possibilities of failing a course.

Of other support staff within the school perhaps the least used were school counsellors. Where they were used they were often information sources once a general decision (eg., I want to go to university) had been made if the student required more specific information they could not obtain from other sources, or if the student was sent to them. Few students mentioned counselling staff as a source of information. A number of students expressed the belief that it was a stigma to have to go to a counsellor. School visitors (eg. defence forces, TAFE, universities) appeared to have made little impact on students except for those who required further information and who sent away for prospectus or other material. It also appears that the earlier in the year the visit, the less useful it appeared to be for the average student. Many stated that at the beginning of the year they had not made any decision about their post-high school aspirations and were consequently disinterested in what such visitors had to say.

School location also plays a role in influencing aspirations and perceptions of opportunities. For example, the majority of respondents who were considering TAFE came from schools on the outskirts of the metropolitan region. Students in these schools generally appeared to be more aware of the courses they would like to pursue at TAFE and the requirements for entry. Nearby vocational and study opportunities also influenced aspirations. For example, students from schools with light and heavy industries nearby saw work and apprenticeships as a more viable option for after Year 12. Few students from the inner city suburban schools saw direct entry to the workforce as an option, unless all else failed. Another example was the location of one of the schools near a large Naval Base. Of the 48 interviewees few stated the defence force as an option but of those that did almost all of the students were from this school and all stated

the Navy as an option. Of these only one had a father who was ex-Navy.

Another environmental influence was the expectations of others around the decision maker. Individuals not only experienced expectations about themselves that influenced their decisions but also were influenced by the expectation of others. When asked to think about what others expected that they, the decision maker, would be doing next year, students generally responded by noting the expectations of parents and occasionally teachers. These expectations are often vague in nature, such as, do your best and be happy. Further education was seen as the most fruitful course to take for future happiness and the majority of students stated that most people expected them to be happy, preferably happy and qualified.

"My mum doesn't mind what I do. She just wants me to be qualified in something".

The expectations of self and others featured in the decision of those who intended to repeat Year 12. Students who stated this as an option came from schools from areas with a more formally educated workforce and higher income levels, or from a strong ethnic background that highly valued education. Few students outside of these conditions saw repeating as an option.

Similar to previous research findings throughout the decades parents are an important influence on the decision process. The relationship between the decision maker and parent was often one of emotional support, encouragement, someone to talk to or someone to pressure them to get things done (eg., homework). Parents rarely provided specific information about post-high school aspirations but often had friends who could. They also provided a role model for some students if the student was interested in undertaking a similar post-high school path. Parents occasionally acted as models of behaviour, though often students regarded parental experiences as outdated.

Some students deliberately rejected parental demands by not doing homework or provoking conflict. Others felt that they had to make their parents happy because the parents were paying for their education. This appeared to place them in a conflict situation between their own feelings about controlling their world and what they want to do, and their feelings of responsibility and wanting to honour their parent's wishes. This was apparently more so for females from middle class backgrounds and males and females of non-Anglo origin. Such conflict was apparently being resolved in favour of the parent's view.

Tied into the influence of parents was the family socio-economic status. As with other research (eg., Marks, 1992) the socio-

economic status (SES) of the family played an important, though

often mediated, role on the decisions of students. For example, students from two schools within low SES regions rarely mentioned further education as an option. Pressure was placed on such students to leave school and provide further income to the household or to undertake traditional occupations. Parents within such regions understood little of the complexities of an adolescent's world

It's beyond my parents. When they went to school it was simple. You left school in Year 9, get out, get a job, you get a career then ... there's so much stuff you've got to do, they [parents] just say "what is all this crap"?

The relationship between the student and their peer group was also not a cut and dried one of relying on 'peer' advice. There was a difference in the roles of older and same age peer group members. Older friends, siblings and boy/girl friends were sought out for information about particular options and students were very much aware of the difficulties and requirements encountered by them. Older peers' experiences at high school (the subjects they studied, the relationships with the opposite sex etc.) and post-secondary life were sought by those who were looking to support an option or those with a vague idea who want more information. Such peer group members are a very important source of information and experience. Partners also provided emotional support and contact with other parents/adults. They also encouraged and provided information on the mistakes they, the partner, had made.

Same age peers provided a reality check system, someone to bounce an idea off. This tended to break down towards the end of the year when individuals seriously started to consider their post-high school options, The intentions of same age peers are the most influential in where students want to study. This in turn leads to restrictions in what they can study. Peers of all ages can also be negative if they perceive the choice to be 'boring' or not fitting in, an influence that is hard to ignore for the majority of youth.

Peers can seemingly overwhelm the individual desires of the 'decision maker', particularly for those who have vague ideas about their options. For example, a close friendship between two males had obviously influenced their decisions about post-high school options. Both stated that they wanted to travel to the United Kingdom to play soccer, and both stated that failing this choice they would try to enter the Navy. On further analysis of the transcripts it was evident that one of the males was very certain and specific in his choice while the other male was apparently following the lead of his friend.

Peers are not the coherent set of influences many people seem to assume. For example, information concerning TAFE was often obtained from older members of the peer group, either already at

TAFE or who had researched the option. Even so, such information was limited.

The final year student is also bombarded with a large variety of information provided by government, business, and tertiary institutions. Despite the amount of information, and its often attractive presentation, few students felt it had been influential in their decisions making. Sources such as visitors, Career References, university sources and the TAFE handbook are often seen as confusing and contradictory. Most students use such sources once they move from a general conception to a more specific idea of what (eg from 'university' to 'social science at

university'). Study course material, such as tertiary prospectus, were viewed as useful by those who were reasonably certain about university entry but were unsure about the course of study to follow. The majority of students appeared to ignore such information source. What was more influential was actual site visits and visits from students who had left school the previous year or were from the school in question.

The media played a role in establishing conditions for information research, motivation, and a broad picture of the world that could be optimistic but was often regarded as pessimistic. In particular, its roles as a provider of information about career prospects and employment trends was often reported. It also was seen by some students to provide an incentive for 'working hard'.

Seeing a lot of unemployed people makes you realise you have to work harder

The media also provided an opportunity for the more directed individual to circumnavigate potential difficulties in obtaining their goal. For example, a male who strongly desired to enter an Art School program had read in the newspapers that TAFE was altering its entry requirements such that it gave points towards entry for study and work experience. The student had worked out his points and then

... quickly went and did work experience for extra points. I saw it and did it.

Advertisements for work and study courses often depressed students due to the requirements for experience. The lack of job advertisements for a field of interest (whether now or the future) can be damaging. The media makes the world sound pretty bleak.

Related to home location was the concept of physical accessibility to post-high school options. Choices had to fit into the student's financial and transport capabilities. Many

students described their decision making about what course to study as first involving a decision about transport accessibility, particularly for those on the fringes of the metropolitan region or those areas with limited mass transport..

You look into a course first to find out where you can do it

Another influence on aspirations was the student's exposure to options through such things as parental modelling, peer group intentions, educational values, and concepts of success. Students from schools and families with less access to university opportunities, information and experiences appeared to feel less certain about obtaining university entry and had more general notions about university and the courses they wished to enter. For example, a male interviewee whose mother worked within a computer firm but had no formal education stated:

I don't know really what I want to do next year. I'm hoping to get into some computer management course, managing business firms

He had repeatedly been told by his mother about all the young people with computer degrees that were promoted over her and had responded to her pressure to undertake a course in computers, despite his difficulties with mathematics and English. Similarly when asked to describe what they saw as work, two

students from a middle class school, where the majority of work was undertaken in the Central Business District, provided the following exchange:

Male: I'd say business, in offices and things like that. Only because, like both my parents work in offices. Just people I know of the adult race, other than being people. People my age who work down at fast food places. It depends but I don't know.

Female: Depends on what your family or your parents

Male: Yeah, they all work at offices and things like that

Female: If you work at a farm or something you'd expect work to be hard work

While environmental influences featured predominantly in the students' perceptions of influences on their decisions many students recognised that past and current behaviour influenced their decision process.

Behavioural Influences

In line with theories such as Gottfredson (1981) past and present

decisions greatly limit the potential options that many students see as available. Decisions about homework, the necessity to make a decision, and decisions about courses of study at high school severely limited many student's options, and they were quite aware of this. Most disturbing was that many students had only just begun to consider post-secondary options, despite a strong view that

... what you're gonna do after this year determines what you're gonna do in the future

As many students had only recently begun to consider their options they had often only just realised that they entered into courses of study that did not match their aspirations, had collected superficial information about the options available to them, or had only just realised the effort required to achieve what they wanted. The lack of information gathering behaviour by students was reflected in their surface knowledge of the working conditions, the periods of study required, or even the tertiary institutions that offered courses they were interested in. The vast majority of students had only vague notions of university or work as a post-high school option, despite the interviews being conducted eight weeks before the end of the senior secondary education. Few students had actively gathered or were gathering information and those that had some knowledge had used sources of convenience such as peers, parents, and school personnel. This lack of information was reflected in the students certainty and specificity of their decisions. As stated earlier, most students had only vague notions about their options. Such students were similarly uncertain in their expectations of success (I'd like to go to university). In contrast those students who had more defined options were seemingly more active in their information gathering and more certain in achieving their desired outcome.

The decisions about subjects studied in Year 11 and 12 featured heavily in the discussions of the adolescents interviewed. There was a feeling by many students that they had been pressured to take Tertiary Entrance subjects. Students repeatedly stated that at the time of subject choice they enrolled in such subjects

because they seemed to offer the most scope for post-high school life, based on teacher information or faulty peer information. Towards the end of Year 12 these students stated that they felt that they could have had a lot more pleasant time at school if they knew that they didn't need to take such subjects for TAFE or work. This in itself reflects a structural influence on the decision process whereby students are pressured to participate in a system that stresses university entry despite fewer than 30% of such students entering such institutions. Many students

complained of conflicting or even erroneous advice from teachers and support staff on the requirements for further study and the content of the subjects studied.

Immediate and long term influences.

Influences on decisions are also embedded in a temporal state. Many of the participants related to the immediate influences on their decisions about post-secondary life. This appeared to reflect a lack of clear understanding about life after high school, and perhaps a perception that such decisions do not need to be made until other more important concerns are dealt with, for example, tertiary entrance examinations. The decision process appeared to depend on a hierarchy of immediate influences:

1. Where are my friends going, or who has gone there before me?
2. Can I get there?
3. What sort of courses are available.?
4. What don't I want to do?
5. Out of what's left, what can I do based on my school performance and subjects I have?
6. What do I have information about?
7. From the remainder what might I be interested in?

However, decisions are also a product of long term processes and relationships such as student relationships with adults, and their own feelings of certainty. A far cry from the job matching or personality testing procedure, pragmatic but not rational.

Implications

The transition from school to work or further study is an important period of decision making. The decision as to which vocation to enter is often assumed to be based on an individual's interests and aptitudes. Modern vocational counselling and curricula are based on developing an awareness of interests and aptitudes and the matching of such to vocations where successful individuals show similar abilities, interests and aptitudes. The material presented here suggests that the decision making process is a complex and dynamic process where influences alter depending on the needs of the individual and the capabilities of the environment to not only meet those needs but also to circumscribe the individual.

What strikes the observer of Figure One is the predominance of environmental influences on the decision process. This may well reflect the participants' ascription of influence, or the relative ease with which individuals can describe external rather than internal influences. Perhaps it reflects the true nature of adolescent decision making where control is outside the individual. If so we as counsellors and teachers must bring control back to the individual, to provide them with a framework where they can explore the influences and balance the

relationship between behavioural, personal and environmental influences. This brief overview of the influences on the decisions of final year students reinforces the necessity to

explore such interrelated models of the decision process. Bandura's model offers scope for the researcher and counsellor to examine in micro and macro perspective the influences on decisions. It also offers the realisation that research and practice must not only describe influences and the relative influence of each, but must also explore in what ways an individual factor influences. More importantly, researchers and counsellors must be aware of the dynamic nature of the system of influences and the changing role of parents, peers, teachers, and so on, play in the decision making process. It can not be said that the decision making process of youth are simplistic. The influences described here represent the tip of an iceberg. Counsellors and researchers must realise that influences are a dynamic system. Yesterday the child was following in a parent's footsteps, today they are confused by the conflicting information from peers and experts. What has been attempted here is an exploration of the influences that moves beyond the normal application of psychology and /or environment. The use of Bandura's model presents the researcher and counsellor with a framework that explores the complex and interrelated pattern of influences. There is a large degree of interrelationship between behaviour, environment and personal influences. Individuals are not solely products of their environment nor are their behaviours purely statements of their individual psychology.

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