

Being a Learner

This chapter discusses aspects of Emily’s overall propensity for learning, including reference to some of the personal qualities most likely to contribute to effective learning.

While inclination to learn is likely to be strongly interrelated with school learning or school-related experiences generally, it is also broader than that, encompassing influences on a student’s life from outside of school as well. Chapter Six focuses more specifically on student orientation towards school and what is required of them there.

General Learning Behaviours

Views about Reading and Writing when Not at School

Given that at least basic proficiency — and, preferably, more highly developed abilities and inclination — in reading and writing is so integral on many levels to effectively living in our society, we sought information from students about their attitudes towards each of these competencies. We asked students whether they liked to read and write in their spare time, in activities not related to homework, school projects, or similar.

Reading

Emily did not regard reading as a favourite activity.

In Phase 1, Emily reported that she did not like reading for her own enjoyment or interest when not at school. Furthermore, one year later, in Phase 3, Emily still did *“not really”* like reading. However, although she reportedly spent very little of her time reading, Emily had clearly experienced it as a moving or worthwhile activity. For example, she mentioned a particular novel that had been recommended by her teacher, saying that she *“read it over and over”*.

Emily went on to say that on rare occasions she also read other pieces of fiction, and more regularly teenage magazines such as *Dolly*, *Girlfriend*, and *Smash Hits*, as well as emails from her friends. But she did not read the daily newspaper or reference materials for her own interest, and was not interested in junk mail.

Emily’s Year 8 teacher was aware that Emily was not keen on reading, identifying reading as one of two subject areas that Emily ‘liked least’.

Emily’s expressed attitude to reading (and also her quite low level of Internet use for searching out information) throughout most of the study contrasts with other information that shows her to have an enquiring mind and an interest in learning generally. It may be that given her social nature, she simply preferred to spend time talking to friends rather than reading.

It is however interesting that in Phase 4 Emily now gave a rating of ‘sometimes yes/sometimes no’ when asked if she read for interest in her spare time, and that her asTTle achievement score for reading (see Table 14 in Chapter Thirteen) was at a higher level than at any of the previous three phases. And when discussing her English classes, it was evident that Emily was amenable to reading when it was material that sparked her interest: for example, she suggested that she and many of her friends would find the short stories of Witi Ihimaera more interesting and relevant than what she considered to be the *“boring”*, hard to relate to, novel they had been assigned to read.

Attitude data from asTTle testing sessions at each phase of the study indicated that Emily felt less positive about reading in Phase 3 than she had in Phase 1 (Table 9, Chapter Ten).

But in Phase 4, her asTTle attitude reading score was more positive, reinforcing the data in Table 1 that show that, when she reached Year 10, Emily was reading more often for personal interest. Perhaps, too, she was gaining a greater appreciation of the need to read — research — to help her succeed in her studies, which she was keen to do.

And any expressed lack of interest in reading over the course of the study didn’t correspond with any difficulties in doing so, according to her asTTle achievement results, which showed her to have made significant gains in reading (comprehension) over the course of the study and to be scoring above the group mean.

Luke on Reading and Writing

In Year 8, Luke enjoyed reading in his spare time. In particular, he enjoyed the Harry Potter books; he also liked reading comics, and looking at junk mail. And up until the time he stopped delivering it, he read the local newspaper.

Although Luke said he did enjoy reading, it seems that the breadth of his reading was fairly narrow, and that unless it was something he had currently happened upon and found interesting, he did not actively seek out new reading experiences: that is, he was not an avid reader.

In Phase 3 Luke answered that he did *“not really”* like reading: *“Cause I don’t like it”*. But it is likely that this answer was more to do with his generally lowered state of well-being at the time, due to a high level of anxiety about a family member’s health, than it was about his feelings about reading.

However, he again said that he particularly enjoyed the Harry Potter books, noting that he had read the whole series to date, but also emphasising that he just read that series and not other books. (He wasn’t able to articulate what had initially attracted him to the Harry Potter books.) Luke further advised that he now ‘sometimes’ also read the daily newspaper, magazines, comics and junk mail.

While the finding that Luke read for interest or fun in his spare time only ‘one or two days a week’ in Phase 4, compared to ‘three to five days a week’ in Phase 2, suggests that Luke became less positive about reading over the course of the study, other information does not. For example, his asTTle attitude scores (see Chapter Ten, p.183) show that Luke’s attitude to reading, after a dip in Phase 3, was the same in Phase 4 as it had been in Phases 1 and 2.

These results suggest that he still enjoyed reading from time to time, probably continuing to focus on a quite restricted range of books, but that because he was most likely now spending greater proportions of time on other leisure activities, on socialising with friends, and on extra-curricular activities at school, this left less time for reading.

In Year 8, Luke did ‘not really like’ writing, stating that the only writing he did in his spare time involved emails to his friends.

Luke’s answer in Phase 3 was similar. He explained that this was because...

“...I’m not good at it — I can’t write stories out of my head (I didn’t finish my story [in the asTTle test]), I’m better at writing about what I know.”

The only things he wrote by choice in his spare time towards the end of Year 9 were emails, text messages, and chat room dialogue.

In Year 10, Luke recorded that he wrote for fun or interest in his spare time ‘less than one day a week’.

And Luke’s attitudes to writing, as measured by the asTTle attitude scale, declined slightly in Phase 4 compared to the previous three phases, and overall were at quite a low level (and below the group mean).

All Students

How they felt about reading in their spare time

- The majority of students (83%) indicated in their Year 8 interviews that they enjoyed reading in their spare time; the remaining 17 percent did not.
- However, one year later, fewer of the now Year 9 students (56%) either 'definitely' or, with some qualifications, mostly enjoyed reading.
- These results are consistent with asTTle results from the study, which showed a decline in students' attitudes towards reading from Phase 1 through to Phase 4. (See 'All Students' asTTle attitude data in Chapter Ten, p.183.)

The most preferred reading materials for students in Phase 1 were novels and other fiction, and magazines, followed by non-fiction works (biographies, history books, "*reading about peoples' beliefs*", science and technology), national or local newspapers, comics, emails and information from the Internet.

Smaller numbers of students mentioned reading junk mail ("*Read junk mail to see what books are for sale, to look at clothes*"), instructional materials such as manuals and cooking books, the Bible or other religious and spiritual materials, puzzle books, and reference materials (eg, encyclopaedia).

Students in Phase 3 specified the same range of reading materials, although at a lower level overall; in particular, they were less likely to mention that they read puzzle books, comics, instructional materials, and religious materials.

Fiction most often favoured by students included: "*funny ones (comedies)*"; "*Interesting adventure stories*"; "*Teenager-type problem things*"; "*Harry Potter*"; "*Ghost stories*"; "*Fantasy, sci-fi, adventure books*"; "*Fantasy, excitement, action*"; "*Books for girls my age*"; "*Scary short stories*"; "*Just fairytale books*"; "*Especially love stories*"; "*Fantasy, horror, and mystery*"; "*Adventure stories*"; "*Westerns, war books*"; "*Any book that I find in my home*".

Some students referred to particular authors that they liked, or specific book titles. These included: "*Asterix books, prefer them to all else*"; "*Soldier's Heart*"; "*David Hill, he's my favourite author*"; "*Andy Griffiths, I like him as an author*"; "*Lord of the Rings — I've read the whole series*"; "*The Power of One [by Bryce Courtenay]*"; "*Harry Potter, Tolkien, Anthony Horrocks, Paul Jennings*"; "*Holes' by Louis Sachar. It's about a juvenile delinquent. Have read it heaps of times*"; "*The Saddle Club' — a series about horses, and other horse books*"; "*'Left Behind' series*"; "*Princess Diaries*"; "*J. K. Rowlings — [author of 'Harry Potter' series], 'Biggles'*"; "*Fantasy novels — I'm currently reading the 'Bartholomew Trilogy'*"; "*Jaelyn Wilson books, eg, 'Double Act'*".

The magazines that students typically read included 'teenage magazines' such as *Dolly*, *Girlfriend*, *Cream* and *Smash Hits*, as well as *TV Hits*, their 'mother's magazines', and car, sports, and hunting and fishing magazines.

There was clearly a wide range of reading interests and reading inclination, with some students reading regularly and eagerly, others reading only sometimes but nevertheless with enjoyment, and still others reading either with considerable reluctance and/or tending to read quite superficially or narrowly.

These latter students often seemed to be quite unaware of how they could find material to read that would perhaps be of interest to them personally; even if they had found a particular book or series interesting or enjoyable, they didn't necessarily know how to move on from there and find other things to read that would be of similar appeal. Sometimes, too, time spent on reading depended on competing activities or responsibilities.

continued...

All Students

How they felt about reading in their spare time – continued

And comments from students who were either less positively inclined towards reading and/or spent little time on this activity included:

- “I don’t like reading, too slow at it. (Just read ‘K-Zone’ magazines and junk mail).”
- “Boring — just don’t like reading.”
- “Don’t know why [I don’t enjoy it]. Maybe ‘cause I’ve read most of the books at home. Could get school library books but when I’ve got one out I don’t get around to reading it. (Only really read music magazines.)”
- “Cause usually I’m too busy [to read] or have other work to do.”
- “I don’t like reading much when I’m not at school. It’s OK when I have to. But I do read a bit in bed — Anthony Horrocks stories, Point Blank series (Alex Rider character — secret agent stories, adventure stories). My friend and I also read hunting magazines (we’re both in ATC).”
- “Sometimes I like to read if it’s a good thing to read. I don’t really know what kind of books I like to read but I enjoy the ‘Left Behind’ series. Just read ‘Girlfriend’ magazines usually.”
- “Read only when I feel like it! Have to be in the mood.”
- “It’s kind of boring. I would read if there was anything interesting to read. [Said her teachers had tried to interest her in books but had not been successful.]”
- “Reading is for school and not for home.”
- “Have read all the books at home already, and after I’ve done my homework I can’t be bothered reading. Would rather do other things.”
- “[Don’t read] ‘cause I always watch TV and go play.”
- “Sometimes read stories when I can be bothered. Mainly read magazines: ‘Dolly’, ‘Girlfriend’, ‘Cream’, ‘Smash hits’, Mum’s magazines (‘Woman’s Day’), and crosswords.”
- “I just read when it gets boring, when there’s nothing else to do.”

Writing

While mostly lukewarm about reading during the first three phases of the study, Emily enjoyed writing in her spare time over the same period. In Year 8, Emily regularly wrote stories — “*True stories — can give examples of how I’m feeling*”, emails, and, occasionally, letters to out-of-town relatives and friends.

A year later, in Phase 3, Emily stated that she “*definitely*” enjoyed writing in her spare time, particularly stories. But in contrast to her ‘true life’ accounts of the year before, describing what she and her friends had been doing, Emily now preferred writing fictional stories: “*Anything creative, that’s not true*”.

She also regularly sent text messages to her friends, having been given a cell phone of her own, now that she was a Year 9 student, and, as before, wrote the occasional letter to friends who had moved away.

Emily did not keep a diary because “*my [siblings] would read it!*”

Once more lending weight to what Emily told us, her Year 8 teacher identified writing as one of Emily’s ‘particular areas of interest’. She added that written language was a subject that Emily did particularly well in.

In Phase 3, while not quite as high a rating as that given by her Year 8 counterpart, Emily’s Year 9 English teacher also rated Emily’s written expression/writing very positively, describing her achievement as ‘average, but very good in some aspects’³⁸, compared to other students in her class.

Contrary to her pattern for reading, Emily’s mean asTTle attitude score for writing in Phase 3 was considerably more positive than her mean attitude score for reading (Table 9, p.182). However, although Emily advised in Phase 4 that she was now ‘never’ or ‘almost never’ writing for personal interest, her asTTle attitude score for writing did not decline; in fact it was slightly more positive than it had been in Phase 3.

Creative writing was something Emily ‘definitely’ enjoyed.

³⁸ The range of rating options was: ‘Minimal/very low; ‘Slow/below average; Average/medium’; ‘Average, but very good in some aspects’; and ‘Very good/excellent’. Teachers could also specify some ‘other’ rating or select a ‘Not sure/unable to comment’ option.

It is probable that the decrease in time spent on writing for pleasure was due in large part to her involvement in a range of extra-curricular commitments during her first term in Year 10, leaving her little time or energy for other things, rather than that she no longer enjoyed writing. And, again, it may be that Emily was making greater

distinctions between school and home activities, with the suggestion in this instance that writing at school may have become more satisfying or challenging than it had been the previous year — although not yet as positive as it had been when she was in Year 8.

All Students

How they felt about writing in their spare time

- In Phase 1, just over half (53%) of students said a definite ‘yes’ when asked if they liked writing in their spare time.
- But by Phase 3, just 21 percent said they ‘definitely’ liked writing as an activity of choice.
- This meant that by the end of their first year at secondary school, half of our students were saying they did not like writing. (Remaining students gave a ‘qualified yes’ response.)
- As with reading, the students’ attitudes to writing, according to aSTLE data, became less positive from Year 8 to Year 10.

Students who enjoyed writing and spent some of their spare time outside of school on this activity mostly indicated that they wrote stories:

- *“I like creating stories.”*
- *“I like writing about the past, the history of our country, to do with Māori culture: oral history.”*
- *“Sometimes I write about how I did at school.”*
- *“All sorts of things — little stories and I like writing pointers/notes to help me with my work. Also, I like doing block letters: design work.”*

Writing stories was followed in terms of frequency by keeping a diary, writing letters (particularly in Phase 1: *“I write to my cousin”*), writing emails and texts, and chatting online.

And there were smaller numbers of students who composed poems (more usually in Phase 1) or songs (*“Write some raps”*).

Students who were ‘reluctant writers’ made comments like the following.

- *“I don’t like writing because I’m not very good at it.”*
- *“It’s boring.”*
- *“Don’t really like it, it’s too hard.”*
- *“No! Writing stories, they suck! [Except that] I do like writing a diary. And me and a friend have an A3 book — a sort of journal — that we have photos of friends and famous people [in] and we write a bit about them.”*
- *“It doesn’t interest me.”*
- *“I’m too lazy [to write things].”*
- *“Just not used to writing at home.”*

Note that students (usually boys) sometimes interpreted ‘writing’ to mean their handwriting rather than composing a story and so on, and emphasised that it was difficult for them:

- *“Writing’s hard on my hands.”*
- *“Sometimes just the physical [act of writing] is hard. Sometimes my hand gets shaky, it happens quite a lot.”*

Emily's Views on whether she was Good at Learning

Children and young people's perceptions and experiences of their own successes as a learner are likely to be an important element in how positively they engage in school and in their subject areas.

When we asked our students in Phase 1 if they thought they were 'good at learning', Emily responded positively, explaining:

"I'm good at listening, and I learn through talking to my friends. I have a good teacher. And 'cause I know I can work independently and individually."

Other things that the Year-8-Emily felt helped her to be 'a good learner' were:

"Knowing that if I don't learn I'm going to end up dumb [and knowing] that being intelligent is really important and if you don't know something you will struggle on a lot. If your teacher expects you to learn and you do, you feel proud of yourself."

Emily considered herself to be 'good at learning'.

"If your teacher expects you to learn and you do, you feel proud of yourself."

All Students

Views on whether they were good at learning

Asked whether they were 'good at learning', the great majority (89%) of our students in Phase 1 felt that they were*, mostly anyway. But there were eight students (7%) who did not feel they were good at learning. (Relevant data were not available for the remaining five — 4% — students, although two or three of these students tended to be generally more negative than positive about their subjects and learning experiences.)

Students who felt they were 'good at learning' usually mentioned that this was because of:

- listening well/paying attention;
 - *"I listen to what the people have to say."*
- their own efforts (eg, working hard, doing their own research, extra reading);
 - *"I research a lot."*
 - *"I read books, look up stuff on the computer."*
- being supported and encouraged by teachers, parents and/or other family members;
 - *"People expect me to do well."*
 - *"The teacher helps me."*
 - *"My grandparents help me."*
- knowing how to find things in the library or on the Internet;
 - *"I know how to look up stuff on the Internet and find books, and things like that."*
- having helpful friends (eg, who help you with your work, do not distract you in class).
 - *"My friends are good, sometimes we work together and I can ask them if I don't understand something. They don't talk too much to you in class when you're trying to listen."*

Other reasons for being good at learning mentioned by the then Year 8 students included:

- finding it easier to learn when the work seems interesting and relevant;
 - *"If I enjoy a lesson I will do well on that topic."*

* Note: Students' perceptions, however, did not always match their level of achievement. This is discussed further in our report *Students' Achievement as they Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*.

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All Students

Views on whether they were good at learning – continued

- having a good attitude/being motivated;
 - *“Positive attitude; wanting to learn.”*
 - *“Want to work because I enjoy learning.”*
 - *“I settle down quickly [in class]. I contribute.”*
 - *“By paying attention and memorising things.”*
 - *“I set goals for myself.”*
 - *“I’m good at working independently.”*
 - *“I do the work set for us and I do my homework.”*
 - *“Taking responsibility: not talking to people and getting distracted, not being disruptive in class.”*
- being ‘bright’, ‘clever’ or having particular qualities that facilitate learning.
 - *“Pick up new things fast. Already know some things.”*
 - *“I have a good memory.”*
 - *“I follow instructions.”*
 - *“My personality — always happy.”*
 - *“I can get along with anyone — like if we have to get with a partner to work [or study].”*
 - *“I am not shy to ask the teacher for help.”*

The reasons the eight or so students gave for their less positive self-assessment as learners included one or more of the following: not being clever enough; not understanding sometimes; not listening or concentrating well; talking too much and being easily distracted; finding the work and/or the teacher boring; forgetting things; and the negative influence of friends (eg, being told by friends, ‘don’t do your homework’). One student also mentioned that having English as a second language made learning difficult.

What helped them learn best

At the different phases of the study, students felt that the factors that helped them learn best* were:

- their own efforts — when they worked hard, listened well and paid attention, and/or having a love of learning and a good attitude to the work involved;
 - *“I try hard at school because I want to succeed in the future.”*
 - *“I study for the exams and complete all the work. My parents encourage me to do my work.”*
 - *“When I concentrate and follow instructions. When I ask for help.”*
 - *“Me wanting to learn, inquisitive mind.”*
 - *“Staying on task. Not getting distracted by others. I listen — it’s easier to listen when it’s interesting.”*
 - *“Probably just by listening and not fiddling around. Also the teacher uses words you’ve never heard before and it kind of sits in your head: you’ve also learnt something and also a new word ‘cause the teacher uses it and that happens a lot, my teacher is really good at English.”*
- having a good teacher and/or good relationship with the teacher; effective teaching;
 - *“[Having] eye contact with the teacher.”*
 - *“The teachers help a lot. They make sure we know what we’re doing.”*
 - *“Having a good teacher. (I have good teachers in English, science and home economics and social studies).”*
 - *“The teacher. My teacher, he helps me heaps. And my Mum too.”*
 - *“Somebody showing me how to do it, not just telling me, that helps me do the work better.”*

* Note: It will be observed that the factors identified are almost identical to the range of responses given in Phase 1 by the students who felt they were ‘good at learning’ — see previous set of ‘All Students’ data.

continued...

All Students

What helped them learn best – continued

- a positive environment for learning, especially one without lots of distractions;
 - *“Probably being by myself, ’cause then there’s no-one to distract me. Sometimes there are lots of distractions in class, especially when kids don’t like the subject, like social [studies], no one in class likes it. (There are least distractions in maths.)”*
 - *“When I’m with someone that I can talk it over with — sitting near someone who understands and can help.”*
 - *“An environment where people like learning.”*
 - *“I like it to be quiet, like working by myself (don’t like working in groups).”*
 - *“Probably the teachers [help most]. Also the environment that you’re in — when everyone’s not talking and yelling over one another. What you’re learning about: can focus more when the work is interesting.”*
 - *“If everyone else [in class] wants to learn it makes it easier.”*
- parents/whānau who helped and encouraged them;
 - *“My parents and family help me achieve a lot — everybody at home.”*
 - *“My Mum pushes me to study.”*
 - *“My Mum, she helps me most of the time with my homework.”*
- having help and support from friends and/or mixing with like-minded friends.
 - *“Working with my friends: we help each other, work together, share ideas.”*
 - *“Staying on task and not talking. Don’t get pulled into a conversation to distract you. All my friends are hard workers and don’t really talk a lot to distract me.”*

Other comments concerned:

- knowing how to find or look up information in the library or on the Internet (this point was more often made by students pre- rather than post-transition — see ‘All Students’ box on p.79);
- having the ability (*“Am quite bright”*); and,
- being physically prepared (*“Wide awake, full stomach”*; *“Having enough sleep”*).

And an underlying theme in students’ responses overall was that they found it easiest to learn when they found the work interesting and relevant:

- *“If I understand what they’re talking about. If they make it interesting for me then I’d be motivated to learn about it: when they [teachers] find out unusual things [for us], not the usual boring things. When they find out things that are unique, that makes us motivated.”*
- *“Fun things would help me learn better. [For example], the ‘trust’ thing we did last week when we blindfolded our partner and they had to trust us, that was fun.”*
- *“I get distracted — by everything, ’cause it’s boring. [It would help a lot] to do more fun stuff, have breaks and play games.”*
- *“Having the attitude to learn: when it’s interesting and you find it relevant you want to know more about it. Having the sleep and stuff.”*
- *“I focus on things when I like them. If it’s enjoyable I can focus, but if it’s boring I just switch off.”*
- *“When I listen. When I’m hyped up I do well in that class: when I’m excited about the topic.”*
- *“It helps me when it’s practical/hands-on, and having a good teacher. And if my friends are working hard I do my work ’cause no one to talk to.”*

All Students

When learning was more difficult

Reflecting on factors that could make learning more difficult for them, students, especially post-transition, very frequently mentioned the classroom environment as a problem: high noise levels, with disruptive classmates generally, and/or friends distracting them with lots of talking, often resulting in angry teachers and interrupted teaching and learning.

- *“It’s hard sometimes when I’m trying to learn and other people are disruptive — being too loud or annoying you.”*
- *“Noisy class, angry teacher, other students distracting you when I’m trying to learn.”*
- *“When it’s really, really noisy — always people talking, can’t hear teacher sometimes because of noise.”*
- *“Student misbehaviour. It’s just hard — sometimes I can’t concentrate [because of it]. Affects a big part of my life. My parents tell me to ignore it and try to get along by myself but it’s hard.”*
- *“Other people talking when the teacher is talking, so I can’t hear the teacher very good. Teachers who say ‘I already told you’ when I couldn’t hear.”*
- *“[Learning is harder] when there’s heaps of noise in the class. (The teachers try and deal with this — they get angry!) [And] when someone’s talking to you and they distract you. [It’s also hard] when the work is not interesting, when it’s boring.”*
- *“Everyone in class talks, then the teacher has to tell them off. It’s disruptive and makes it hard to work.”*
- *“Distraction by members in our classroom — kind of gives you a migraine.”*
- *“Other students [can make it hard]. They’re idiots, everything that’s bad [in their behaviour]. I was probably like that last year [in Year 9], but I’ve changed. Now I know how people feel [when you disrupt them all the time].”*

Students also often mentioned making learning harder for themselves by talking too much or being inattentive, which meant that they didn’t listen properly and missed important information (these students were probably often the classmates referred to in the previous set of comments!):

- *“Talking to my friends, not being on task, my friends distracting me.”*
- *“Sometimes I don’t read the questions properly and sometimes I don’t listen to what the teacher is saying properly.”*
- *“Friends — we laugh too much; I get distracted easily.”*
- *“Maybe when I’m talking to my friends or not on task. Maybe my friends sometimes — they talk to me when I’m trying to work. They’re hard to ignore. [Learning is also more difficult] when the work’s too hard for us.”*

Other factors mentioned included:

- being too tired or too hot or cold in class;
 - *“Just sometimes get too tired, can’t concentrate and stuff like that.”*
 - *“When it’s really hot or really cold. I feel uncomfortable when the classrooms are cold.”*
 - *“Some days I feel sloppy, have no energy, find it hard to concentrate. Sometimes if I have no breakfast.”*
 - *“When I’m too tired because I stay up late — playing on the computer or I read (Harry Potter).”*
 - *“If I have a headache or girl problem, I get really tired.”*

continued...

All Students

When learning was more difficult – continued

- finding some subject matter too difficult and/or not understanding what the teacher was saying;
 - “Sometimes I don’t ‘get’ [understand] hard words.”
 - “Reading is hard for me.”
 - “Maths is difficult, teachers don’t explain properly.”
 - “My writing, I feel I’m slow at it.”
 - “I just don’t get some stuff. Probably never learned about it before.”
 - “I learn to ignore other people [when they’re noisy in class] so they don’t make much difference [to my learning] but when some of the teachers are unfair or when I don’t know how to do something [it’s hard].”
 - “Sometimes the teacher makes it difficult and sometimes the other guys [classmates] tell me [explain it] in a different way and I get confused.”
- finding the subject or topic boring or irrelevant;
 - “The topic, when it’s boring, not interesting it makes you feel tired and you don’t want to learn it.”
- feeling there was not enough time to master new material;
 - “Teacher only explains things once, talks too fast.”
 - “When you try to work and the teacher interrupts you with other stuff to learn.”
 - “When we only get a little time to do it and we don’t have enough resources. We have heaps of books at school but there are heaps of us so we only get one book each [to find out information].”
 - “The teacher might not explain it very well. Not enough time.”
 - “It’s hard when teachers move on too fast.”
- feeling unwell or unhappy or worried (eg, about home or family circumstances, bullying or other relationship difficulties);
 - “Probably the outside life because it can affect you, like if someone’s died you feel bad and can’t really focus in class.”
 - “Bullying outside of class.”
 - “Something else outside the classroom, like in the playgrounds, that happens and it affects me and I can’t work properly in class.”
- having a physical difficulty, such as with handwriting.
 - “I have a writing disability: I use a computer for word processing.”

Emily’s Views on what Helped her Learn Best

To help us appreciate from a student’s point of view what the extrinsic or intrinsic triggers are that motivate students to learn, and what may facilitate their learning, we asked students in Phase 4 to think about when they ‘learned best’ and then try to tell us what most helped them to ‘be a good learner’. This was Emily’s answer:

“The fact that I don’t want to fail NCEA is constantly in my mind. I’m trying hard now, to avoid problems next year.”

Another purpose of this question and the one that follows was to look at the extent to which students seem to be *consciously* aware of the factors that impact most on their learning.

Not wanting to fail NCEA helped Emily to be ‘a good learner’.

She acknowledged that ‘talking all the time’ sometimes hindered her learning.

When Learning was Not So Easy

Our question to students in Phase 1 on whether there was anything that they felt made learning difficult for them prompted Emily to respond:

“No, nothing really — apart from my habit of talking a lot and I miss a lot of important facts!”

And to the slightly rephrased question in Phase 4, ‘Thinking about times when you might find learning difficult, what makes it most difficult for you to learn?’, Emily replied:

“Me talking all the time. I see it as a problem — can’t stop talking, can’t avoid it [even though] I get in trouble for talking. [And] if the subject is very boring it’s more easy to get distracted.”

Well-being, Learning and Performance

“Being happy makes you want to learn and gives you the energy to learn.”

Continuing the theme of possible influences on student learning and students’ awareness of these, we asked students in Phase 1: ‘Does how you feel have an effect on your schoolwork, how you learn at school — eg, does it make it easier or more difficult for you to learn?’. Emily responded:

“Yes — being happy makes you want to learn and gives you the energy to learn. And if you come to school unhappy you can’t be bothered doing anything.”

A similar question in Phase 2 was: ‘Does how happy you feel have an effect on your schoolwork? For example, if you are feeling *not* so happy, what happens to how you learn and concentrate in school?’ This time, Emily felt that ‘it depends’. She explained:

“Sometimes when I’m not happy, I might not enjoy the subject which makes me lose concentration, but I always try my best.”

Personal Qualities and Learning: Teacher and Student Perspectives

Teacher Ratings of Emily in Relation to ‘Qualities for Learning’

Further insights about Emily-as-learner come from teacher ratings of her on the dimensions or qualities listed in Table 3. The teachers’ feedback here reinforces other data that have revealed Emily to be an optimistic person, with a lively interest in the world around her.³⁹

Table 3: Teacher ratings of Emily on aspects of ‘being a learner’

Quality	Rating		
	Phase 1: Year 8 teacher	Phase 3: Year 9 English/ form teacher	Phase 4: Year 10 form teacher
Persists with solving a problem, even when things go wrong for a while	2	2	Not asked ^a
Has a good concentration span when working	1	2	Not asked
Takes an optimistic view of life	1	1	1
Meets any goals that she sets herself	2	2	Not asked
Is willing to learn from mistakes	1	1	2
Asks a lot of questions	1	3	Not asked
Enjoys new experiences or challenges	1	2	1
Takes an active interest in the world beyond herself	1	2	1
Thinks ‘outside the square’ — thinks of new ways to do things or solve problems	2	2	Not asked

^a In Phase 4, form teachers only were asked to provide feedback about students. As these teachers did not, in most cases, also take the students for any of their subject areas, we felt it would perhaps be difficult for them to rate the students on this and some of the other dimensions listed, so early in the new school year.

Key to rating categories in Table 3:
1 = Always
2 = Often
3 = Sometimes
4 = Occasionally
5 = Never

³⁹ Parental feedback too — see discussion in Chapter Seven relating to Exhibit D — was that Emily typically enjoyed new experiences and challenges.

All Students

Relating well-being to performance at school

Seventy-one percent of students in Phase 1 considered that 'how they felt' impacted either positively or negatively on their schoolwork or how they learned at school. Most remaining students — 22 percent — answered 'no'.

Negative effects occurred when students were feeling tired or unwell, when they were unhappy, upset or worried, in a bad mood, or when they were really excited about something and couldn't settle or concentrate.

In contrast, students felt that their learning was facilitated when they were feeling happy, because it gave them energy and motivation and enhanced their communication, and feeling good about the subject made them try harder and do better at it.

Fewer students (49%) in Phase 2 indicated that 'how *happy* they felt' either made it harder or easier for them to learn: 39 percent now answered that it made '*no difference*' to how they learned and concentrated in school.

The change in response pattern may have been in part to do with the altered question format for Phase 2 — see main text for wording. But for those who did think that personal well-being impacted on their learning, the reasons they gave were the same as those given above for Phase 1.

Luke Commenting on himself as Learner

Asked in Year 8 if he was 'good at learning', Luke's response was:

"I'm all right — not the best and not the worst."

Luke felt that his own efforts, paying attention, having a good teacher, help from his parents, grandparents and friends, and knowing how to look up things in the library and on the Internet were what made him good at learning. He commented in Phase 1:

"I (sometimes) work hard. I listen well, pay attention and follow instructions, my peers and the teacher and my family help me, and knowing how to do research helps me."

And in Phase 4 he stated:

"The teacher and my friends — I can talk about problems with them. [I learn best] when it [what we're learning about] is interesting and enjoyable."

Explaining what could make learning difficult for him, Luke said:

"[I] get distracted easily. I don't get down to work quickly — I get talking to others. I only get down to work when I'm behind."

He added that it was sometimes difficult...

"...just getting things in my head — [and] remembering it as well is difficult."

And a subsequent statement about what could sometimes make it more difficult for him to learn was:

"When I'm quite tired in class. When friends distract me — which is quite a lot (but I enjoy it!)"

His mother's views on what sometimes made learning difficult for Luke was that he tended to be disorganised and was easily distracted from the task in hand when he found the work more difficult or challenging than usual.

All Students

Teacher ratings of students on 'qualities for learning'

In general, the data in the table show that teachers at secondary school were a little less likely than the teachers in Year 8 to rate students as 'always' or 'often' displaying the qualities listed.

But it is of note in terms of student learning that, both before and after transition, a considerable proportion of students (between 15% and 28%) were judged by their teachers as only 'occasionally' or 'never' being inclined to ask lots of questions or think outside the square when undertaking tasks or solving problems. And in Phase 3, more than one-fifth of students were rated as having a poor concentration span when working (which supports information provided by the students themselves).

Of additional note are the Phase 4 data which show that teachers rated only 39 percent of the students as taking an active interest in the world beyond themselves, compared to 55 percent of students in Phase 1 and 47 percent of students in Phase 3.

Quality	Phase 1: Year 8 teachers		Phase 3: Year 9 form teachers ^b		Phase 4: Year 10 form teachers ^b	
	Always/ Often ^a % of students	Occasionally/ Never ^a % of students	Always/ Often % of students	Occasionally/ Never % of students	Always/ Often % of students	Occasionally/ Never % of students
Persists with solving a problem, even when things go wrong for a while ^c	52	15	45	15	–	–
Has a good concentration span when working ^c	61	14	56	21	–	–
Takes an optimistic view of life	65	7	64	4	68	5
Meets any goals that she sets him/herself ^c	56	13	47	7	–	–
Is willing to learn from mistakes	60	9	54	3	53	4
Asks a lot of questions ^c	41	25	45	21	–	–
Enjoys new experiences or challenges	60	9	50	3	48	4
Takes an active interest in the world beyond him/herself	55	10	47	7	39	10
Thinks 'outside the square' — thinks of new ways to do things or solve problems ^c	36	28	28	15	–	–

a As in previous 'All Students' tables, the response categories 'Always' and 'Often' have been combined to simplify presentation of the data over multiple phases; the response categories 'Occasionally' and 'Never' have been similarly combined. The other response options available to teachers were 'Sometimes' or 'Don't know enough about the student to be able to comment' (refer following footnote about this latter option).

b While very few Year 8 teachers in Phase 1 used the response option 'Don't know enough about the student to be able to comment', the incidence of this response from form (rather than 'subject') teachers rose substantially in Phases 3 and 4, with between a quarter and a third of students being rated this way for at least one of the learning behaviours listed.

c We did not include these dimensions in Phase 4. This was because form teachers only were asked to provide comment about students at this time. As these teachers often did not also take the students for any of their subject areas, we felt it would be difficult for them to rate the students on the particular dimensions indicated so early in the new school year.

What Emily thought her Teachers would Say about her to Other Teachers

Emily thought her Year 8 teacher would say she was confident, sociable and very talkative.

At each phase of the study we asked students to consider what they would like their current teachers to pass on to other teachers about them. The purpose of this question was to increase understanding of how students feel they are perceived as learners, particularly within the context of school.

We found that the question also led to some insights about student self-concept, and what students feel is most important for teachers to know and understand about them as individuals. For example, Emily's response to this question in Phase 1 was to surmise that her Year 8 teacher would say...

It was important to Emily to feel that teachers knew her as an individual.

"...that I'm a very confident person. That I get along with everyone. And that I can walk by myself. But that I talk all the time."

In Phase 2, Emily felt that her current teachers would tell her primary school...

"...that I still talk and that I'm still confident."

and that she would personally like them to say:

"That I'm still the same person and I haven't changed and that I'm representing [my primary school] still."

And in Phase 3 what Emily wanted her present teachers to pass on to her teachers for the following year was...

"...that I can socialise with anybody and am not afraid to try new things and [I am] very confident within myself."

But, in contrast to the previous phases, Emily's initial response in Phase 4 when asked what she thought her present teachers would say about her to past or future teachers was *"I have no idea, eh!"*. However, after a pause she added:

"I'm different all the time. Depends how I work for that particular teacher."

From her comments it was evident that Emily wanted to be known as an individual, and as an individual who was confident, friendly, and loyal. Her Phase 4 response suggests too that she would like it to be understood that she was not someone who could be easily categorised but was more complex than that.

All Students

What they would like their teachers to know about them

Data from the study show that students had a strong desire to be known as an individual by their teachers.

They liked to be known as someone who was good at something or had special qualities, for example: a positive attitude to life; a strong work ethic; the ability to relate well to others; the motivation and/or aptitude to achieve well in their schoolwork, sports, or other activities; and the inclination and maturity to behave well or take on responsibilities.

Some examples of what the students said in Year 8 about what they would like their current teachers to pass on to their new teachers at secondary school about them, follow:

- *"I'd probably like them to know about the stuff I've done with my music and all. The college might then give you more opportunities to do things with music or whatever you're good at."*
- *"That I'm well behaved and I like sport and hands-on stuff rather than academic stuff."*
- *"They might say how good, and responsible and trustworthy I am and how good at writing I am. I'd like them [teachers] to pass on how I can speak two languages and how I like reading and stuff."*
- *"That I am well behaved and that I enjoy school and I always have a positive attitude to what I do."*
- *"That I'm a kind person and I try hard."*

Some students also especially wanted current or future teachers to know that they sometimes had difficulties, and needed practical help with these as well as understanding:

- *"[I'd like teachers to know] that I have got a difficulty learning. That it's a little bit hard for me to learn and you have to repeat things more than once."*

Perspectives on Learning, Schooling and Future Aspirations

Understanding of the Purpose of School

For a general perspective on what young people understand to be the purpose of school, we asked all participating students what ‘school is for’, or, in other words, why they thought students like themselves had to attend school. At the end of her primary schooling, this was Emily’s understanding:

“To learn things so you can get a better job and not live off the dole. So you can meet new people and learn how to get on with people and just things like that.”

And her thoughts on what she would do if she didn’t have to attend school were that she’d spend...

“...practically all my time studying, maybe. Helping my [siblings] if they got stuck on anything. [And I’d be] helping my Mum. But I’d have no one [friends] to talk to.”

Although Emily conjectured that she would probably carry on studying on her own, her answer to the next question — ‘If you didn’t have to go to school, what do you think this would mean for your future?’ — showed that she felt her efforts would be largely fruitless without school:

“I would have no future.”

Furthermore, Emily considered that “everything” she learned at school was ‘important or useful’ and that there was nothing she could think of that she would prefer ‘to learn about instead to help [her] in life’:

“No, because they teach me everything here [at school]. And if I need to know anything else I know that I’ll learn it — with the help of my parents.”

She also thought that the “majority of the subjects” were interesting to learn.

But while Emily no doubt meant what she said when she made this comment, later in the study it was evident that her thinking had moved beyond this uncritical view of the content of what she was learning. As will be seen from the discussion in Chapter Ten, she developed definite ideas about subject likes and dislikes, and stressed that it was very important to her to be able to see that topics of study were of personal relevance.

Understanding of Learning Contexts Outside of School

We explored students’ understanding of schooling and contexts for learning a little more in Phase 1 by including two additional questions. The first of these asked students whether they thought there were ‘other places besides school where you can learn things that are useful, important or interesting (or will help you in your life)’ and the second asked whether ‘other people besides teachers at school’ could help them learn.

To the first of the two questions, Emily answered:

“Yep — activity centres (if you are too naughty to be at school). Home schooling. Study at libraries. That’s about it.”

And to the second question her response was:

“Parents. Family members — if you have older brothers or sisters. Babysitter or a nanny. I don’t know [who else].”

Emily had a well-developed understanding of the ‘purpose’ of school.

She believed that without school she would have no future.

All Students

Their understanding of the purpose of school

All students in the study (when in Year 8) articulated a belief that school is essential for learning the skills they would need for their futures, in particular, 'to get a good job' and 'have a good life'.

There was also a realisation that school is an important arena for social interactions and learning social skills. Some comments to illustrate follow.

- *“Cause it’s the law for one thing. It helps you get a good education and have a good life. I’ve been making the most of school ’cause I want to have a good life.”*
- *“To get educated — to get a good job. Only get a good job if you go to school. You need to learn unless you ask your uncle for a good job, if he had one to give you.”*
- *“To get a good education, to learn, to meet new people. To get settled into the environment ’cause they teach you how to manage your life when you get older so you don’t get stuck and don’t end up living on the streets. So you know how to pick your friends.”*
- *“Come to learn; education — to get a job; have a good time.”*
- *For learning, socialising, to have fun, to be educated, to get jobs, so you know about maths, science, English, social studies, reading.”*
- *“It’s for education, getting you ready for older life, working life. If you wanted to be a sports person, school would help you prepare because you get built up to be the top person in your class. In maths you are prepared for maybe becoming an architect.”*
- *“Learning maths, people skills, and to interact with other kids.”*
- *“To build good friendships. Have an education so you can achieve and so your talents can be recognised and you can do stuff with them.”*
- *“To get a good education, to get a more independent job when you grow up. It gives me the opportunity to get into more physical activities to gain more friends. As you grow up, they will still remember and support you.”*
- *“To learn and get a good job in the future. Learn how to deal with social issues. My achievement in sports could lead to a professional sports job. To learn my times-tables for maths — to learn to measure things.”*
- *“To learn for when you get older and get a job. Learn how to provide for a family, how to look after yourself.”*

What they would do if they didn’t have to attend school

To the question ‘If you didn’t have to go to school, what do you think you would spend your time doing instead?’ students talked about helping out at home, enlisting parents and others to help them learn things, spending lots of time on their favourite activities, sleeping in, watching more TV, increasing their computer use, spending time with friends, and ‘just hanging out’.

But although a small number thought they would be happy spending all their time in the way that they chose instead of going to school — for example, one boy who wanted to be a mechanic would have liked to spend much more time working on a car he was helping to restore, the great majority thought they would soon get bored having to stay at home, and most mentioned that they would miss the daily contact with their friends. In short, almost all students preferred school to the idea of staying home all the time.

All Students

What 'no school' would mean for their future

Imagining what it would be like for them if they didn't have to attend school, a small number of students felt that they'd get on and learn things anyway, for example, by enlisting the help of parents, grandparents:

- *"I would learn from my Mum in her spare time. I could try and learn a sport or instrument."*
- *"I would go to the library. I could have school at home. My Dad would teach me."*
- *"Might not be as bright [a future], but there'd still be opportunities."*
- *"Ring up my Nana, and old people (granddads, uncles, marae people). I'd find out about the history."*
- *"I probably wouldn't achieve as many things if I didn't go to school. But I would still try hard if I didn't go to school. But you need to go to school: if you achieve there, you will achieve better later."*

But the large majority of students thought their chances of a good life would be seriously compromised if they didn't attend school:

- *"Have a pretty stink life — wouldn't know anything. I'd be on the streets."*
- *"A terrible one — don't get to learn nothing. Don't get to learn about new people."*
- *"Not a really good career — I'd be real stupid. I wouldn't know anything, the world wouldn't go around. The human species would die 'cause there'd be no cooks or bread-makers or people like that to do things. You have to go to school to learn these things. You could maybe learn them at home but no-one there might know anything."*
- *"Probably be doing something I wouldn't want to. [Pauses.] The question makes you think a lot."*
- *"I probably wouldn't get a good job, or wouldn't even get a job. If you go to McDonald's you need to know how to put the money into the cash register and to know what buttons to push and what to say. You'd need a wide range of vocabulary and things to say so you don't bore people."*
- *"I wouldn't have anything. I wouldn't know anything. I don't think there would be a future for me."*
- *"Life would be boring. I wouldn't know much about what is happening to myself. Meeting a problem, trouble, you wouldn't be able to understand what he is talking about. Occasionally that happens at school."*
- *"Not a good question! My future wouldn't be great because I wouldn't get a great job. And things that I don't now understand, I wouldn't understand then. As I go into the future, I would not know what I was doing."*
- *"Not a really good thing. I wouldn't be able to speak English and I wouldn't get a good job because I wouldn't know anything."*
- *"Not good. The X-box might have words in it sometimes, but it [future] would not be good at all."*
- *"You would not get a good future and get a good job: if I couldn't read and write, I wouldn't be able to get information. All we would do is muck around."*

Some of these students also felt that society would break down if people did not receive an education:

- *"You wouldn't be able to get a job or earn money. People would not follow the law. They might know about the law, but they probably wouldn't listen and they would go and do the bad things anyway. So school really helps people understand the law and the rules."*

Just one student preferred the idea of no school despite likely adverse consequences later on, and was willing to just let the future 'take care of itself'. And one other student wasn't able to relate to the question at all.

All Students

Their understanding of learning contexts other than school and who, besides teachers, could help them with their learning

It appears that while students view 'learning at school' as a given in their lives, consciously thinking about who else they learn from outside of school, and in what contexts, was not something they related to very readily (at least, not when they were in Year 8). However, with some prompting, most students were able to offer some thoughts.

Regarding contexts for learning other than school, students most often mentioned libraries, museums, their home and/or marae, youth groups (eg, Air Training Corps, Guides), church/Sunday School/Bible class, sports clubs, and out-of-school classes (eg, music, dance). And a few students mentioned a more formal arrangement, such as home schooling or having a tutor.

A small number of students had a wider awareness, for example:

- “[You can learn] at home as well as at school. Libraries, friends’ houses. You can learn anything anywhere really if you want to learn.”

But, conversely, eleven students either couldn’t think of anywhere other than school that you could learn, or felt that school was the only place where it was possible to learn adequately:

- “School is the only place for me.”

Answering the question ‘Can other people besides teachers at school help you learn?’, 97 percent of students stated ‘yes’ and only three percent ‘no’. These latter students were those who felt that school was the only place for learning.

A large majority of students who answered ‘yes’, identified one or more of parents, grandparents, siblings and wider family — aunts, uncles, cousins: “My uncle, he takes me out fishing with him and my cousin helps me with guitar” — as most often helping them to learn, although the learning situation wasn’t always necessarily trouble-free: “My sister tries to help with homework but I don’t listen to her.”

Many students also nominated friends as well as family (“They know different things”; “Friends who are higher level than me”); however some students nominated only friends, and not family members, as people they learned from.

Other people who could help them learn mentioned by students included: ‘experts’— that is, those with a profession or career who could pass on their knowledge; church members, including the minister; community elders (eg, kaumatua); youth group leaders; librarians; people who post information on the Internet (“They post up comments, for example, how to fix a car”); various instructors (eg, kapa haka teacher, sports coaches, music and dance teachers); and other students:

- “People who have experienced things that you are learning about. There are people who are experts in the subjects you are learning about — [for example], we have a Tongan girl in our class. She teaches us about Tonga. It helps us to learn.”

And one student thought that the best person to help your learning was yourself, along with appropriate resources:

- “Yourself! Resources can help you learn — [for example], books, fiction, non fiction.”

All Students

How long they intended to stay on a school

Asked in Phases 1, 3 and 4 about the likely extent of their schooling, the great majority of students felt they would stay on until Years 12/13, with many of these students also intending, or at least hoping, to go on to either university or some other form of higher education or training. The relevant figures for each of the three phases were 79 percent, 86 percent, and 91 percent.*

The relatively lower proportion of students in Phase 1 who said they were going to stay on at school until Years 12/13 is largely accounted for by there being a larger proportion of students at this stage — 10 percent — who either didn't know how long they would stay at school or just hadn't thought about it at all. The size of this group is not surprising, perhaps, given that the students were then still only in Year 8.

The proportions of students who answered that they 'didn't know' in each of Phases 3 and 4 were four percent and one percent respectively, suggesting that as time went on, students in general were thinking more about the future, and gaining more understanding of secondary and tertiary education.

Students who answered 'it depends' (between two and four percent at the three phases) gave reasons such as if a good job, or apprenticeship, opportunity came up, then they would leave school before completing Year 12 and/or Year 13, or that it depended on family circumstances (eg, a parent's health). Two students said that it would depend on how satisfied they continued to be with their education, while another two stated that a decision would rest on how well they did: *"Depends how my grades are"; "If I keep failing, I would have to leave."*

Only one student consistently answered throughout the study that they were keen to leave school 'as soon as I can', stating that school was not enjoyable, the work was boring, and that the idea of (external) exams was intimidating.

* Note: These data largely support the findings presented earlier regarding students' awareness of the importance of school for securing a good future, but at *face value* seem to contradict somewhat other data from this and other studies which reveal students' dissatisfaction with aspects of their learning and other experiences at school.

Future Aspirations

Reinforcing that she not only thought ahead in terms of the importance and value of schooling and learning but had a sense of broader goals and horizons, Emily expressed definite ideas in Phases 1 and 3 of the study when asked about career aspirations. As a Year 8 student Emily thought she'd like to be either an interior designer or a photographer one day. A year later, Emily again mentioned that she'd like to be *"a photographer or an interior designer"*, or, as a further possibility, *"a TV presenter"*, which she thought would fit well with the social, 'performing' side of her personality.

In Phase 4, Emily was less definite, initially saying *"I'm still thinking about that"*.

But she added that perhaps she might *"work with children: be a child psychologist — my parents suggested it."*

Apart from her vocational aspirations, Emily had ambitions to travel: to 'do her OE' following her 21st birthday.

Staying on at School

When she was in Year 8, our question about how long she thought she would stay on at school seemed to concern Emily. This is what she replied to the question:

"I'm not really sure. I might get expelled. Everyone changes. It depends on who you hang around with [whether things go well or not]."

Emily intended to complete Year 13; her teachers anticipated she would go on to university.

Emily had aspirations to travel and ideas for future career options.

At the end of Year 9, however, Emily now said she expected to stay on at school until Year 12 or 13. And after a term in Year 10 Emily was even more definite, saying she wanted to stay on until the end of Year 13.

Teachers before and after transition had even higher expectations of Emily: as discussed further in Chapter Thirteen, they anticipated that Emily would go on to

tertiary education, and achieve an undergraduate degree. Her teacher in Year 8 also offered the following comment to sum up her view of Emily:

“I believe Emily will go far in life. She has many strengths, is a very well balanced child who strives to do her best.”

All Students

Their future aspirations

A large majority of students had ideas about the sort of work they would like to do when they left school or further education, showing that they did, at least, have some sense of the future. But it is interesting to see that students overall were most likely to have ideas about future jobs when they were in Year 8, with only five percent of students in Phase 1 saying they ‘hadn’t thought about it’ or just didn’t know what they might do in the future, compared to the 19 percent in Phase 3 and 16 percent in Phase 4 who gave this sort of response.

From their answers in Phases 3 and 4, it seems that as time went on students were less inclined to have more ‘fanciful’ ideas about their futures and were instead starting to think more seriously or realistically:

- *“I’ve been thinking about singing and stuff. But realistically, it’s hard to [make a living at it]. I’d [also] like to be a teacher, of any age above kindergarten, maybe middle school to Year 10.”*

Students’ identification of future job possibilities revealed a mix of: vague hopes and dreams; more purposeful hopes and dreams, passing fancies (eg, the student who in Year 8 was inspired by a TV programme to want to work in a forensic unit, solving crimes, but later realised this wasn’t likely to become a reality, especially as she’d ‘gone off science’ in the meantime); suggestions from their families; and definite goals.

Students who expressed definite goals made comments such as:

- *“I know what I want to do with my life: work in a mechanic shop [as an] automotive electrician.”*
- *“I’ve always wanted to be a lawyer; I have cousins who are lawyers.”*
- *“I’ve wanted to be a teacher since I was five [years old].”*
- *“I’m going to be a businessman — a house seller — and work hard and get money for my family.”*
- *“I want to be a funeral director and have my own [funeral] business. I’m fascinated about the whole process ever since my great grandmother’s funeral when I was six.”*
- *“I’d like to work at a supermarket when I’m a young adult. And later on I’d like to become a rugby professional and then a rugby coach.”*

continued...

All Students

Their future aspirations – continued

- *“Become a panel beater/mechanic ‘cause I want to do car kits and stuff — design cars.”*
- *“I hope to keep singing and be in the music industry. I’ll do some other things in the meantime to support myself.”*

Some students’ comments revealed that while they had ideas about their future, they didn’t necessarily make a link between a desired occupation and the steps they would need to take to achieve it, such as reaching and maintaining a high level of attainment, and having to undertake a particular course of study, as in medicine for example.

The occupations students said they might like to do in the future covered a wide range. A considerable number of students aspired to be sports stars/professional sports people, primarily in either rugby (as an All Black) or rugby league, but also in cricket, and in one case, sailing. Other choices involved ‘something in the (performing) arts’, such as a singer, musician, actor, writer, book illustrator, or photographer.

Another group of students nominated one or more of the professions (to be a doctor, lawyer, architect, teacher, nurse, accountant, physiotherapist, pilot), and yet another group aspired to either the armed forces or the police force.

For remaining students, their choices ranged from working in the IT field, running their own business (eg, *“Own my own hair salon”*), taking up a trade, becoming an engineer, ‘doing something in science’ (including astronomy), design, engineering, working with animals (veterinarian, zookeeper, animal trainer), and entering the travel industry, including as an air hostess.

A couple of comments to illustrate students’ diverse ideas follow:

- *“[Be] an entertainer — singing, acting or dancing. Or if all that fails, I might do something with makeup or be a fashion designer. You use a lot of creativity in that.”*
- *“To run a Starbucks restaurant or be a politician — because they get heaps of money.”*

There were also three or four students at each phase who simply stated that they just wanted to have work, and/or they would do whatever came their way, the implication being that it wouldn’t necessarily be something they’d definitely decided on for themselves: *“A bit too early to think about things like that. Whatever comes my way”*; *“Anywhere God puts me”*; *“To have a job at least”*.

By contrast, one student who wasn’t sure about the future, was nevertheless taking steps to plan for it: *“Not sure [what I want to do when I leave school]. But I’m doing a careers unit — need to explore options.”*

And a few other students showed they had a clear understanding of the need to undertake higher education (eg, at university) or further training (eg, hairdressing course, training to be a chef) in order to achieve their career goals or aspirations: *“Go to university and then become a lawyer (not sure what area of law I’d specialise in yet).”*

Summary Statements about Emily as Learner

She was keen to learn and achieve well.

The data presented in this chapter suggest that Emily had a very good understanding of the purpose of school and the importance of learning and achieving well for her future. She was motivated both by strong extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic forces included wanting to do well in NCEA, having her teachers be proud of her, and her desire to secure a good job in the future. Intrinsic motivators for Emily were a desire not to fail or fall behind, the enjoyment she derived from learning new things, and the sense of increased confidence gained from doing things well. Emily also appeared to be generally very positive about and receptive to learning and studying, and about interacting with others in order to maximise learning opportunities and outcomes.

Emily's disinclination to read during the first three phases of the study could perhaps have signalled a possible cause for concern over the longer term, given the importance of reading for achieving very

well⁴⁰. However, in Phase 4, Emily was spending more personal time reading and expressing more positive attitudes towards it. And, according to asTTle data reported in Chapter Thirteen, she was achieving more highly on reading comprehension tasks than previously, showing that any possible reluctance to read was not due to any difficulties with reading. In addition, when she did find a book she could relate to, Emily engaged with it fully.

Her overall optimism, her enquiring mind, and motivation levels evident in Year 8 appear to have been maintained throughout the transition to Year 9 and on into Year 10. Emily also felt that her teachers were likely to say positive things about her personality and about her progress at school. Emily's belief in what her teachers would say about her was not unfounded; it was supported by teacher ratings.

Finally, Emily had enough self-awareness to realise that while she was not yet at the point of being able to stop doing it, her love of talking at inappropriate times could get in the way of her learning.

⁴⁰ The NZCER *Competent Learners @ 14* study, for example, refers to the importance of reading for academic and more general success. In the report *Growing Independence: A Summary of Key Findings from the Competent Learners @ 14 Project*, it states (p.25) that '...it is not enough just to learn to read — one of the strongest indicators of positive engagement in school and learning was the enjoyment of reading. Those who enjoyed reading also had higher average scores or positive relationships with family and friends, and showed less risky behaviour'. This report may be downloaded by going to: <http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/publications/homepages/competent-children/index.html>