

Abstract Template

TITLE: 'Getting it right': An exploration of Year 6 students' understanding of Victoria's secondary school opportunities

AUTHOR: Fiona MacDonald

AFFILIATION: Monash University

In May 2014 The Victorian Government released a new strategy, *Aiming High: A strategy for gifted and talented children and young people, 2014-19* designed to assist gifted and talented young Victorians with more educational choices to achieve their potential. Combined with increasing numbers of Select Entry Accelerated Learning Programs (SEAL) the educational opportunities for young Victorians appears to be increasing. But what happens to students who aren't offered a place in the highly sought after SEAL places in Government Secondary Colleges? How aware are these students, generally aged around 11 or 12, that they are 'missing out on something'? We know from the long waiting lists and demand for SEAL places that parents are aware of the differences but how aware are young Victorians of the opportunities being offered to others but denied to them?

We know that a child's sense of belonging and connectedness to their school plays a major role in their engagement with learning and their subsequent educational outcomes. With school retention rates, and Year 12 outcomes a priority, understanding how, and when, young people disengage from their learning journey is vital. While considerable research is being done with secondary aged students around Australia I suggest that there is vital knowledge to be gained from obtaining primary aged students' understandings. I want to argue that the increasing numbers of select entry secondary schools and colleges is contributing to young people's disengagement with our education system during their final primary school years; influencing their ability to engage and connect with their secondary schools and colleges. Drawing on discussions with Melbourne Year 6 students I explore their awareness and understanding of secondary school options and consider how important it is to them to be accepted at the 'best or right school'.

