School factors contributing to successful academic and personal outcomes for low SES students

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of the Sisters of Mercy who left their homeland in Argentina in 1880, and continued their work in Australia, establishing the school featured in this study; to the Sisters of Mercy who followed in their footsteps and to the staff who work in partnership with the Sisters offering generous and valuable service to generations of students who choose to be educated in the Mercy tradition.

ABSTRACT

This study is designed to answer the question: what is the role of schools in fostering educational and personal success for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds? The study sets out to examine the proposition of how schools might contribute to successful educational outcomes for students from low SES groups when schools adopt the constructive interventionist approach promoted by Karmel (1973), Sahlberg (2015) and other researchers. These researchers claim that it is important to look beyond the personal and social limitations of such students' lives and instead focus on considering school-based policies and practices aimed at enabling students' positive identity formation leading to personal and academic success.

This thesis begins with a critique of a prevailing deficit view regarding the educational success of students from low SES backgrounds. It argues that focusing on the personal limitations, barriers and challenges that are perceived to prevent students from low SES backgrounds from achieving educational success is neither productive nor enabling of social change. This thesis seeks to build on research that offers a more productive and interventionist paradigm based on a premise that schools have a significant role to play in providing measures to assist students to overcome the limitations they face. Following on from this argument, the initial stages of the study consider what constitutes success and focuses on educational models and research that were based on principles of social justice and equity.

The study itself uses a case study of a single inner-city, private girls' school to identify more precisely the impact of the values and actions that schools might consider implementing to assist student success. The school selected had a deliberate, well-established strategic approach to inclusiveness and student success. Through a process of monitoring progress and attendance and intervening to support students and address their challenges, the school had evidence of a proven track record of success for all students, including those who came from low SES backgrounds.

In seeking to identify which school factors had best contributed to students' success, the data for this thesis draws on the perceptions and experiences of school leaders and other staff, as well as a representative group of graduates from the Year 12 cohort in 2012 who came from low SES backgrounds. The participants in the study responded to the main research question, namely, 'From your experience, what school factors have contributed to success for students from low SES backgrounds?'

The study concludes with a review of the insights and issues arising from the research, a discussion on the research implications for the school studied, whether the findings of the research can have meaning for other schools or institutions and recommendations for further research.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ANGEE	Association of Non-Government Employees in Education
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATN	Australian Technology Network (Australian university coalition)
DSP	Disadvantaged Schools Program
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
Go8	Group of Eight (Australian university coalition)
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
IEU (SA)	Independent Education Union SA Branch
IRU	Innovative Research Universities (Australian university coalition)
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SAIT	South Australian Institute of Teachers
SES	Socioeconomic status
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed....  .....

Date.....14/02/2019.....

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Finally, I thank my extended family and friends for supporting me, especially during the past four years. When this work is finally completed I look forward to spending more time with you.

Schools like St Ethnea make a remarkable contribution to education, often with little recognition. I hope that this thesis will affirm the leaders and staff, particularly when they read the graduates' comments.

I was greatly impressed by the confidence and poise of the graduates whom I interviewed for this thesis. They had all been academically successful, but more significantly were their decisions to use their talents to make a difference in the world. Their commitment to social justice and their determination to seek ways to collaborate with others in order to act for social change left me in awe.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

> 'It is difficult to change things if you do not believe you can' (Wrigley, Lingard and Thomson, 2012, p. 96).

Inequity is a longstanding issue in Australia's education system. From the Karmel Report of 1973 to the Gonski Report of 2011, little progress has been made in lifting the educational outcomes of low SES students (Connell, White and Johnston, 1992, pp. 461-462; Lingard 2000, pp. 54-554; Gonski et al., 2011, p. xiii, xxix, 137). A review of secondary education in South Australia demonstrated a particular disparity in senior secondary outcomes when students socio-economic background was taken into account, noting that, in spite of changes following the introduction of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), "a disproportionate number of early school leavers in South Australia come from lower socio-economic backgrounds" (Crafter, Crook and Reid, 2006, p. 9). Research by Ramsay, Tranter, Charlton and Sumner (1998), Considine and Zappala (2002) and Bradley, Noonan, Nugent and Scales (2008) consistently found that significantly lower proportions of low SES students attend university when compared with their higher socioeconomic peers.

There is a widely held view in education that low SES students are more likely to fail in their schooling, lack motivation and aspirations, and will not go on to university (Bowden and Doughney, 2010; Walpole, 2008). Such views are supported by theorists who maintain that schools reflect the structures of society in which the wealthy maintain their own interests (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett, 1982, p. 190).

To address this challenge, the focus of this thesis is an exploration of what schools can do to ensure success for students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. The study draws upon the experiences of school leaders, staff and graduates in a school that has been able to make some achievements in this regard over a number of years. These experiences are used to identify school factors that have the potential to contribute to successful academic and personal outcomes for low SES and vulnerable students.

The key research question that guides this research is: *What school-based factors contribute to successful academic and personal outcomes for students from low SES backgrounds?*

To establish a basis for this study, two paradigms related to the education of students from low SES backgrounds are examined. One paradigm adopts a deficit viewpoint, focusing on the problems associated with the lack of achievement of low SES students and locates the causes in their social and home context (Ainley, Graetz, Long and Batten, 1995; Payne, 2005; Gorski, 2006; Valencia, 2010). The other paradigm adopts a more proactive viewpoint, largely focusing on the

responsibility of schools to enable students to become successful (Williams, Penelope, Connell and White, 1991; Gee 2004; Valencia 2010; Dudley-Marling and Michaels, 2012). Put simply, the difference between these two paradigms is that the deficit approach seeks to 'fix' the student, whilst the proactive approach seeks to 'fix' the school and establish policies and strategies to benefit all students.

In focusing attention on the potential agency of schools and teachers to contribute to successful educational and personal outcomes for all students, this thesis draws upon the conceptions that have been generated by theorists who hold a proactive stance in regard to schools' provision of education for low SES students. This constructive perspective adopts a strengths-based approach which seeks to understand and develop the strengths and capabilities that have the potential to transform the lives of people in positive ways (Hammond and Zimmerman, 2013; Smyth and Wrigley, 2012; Sahlberg, 2015). This paradigm is grounded in a respect for the intrinsic worth and value of others. It promotes positive change through the development of authentic relationships (Noddings, 2005; Antrop-Gonzalez and de Jesus, 2006; Tronto, 2013) and turns the gaze away from deficits in the family situation, instead focusing on schools' policies and strategies in looking for solutions.

1.1 Issues to Be Addressed in this Study

The pervasive influence of neoliberalism has placed constraints on schools by demanding measurable outcomes, for example, using high-stakes testing to achieve political ends aimed at globally ranking schools. Schools cannot change society, but they do have a role in generating an educational philosophy and developing strategies for improving educational outcomes for students from low SES backgrounds. Lingard recognises that "schools and teachers can make a difference but not *all* the difference" (In Smyth and Wrigley, 2013, p. x). By taking a deliberate stance in fostering the educational success of students, schools open the way for these students to pursue successful careers and make positive contributions to society as citizens. The thesis will focus on the significance of the role of the school in deliberately adopting policies and strategies that can contribute to positive outcomes for all students.

1.2 The Approach

This research will adopt an interpretive approach to investigate a school which has a proven track record in enabling success for students from low SES backgrounds, including migrant, refugee and vulnerable families, to achieve educational and personal success. Over more than two decades, through deliberate efforts of the Leadership Team and the commitment of teachers and support staff, the school has adopted initiatives to create a school climate that incorporates strategies designed to support success for all students. The actual strategies and the impact of the approach

adopted by this school will be critically examined using contemporary research findings and the lived experiences of leaders, staff and graduates. The analysis will be situated in an examination of school documents and historic data regarding students' academic success. Key data will be derived from the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders of the current Leadership Team, teachers and support staff to identify and examine the deliberate strategies which they believe led to students' success. An important perspective that will be sought is that of the perceptions of a representative group of 2012 graduates, including their impressions of the school's practices and the impact these practices have had on their experiences during their school years and following their graduation from the school. All of the students in this study were eligible to receive School Card. They successfully applied for admission to higher education institutions in 2013.

1.3 Significance

This thesis sets out to challenge the assumptions of those supporting a deficit view of student failure in education and to identify the deliberate strategies enabling student success. The outcomes of this research are intended to make explicit, for current school leaders and teachers, useful information for reflection and evaluation. In doing so, it may assist the school chosen for the case-based study in setting direction for future school-based policy development and strategic planning. In addition, the outcomes will be available for consideration by other schools that similarly seek to contribute to success for all of their students.

1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 Concepts of success applied to this study

The aspects of success to be examined are both academic and personal. For the quantifiable aspects of academic success in this study, a concrete, measurable definition of success at high school level is an everyday interpretation by students, staff, parents, the general community and most educational writers, namely, the completion of Year 12 with, in South Australia, the attainment of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) and an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) which permits entry into higher education courses.

Of equal importance, alongside academic success, are the values and non-quantifiable aspects of success seen in examples of students' resilience, self-confidence, self-discipline and critical awareness of the world around them. It is noted that, when students take advantage of all that the school has to offer, they can become "entrepreneurs of self" (Foucault, in Rabinow (Ed.) 1997; Iftode, 2013, p. 82) by consciously choosing education as a resource for social mobility. Through education, students acquire cultural capital and something of the 'culture of power' (Delpit, 1988).

Gandara (1995, p. 55) describes 'aspirational capital' as providing students with the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers". This resilience is evidenced in parents who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances (Gandara, 1995; Dweck, 2016). Access to higher education is a way of realising their ambitions.

Sellar, Gale and Parker (2011, p. 44) reflected on the rising prominence of imagination in everyday life, and claimed that success is likely when students receive direct or indirect messages which affirm them as successful students. Appadurai (1996, p. 53) suggested that "the imagination has now acquired a singular new power in social life…more persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before". He highlighted the role of the collectively 'imagined world' or 'social imaginaries' (Taylor, 2004) in assisting individuals to arrive at different visions of the 'good life'. According to Sellar et al. (2011, p. 46), the capacity to aspire involves both the ability to realise particular aspirations, and also the collective power, within the social imaginary, to shape cultural contexts in which aspirations are formed. In the case of St Ethnea[1], the school in this study, "the discourse of raising aspirations is grounded in an imagined world where the inherent desirability of university study is presupposed" (Sellar et al., 2011).

The particular concept of 'success', held by the leadership group and staff of the school selected for this study, is cited in the mission and values statements (Appendix 1). The school holds as evidence of success the development of confidence in students in meeting present and future challenges. An enduring zest for all aspects of life and learning, self-discipline and purpose are held as important attributes to be nurtured in all students as they strive for personal excellence. Encouragement to adopt a balanced approach to living and a critical awareness of the world about them, of their own needs and the needs of others are held as central to individuals becoming fully human. Although these attributes are difficult to measure, this study also takes into account values and non-quantifiable personal attributes in the construction of questions to be discussed with graduates, teachers, support staff and leaders.

1.4.2 Definition of low socioeconomic status applied to this study

Socioeconomic status resists clear definition (Putnam and Gill, 2011). However, for Marks, McMillan, Jones and Ainley (Marks et al., 2000, p. 10), socioeconomic status (SES) is determined by an individual's educational attainment, employment, income and wealth. Bradley and Corwyn (2002, p. 271), and Milne and Plourde (2006, p. 185), suggested that the notion of capital may be a

[1] A fictitious name, St Ethnea, was chosen for the school so that the thesis could focus on the issues rather than on the reputation of the school, and in order to protect the anonymity of the leaders, staff and graduates who responded.

better means of measuring socioeconomic status. According to Bradley and Corwyn (2002), capital (resources and assets) may be a way of thinking about socioeconomic status because it refers to financial capital (material resources), human capital (non-material resources such as education) and social capital (achieved through social connections). Adopting this definition, Milne and Plourde (2006) concluded that capital is determined by household income, occupation and parents' education.

Bourdieu (1965; 1973; 1977), extended the idea of capital to include categories such as cultural capital, symbolic capital and linguistic capital (the ability to decipher and manipulate complex language structure). Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) notion of cultural capital is extended to "all the goods, material and symbolic, which present themselves as rare and sought after" (cited in Harker, 1990, p. 13). It refers also to non-financial assets that promote social mobility, and can include education, intellect, style of speech, dress or physical appearance.

In Australia, a geographic measurement of socioeconomic status is sometimes used to categorise people according to postcodes. Because this measure fails to account for individual circumstances, James, Bexley, Anderson, Devlin, Garnett, Marginson & Maxwell (2008, pp. 6-7) argue that "it is not an appropriate way to identify individual socio-economic status or educational disadvantage".

A recent review of the composition of social classes conducted by Sheppard and Biddle (2017) claimed that the division of people into working class and middle class no longer exists as a valid description of society. As a result, they proposed six new categories, described in the table below, and tested individuals' self-location into these divisions.

Table 1.1: Composition of social class categories according to Sheppard and Biddle (2017)

Category	Description
Precariat	Combining the words precarious (at risk) and proletariat to describe those without assets. 60% of those falling into the category of the precariat described themselves as middle class and 2% described themselves as upper class.
Ageing workers	Unlike members of the precariat, no one claimed to be upper class. Instead, perhaps as an indication of the classifications of their youth, they claimed to be working class.
New workers	Financially better off than ageing workers, least likely to be unemployed, and most likely (64%) to say they are middle class.
Established middle	Enjoy greater advantages than new workers and were most likely to call themselves working class.
Emerging affluent	The youngest group, with most of them being full time workers.
Established affluent	Consists almost entirely of managers and professionals. Six percent said they were upper class and 11% said they don't know which class they are in.

It would seem that, using the study of Sheppard and Biddle (2017), the whole idea of class in Australia is chameleon-like, with categories blurred, difficult to discern and with fluid self-categorisation. In this somewhat new approach, it was found that despite the careful organisation of social categories together with appropriate descriptors, people located themselves in quite different categories. Allocation to a particular class could be based on criteria which change with different circumstances (Sheppard and Biddle, 2017). People perceived themselves in classes other than those suggested by researchers on a number of measures. This is an interesting finding in view of the construction of identity and self which is explicated in Section 2.6.4.

It is difficult, therefore, to establish the components of a category such as 'disadvantage' or 'low SES', terms commonly used in educational writings. In South Australia (SA), the State Government offers a category enabling funding to support students from low socio-economic families through the School Card scheme. The granting of a School Card is contingent on the following criteria:

- Income audit by the State Government;
- Hardship, change of circumstances or self-employment;
- The student being in care of foster parents/guardians; or
- The student is from a migrant or new arrival family (South Australian Government, 2017).

It is beyond the terms of this study to attempt to define a more satisfactory measure. While being fully aware of the bluntness of this instrument, and in the absence of an acceptable alternative method, the holding of a School Card is adopted in this study as being the measure of low socioeconomic status and the two terms, School Card holder and low SES, are used interchangeably.

1.5 What Drives My Interest in this Research?

My interest in identifying ways of redressing the failure of disadvantaged students to experience academic and personal success arose from my long experiences in education. The passion for addressing inequities in education was originally sparked by my experiences as a beginning teacher in 1962, aged 20, in Central Australia. My training had been in primary teaching of years 3-7 students. In Alice Springs, I was faced with the responsibility of teaching Indigenous children. I undertook this responsibility without any preparation for the complexities of teaching five-year-olds who had been brought into Alice Springs from remote areas to board in a hostel. This challenging and unjust experience for me, and more so for the students, became a watershed moment.

The release of the Karmel Report in 1973 became the next defining moment. By that time, I had joined the Sisters of Mercy. The charism of Mercy, which was espoused by the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, is a significant legacy which has been handed down to all the

institutions which operate under the aegis of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. Remaining central to the policies and philosophies of works undertaken by the Institute was serving the needs of the poor and distressed, as well as the pursuit of excellence, hospitality, justice, service, respect and compassion for all, especially for those suffering from the effects of poverty and homelessness.

Inspired by the findings of the 1973 Karmel Report, the Sisters agreed to serve in areas with the greatest needs. To equip me to provide leadership in this area, in 1974 I received funding from the Sisters of Mercy and the South Australian Institute of Teachers to undertake a study tour of educational and community programs for disadvantaged children in the UK, USA and Scandinavia. On my return to Australia, I was appointed within the Catholic Education Office to the position of Supervisor of the Disadvantaged Schools Program for SA Catholic schools (1974-1980). In addition to this role, I was appointed as Supervisor of the Migrant and Multicultural Program in SA Catholic schools from 1978-1980.

The experiences gained during my time of employment at the Catholic Education Office were invaluable. I was a member of the executive team as Catholic education expanded and developed into a 'system' in the 1970s and gained first-hand experience in all aspects of education including industrial relations, curriculum planning and development, professional development of administrators and teachers, and the planning of new schools.

A number of further appointments broadened my aims of serving the needs of low SES students in the wider community. In 1984-1985 I was appointed as a panel member on the National Review of the DSP. In 1986-1988, I was appointed as a part-time Commissioner on the Commonwealth Schools Commission, working closely with Dr. Jean Blackburn who had created the framework for the DSP in the Karmel Report. These appointments involved visiting schools throughout Australia to meet with teachers, administrators, policy makers and planners at state and national levels, gaining insights into the state system. These experiences all provided a context for educational thinking and policy making when I was appointed as Principal of the school in this study.

The school selected for this study was committed to the Mercy ideals. From its beginning in 1880, until the present time, it has reached out to those who are poor and marginalized, including successive waves of refugees from countries in chaos, offering them a warm welcome and guiding them on pathways to achieve academic and personal success. Now that I am retired, I have the opportunity to examine critically strategies chosen over the years, their potential to achieve the goals set and to identify what might be done to further enhance outcomes for students.

1.6 My Personal Beliefs Relating to Education

I believe education has made, and will continue to make, a difference to the lives of disadvantaged students, given the right circumstances. Individuals can be successful in their studies, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances. It is this belief which underpins the need I saw for research to identify the factors perceived by staff and students to be critical in achieving academic and personal success for all students, irrespective of their background.

My personal philosophy of education is strongly rooted in religious values which are fundamental to decisions made about all aspects of my school leadership. The cornerstone of this philosophy, as it applies to schooling, is the belief in the dignity of every human being and that each child is born equal before God. The most important aspect of these beliefs is the cultivation of values that are integral to the religious group to which I belong, the Sisters of Mercy.

Growing out of these values, one of my overriding concerns has always been to ensure that the poorest and least powerful students are offered every opportunity to break through the barriers of disadvantage to benefit from schooling. These students need to be empowered by participating in decisions affecting their lives at school, and by taking from school the skills, knowledge and understandings to lead lives that are ethical, meaningful and compassionate towards others.

I have been inspired by a saying of Joan Chittister (2018), a Benedictine author who stated, "The function of authority is to enable another person's growth" (audio file) which aligns well with my background as a religious Sister of Mercy. One of our vows is service of others, and the Scriptures admonish often that the role of the leader is one who serves others. In today's culture, ideas based in religious belief are not universally acceptable and it is not possible to build a generalisable model on my own religious beliefs. Indeed, the tenets of neoliberalism which currently prevail in government educational policy run counter to these beliefs.

However, our Western culture has its genesis in Christian culture and the social construction of knowledge in this age will, perforce, encapsulate some elements of past cultures. Hence it has become possible for a writer such as Greenleaf (1998) to find followers in the secular world for his philosophy of servant leadership which advocates that a servant leader makes sure that other people's highest priority needs are served first. Servant leaders will have the goodwill to bring about change and to exercise their power for the good of others (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 4). Greenleaf suggested that good leadership entails ensuring that those served grow as persons and that they become healthier, wiser, freer and more autonomous, and scrutinising and considering the impact of one's leadership on those least privileged in society to ensure that they will benefit or, at least, not

be further deprived (Greenleaf, 1998). These leadership values directly oppose current value systems of neoliberalism.

It is this philosophy of the leader as servant which I have tried to incorporate into my own philosophy, and to use as a basis for formulating policy and initiating action.

I believe that the quality of the relationships between the principal and members of staff will be reflected in the quality of the relationships between staff and students and students and their peers. All relationships in the school community should be based on mutual respect.

It is my belief that it is the role of the school, as an entity, to make equality real in everyday life. Growing out of this stance is the belief that each person has a right to education and that schools have a responsibility to provide a learning environment where young people are nurtured, encouraged and challenged. Through the formal years of schooling, students should be given a thirst for knowledge, a love of learning and a desire to continue their education. Every student should be given the opportunity to experience success, both academic and personal success in the growth of a positive identity. To accomplish these aspirations, the needs of students should be central in decision making. Following on from this, I believe that the needs of staff as caregivers, both within the school and within their families, should also be given serious consideration, and treated with compassion.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 will examine further the historical efforts to remedy disadvantage in schools as well as the conceptions of success and the role of school leadership in fostering educational quality. Two opposing paradigms are discussed. Following this, the contemporary educational policy context will be outlined, including the rise of neoliberalism, market-driven agendas and testing. Alternative models aimed at achieving equity in educational outcomes are then explored in detail, concluding with an analysis of the major themes emerging from the review of the literature.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach and describes the research design, context and participants. Later in this chapter, I describe the design of the approach and the methods adopted for my research together with the limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 introduces a brief history of the school selected for the study. This is followed by an outline of the specific attributes of the school, including the principles and strategies which it adopted in order to achieve equitable outcomes for all of its students, irrespective of their backgrounds. The chapter concludes with an analysis of student achievement data from a

representative cohort of graduates, together with school documents and policies to provide a justification for the selection of this school for a case study.

Chapter 5 reports on the findings from the interviews with the Leadership Team and staff. This chapter will include reflections on these findings and an analysis of their relationship to the studies reported in the literature review that have adopted a constructive viewpoint in the consideration of educational success for students from low SES backgrounds.

Chapter 6 contains the narratives of the six graduates who were interviewed for this research. This includes a summary of each of their interviews followed by an overview and discussion of these findings, with concluding comments relating to the graduates' perceived importance of particular school attributes.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the overall findings of the study relating this to the theoretical constructs examined in Chapter 2 and provides answers to the research question, namely, 'What school-based factors contribute to successful academic and personal outcomes for students from low SES backgrounds?' The chapter then discusses the research implications for the school in question and whether the findings of the research can have meaning for other educational institutions. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

> The intelligence of an individual is not a fixed quantity, a quantity that one cannot augment. We must protest and react against this brutal pessimism (Binet, 1909, cited in Smyth and Wrigley, 2013, p. 81).

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relating to educational equity for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with the aim of forming a theoretical framework which will be used in the analysis of data and in reporting the findings.

The chapter is divided into five sections:

Section 1: Current overview and international responses to the emergence of equity in education.

Section 2: A proactive approach aimed at achieving equity in Australian schools.

Section 3: Constraints placed on schools as a result of neoliberalism.

Section 4: The proactive approach of Finnish schools aimed at achieving equity.

Section 5: Presentation of a new paradigm, the social imaginary for assisting students from low SES backgrounds to achieve academic and personal success.

2.2 Section 1: Current Overview and International Responses to the Emergence of Equity in Education

2.2.1 Emergence of a concern for equity in education as a means to national security

At the macro, government level, equity in education emerged as a 'problem' for governments in the mid-20th century. Until then it was taken for granted that there would be a lack of education or low levels of education for African-Americans in the US, for Indigenous Australians, and for working class children and the poor in every country (Coleman et al., 1966; Karmel, 1973). Russia's scientific achievements challenged the ubiquitous acceptance of inequality in educational outcomes and prompted an impetus for change in the thinking of governments and educational leaders.

In the USA, in particular, thinking about education was significantly challenged when, in 1957, the USSR exhibited its superior scientific capabilities and sent a satellite, Sputnik, into space, not only damaging the national pride of Americans, but also making them fearful of the Soviets' ability to spy on the US (Kalb, Peters and Woolley, 2007, p. 517). The US became aware of the low levels of foreign language studies in schools, and a low level of science studies. Federal money was made available for programs in both of these areas; language labs and science labs mushroomed. In 1958, President Eisenhower devoted his sixth State of the Union address to the threat of 'communist

imperialism' to the US and the world (Kalb et al, 2007.). One billion dollars was allotted to the National Defence Education Act; education was seen to be the key in promoting national security and in competing with the Soviets. Opponents of this approach to educational policy maintained that aligning education policy with security needs represented an unnecessary government interference into the schooling system (Hunt, Carper, Lasley and Raisch, 2010).

2.2.2 Significant interventions in addressing poverty in education: The USA

Government education interventions internationally stemmed from the report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, prepared in the US by the eminent sociologist, James Coleman (Coleman et al., 1966) and commissioned by President Johnson. It was Johnson's belief that the poor would lift themselves out of poverty by acquiring the skills to contribute to a complex society. His approach to equity, and that of almost all subsequent programs, was based on the notion that equity in education would enable access to national wealth. Programs including the Head Start Program (US Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.) were established in 1965 in response to the high level of poverty in the US, which was 19% under President Johnson. Johnson's view is still held by today's political world leaders (May 2016; Shorten, 2016).

The Head Start Program was one of the early examples of support for the education of the masses which anticipated the tenets of neoliberalism. Education was reified, its attributes to become a commodity for the benefit of the gross national product of each country and for the benefit of the political aims of the country, a view entrenched in programs that followed. Education was no longer seen as a good in itself, nor was it directed to the good of the person. The notion of, and purpose for, education changed from Matthew Arnold's (1869) view of education as "sweetness and light", and "making the best that has been thought or known in the world current everywhere" to that of a commodity (Brunell, 1940, p. 46).

As a driver for educational commodification agendas, testing was increased in the US and supported the reified approach to education (Hunt et al., 2010; Sahlberg, 2015, p. 94). Testing was used to demonstrate the status of the country vis-à-vis other nations. Children in the third to eighth grades were to be tested annually in reading and mathematics and, as a result, it was found that some states actually lowered their standards to meet targets and teachers 'taught to the tests' (Ravitch, 2012).

2.2.3 Discourse of deficit and cultural deprivation

Coleman's (1966) first report generated widespread debate and interest in educational, academic and political arenas. The programs which it established were firmly rooted in a 'discourse of cultural deprivation' based on the belief that the "disproportionate academic problems among low

status students were largely due to pathologies or deficits in their sociocultural background" (Valencia, 1986, p. 3). Race and ethnicity were stereotyped and students from these backgrounds were stigmatised (Valencia, 1986). A number of these studies concluded that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have lower aspirations than their high socioeconomic peers (Bowden and Doughney, 2010; Shallcross and Hartley, 2009; Walpole, 2008; Hahs-Vaughan, 2004; Tett, 2004; Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). Payne (2005) continued to highlight a deficit viewpoint, portraying the lives of the poor as pathological, deficient in the cognitive, emotional, linguistic and spiritual resources needed to escape poverty. According to Dudley-Marling (2015, p. 3), Payne's self-published book, lacked "scientific evidence or scholarly merit" but, nevertheless, became a widely disseminated text with significant popularity within American school districts. It has continued to be criticised for promoting classist, deficit-centred theories to explain the underachievement of youth in poverty (Gorski, 2006). Ravitch (1981, p. 719) observed that the most negative effect of the Coleman Report was to encourage the belief that "schools were unable to affect student achievement very greatly". In effect, this meant that teachers and schools were held to be powerless in their efforts to assist low socioeconomic students to succeed.

2.2.4 Constructive approach generated by the Plowden Report in the UK

In contrast, England, was unencumbered by the panic caused in the US by Sputnik, and Plowden prepared a report for the Central Advisory Council for Education. Entitled *Children and their Primary Schools* (1967), this extensive report considered all aspects of primary education and the transition to secondary school. In particular, the report recommended the establishment of Education Priority Areas aimed at lessening the disadvantage of students by focusing on parent and community participation in education. The employment of social workers, home/school liaison officers and teacher aides enabled teachers and parents to work together to achieve positive learning outcomes for children.

Smyth and Wrigley (2013) noted that Plowden's view of the intellectual capacity of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds echoed the earlier thoughts of Alfred Binet in 1909 when he reportedly commented: "The intelligence of an individual is not a fixed quantity, a quantity that one cannot augment. We must protest and react against this brutal pessimism" (Binet, 1909, cited in Smyth and Wrigley, 2013, p. 81). Plowden also stressed that "education for the deprived child [should be] complementary to his home…rather than compensatory which really means that the home has no merit" (cited in Smyth and Wrigley 2013, p. 109).

Despite attempts that have been made by governments worldwide to introduce programs to counter disadvantage, many of these programs have had limited duration, resulting in limited success. At

times, misuse of the related data occurred as policies of changing governments were implemented. In Australia, the demise of the Disadvantaged Schools Program is an outstanding example which will be addressed in the next section.

2.3 Section 2: A Proactive Approach Aimed at Achieving Equity in Australian Schools

2.3.1 Constructive educational approach in Australia: Contribution of Karmel

Similar to the UK in the 1960s, Australia adopted a constructive viewpoint in relation to poverty, inequality and the role of education, aiming to achieve equity in academic outcomes at the school level. In the 1960s, Australia followed the US by making grants available for science labs, language labs and, later, libraries. Action to redress inequality through poverty, however, was most visible in the contribution of the Karmel Report (1973) and two of its important outcomes: the formation of the Schools Commission and the establishment of the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP). In 1972, the Whitlam Labor government appointed an interim committee, chaired by Professor Peter Karmel, to examine the position of all schools throughout Australia and to address funding inequities, examining the possibility of instituting a needs-based policy. A feature of the resultant landmark report, *Schools in Australia* (Karmel, 1973), was its focus on equity. It proposed financial assistance to private schools, intensive capital funding to state schools and the introduction of compensatory provisions to targeted groups of students in all schools (Karmel, 1973, p. 240).

In effect, the establishment of the DSP replaced the deficit discourses with more constructive discourses and strategies. The DSP was established with two main foci: establishing funding according to needs and promoting ongoing teacher development. Unlike the Head Start Program in the US which targeted individual children, the DSP focused on schools as the unit of change. The Karmel vision generated tangible consideration regarding what equality, difference, democracy and participation might mean for those students whose educational prospects were being impeded by the effects of poverty. A fundamental difference between US and Australian measures was the fact that, in Australia, a group of commissioners individually visited schools to see their problems first hand and evaluate their financial needs.

Connell, White and Johnston (1991, p. 24) observed that “the structure/culture of the DSP spawned a rich array of reforms”. It was not only committed to funding. Its commitment to innovation and action research had a positive effect on schools and their communities. Under the mandate of the DSP, teachers and other staff members participated in high quality professional development activities and conferences, resulting in vigorous debates focusing on strategies in schools to assist low socioeconomic students to succeed in their schooling (Connell et al., 1982, p. 27).

2.3.2 The DSP and the role of teachers

It was at this point in Australia that attention turned to the meso level in the education system, namely, the role of the teacher. Teachers saw themselves as having "a sense of mission to change what was clearly inequitable in the schooling systems" (Thomson 2002, p. 166). The identity of an effective teacher changed from one imparting knowledge, to one engaged also in ensuring success for the disadvantaged. Those involved in schools felt a strong sense of responsibility to give every student an opportunity to achieve success.

During the years of the DSP, deficit discourses were replaced by creative and innovative ideas aimed at engaging students in their learning. The DSP was responsible for pioneering work in developing strategies to assist students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Whole school change was the focus of many projects funded under the DSP. For example, staff, parents and students collaborated to review approaches to discipline and effective ways of monitoring and reporting on students' progress. Teachers were supported and encouraged to undertake action research on aspects of their teaching and share the results with other teachers, within and beyond their own school. With the wisdom of hindsight, it is recognised that while much was achieved at the school and community level, if it were to be sustainable, structural changes needed to be made at each of the state and system levels. Without the vision and leadership of the Schools Commission, which was abolished in 1987, and the continuation of funding for projects that were still developing, priorities at state and system levels were redirected away from addressing inequities in education.

2.3.3 Winding back the DSP

Connell et al (1991, p. 450), in their review of the DSP identified the mid-1980s as "a period of conflict and uncertainty about equity policy" which ultimately led to the winding back of the DSP. As Connell and associates noted, this occurred at the same time as favourable reviews and recommendations for a continuation of the DSP were presented to the Australian Government by Ruby, Redden, Sobski and Willmott (1985), the Quality Education Review (Karmel, 1985) and the Commonwealth Schools Commission (1985).

In 1996, the DSP was reconstituted as a literacy program for disadvantaged students, a change which signalled the federal government's decision to move away from reforming existing school structures to concentrate on addressing individual student deficits. This represented not only a lost opportunity for continuing successful reform in Australian schools, but took away from many schools their sense of purpose.

2.4 Section 3: Constraints Placed on Schools as a Result of Neoliberalism

2.4.1 Current policy context in Australia: The rise of neoliberalism

Following the Karmel Report (1973), structural changes at the school level, together with innovative educational programs, were developing in many schools serving disadvantaged areas but, before they could be embedded, neoliberal agendas began to dominate worldwide politics (Ball 2008, pp. 11-12; Connell 2013a, 2013b). The considerable gains from the DSP were cast aside, beginning with Dawkins, the federal Minister for Education, phasing out the Schools Commission in 1987, leading to the winding down of the DSP in the early 1990s. New policy formulations, new technologies of testing and ranking and new controls on teacher workforces were introduced. Once again, the key dynamics of inequality were reinforced. The social and economic purposes were "collapsed into a single, overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness, side-lining the social purposes of education" (Ball 2008, pp. 11-12).

2.4.2 NAPLAN

When the Federal Labor government came to power in 2007, its policy interventions were firmly based on neoliberal agendas. An emphasis was placed on national curriculum and professional standards. In 2008, under Prime Minister Rudd, the Labour government introduced the National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) which continues to be overseen by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). ACARA conducts annual tests in all Australian schools. Scores are recorded for each student in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, language conventions and numeracy. In 2010, Gillard, the federal Minister for Education, strengthened the approach to testing and accumulating information about students by launching the MySchool website. This website includes data relating to the socioeconomic backgrounds of students, financial information, destinations of Year 12 students and NAPLAN results.

2.4.3 Building the Education Revolution

In 2008, in order to counter the effects of a wave of recession affecting most countries in the world, Rudd, the then Prime Minister, included educational institutions in his 'economic stimulus package', labelling this move as 'Building the Education Revolution'. Again, the commodification of education is obvious; there was nothing educational at all (let alone revolutionary) in dispensing A$16.2 billion for new and refurbished buildings without any investigation of need. This grandiose gesture was a convenient part of the salvage operation for the economy, but it did nothing to revolutionise education.

2.4.4 Gonski Review

Gillard, as Education Minister, established the Gonski Review in April 2010, believing that it was the inequitable funding of schools which prevented change. Her expectation was that the review would generate informed discussion, leading to a broad consensus in the perennial and divisive area of the policy on funding of schools (Gillard, 2010, p. xiii). This divisiveness had been fuelled by Coleman et al.'s third and final report in 1981 on public and private schools. They presented, among other findings, the assertion, which was ideologically controversial, that even after family background factors were controlled, private and Catholic schools provided a better education than public schools (Kiviat, 2000, p. 4). Coleman et al. (1981) noted a link between the characteristics of a learning environment and student achievement, self-concept and aspiration. They concluded that student outcomes improved where there was a greater degree of discipline, higher standards were set and teachers were motivated to assist students to succeed. Greater discipline and order were noted in Catholic and other private schools compared with public schools (Coleman et al., 1981). The inference was not drawn to the possibility that the discipline exercised (or, rather, the lack of need to exercise it) might be correlated to factors which will be discussed in detail later, namely, the tertiary socialisation of a person into a caring teacher, the attributes of the care they give to students and the fact that the foundation of an ethos which inspires motivated teachers is not dependent on funding. Whatever about Coleman's (1981) conclusions, the funding of private and Catholic schools remains an ideological bone of contention in Australia as the reputation of the government system, once held in the highest esteem, is dimmed.

2.4.5 Dominance of the business model in education

Under the tenets of neoliberalism, there was a shift to policies of efficiency and effectiveness (Thomson, 2007) and an emphasis on management skills. The new direction for schools has been to focus on outcomes rather than inputs and processes. Under the ideology of neoliberalism, education has been redefined as the ability to compete with other schools and countries using the results of testing. Improvements in education standards are seen as leading to economic prosperity. In England, Prime Minister Blair proclaimed, "Education is our best economic policy…This country will succeed or fail on the basis of how it changes itself and gears up to this new economy, based on knowledge. Education therefore is now the centre of policy making for the future." (cited in Wrigley, Thomson & Lingard, 2012, p. 96).

The use of terms and concepts such as league tables, benchmarking, quality control and national testing in order to measure efficiency and productivity, demonstrates the degree to which governments now equate educational policy with business models. Ravitch (2010) describes what was happening in the US and the damage done by a school system run on commercial lines. She

accuses all political parties of falling behind calls for "accountability, high-stakes testing, data-driven decision making, choice, charter schools, privatisation, deregulation, merit pay and competition between schools". The same could equally be applied to Australian education. Power (1997, p. 42) had earlier observed the emergence of an 'audit culture', resulting from testing as a subset of a contemporary philosophy of management that is pervasive in both national governments and international policy.

2.4.6 PISA tests

A further demonstration of Australia's commitment to testing is its participation in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses a random sample of 15-year-old students, drawn from a nationally representative sample of schools. PISA was designed to assist governments to monitor the outcomes of education systems in terms of student achievement and compare results with other countries. Yates (2013, p. 44) describes PISA tests as portraying schooling as "a never-ending race [which] works against the equity agenda" and may be viewed as "a potent vehicle" by supplying politicians and the national media with data that may then be misused to make micro-comparisons. Political parties, particularly in the lead up to elections, position education high on their agenda and seek to promote quick, short term solutions for maximum political gain.

Ball (2008, p. 40) noted that education ministers often refer to PISA results in their speeches and "repeatedly use OECD reports and studies as points of reference and forms of legitimation for their policies, when these suit their purposes". As league table logic is trumpeted by the media, Connell (2013b) warned that the goal of getting Australia into the top five percent of the PISA results is "madness". There are tensions inherent in any testing regime "between testing for system accountability purposes and testing for educational purposes" (Lingard, 2000, p. 52). In any case, as Yates (2013, p. 41), eloquently argues, "neither testing nor lack of testing produces or solves the problem of social inequalities and differences." Connell (2013b, video file) asks "Is the new order of test-rich, justice-poor schooling now impossible to change?"

2.5 Section 4: The Proactive Approach of Finnish Schools Aimed at Achieving Equity

2.5.1 Constructive educational approach in Finland: Sahlburg's contribution

A constructive approach to student success has been sustained in Finland where the government took a stance aimed at achieving equity in academic outcomes at system and school levels. At a time when the major nations of the world were encouraging testing, Finland eschewed testing until final examinations at the end of schooling. Sahlberg (2015, p.14) defined pedagogy as educating for human development and identified standardised testing as "one of the most common toxic aspects

of today's school systems globally" (p. 132). Sahlberg's view (2015, p. 92) concurs with that of Yates (2013) who both concluded that the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) is based on a false assumption that regular external testing is a "prerequisite for improving the quality of education" (Yates, 2013, p. 41).

Sahlberg (2015, p. 151) believed that schools and education systems needed to develop against GERM "a countervailing force" against founded on policy adopted by politicians, parents, teachers and administrators, who together worked over time to formulate a vision which was owned and shared by the whole community. As a result, teachers are held in high esteem in Finland, their prestige ranked with that of doctors and lawyers; they are highly educated, all having master's degrees with intensive study in their academic field, methods of research, and in practice. In 2013, 3,200 candidates applied to enter teaching training courses at the University of Helsinki, and only 340 were accepted, thus contributing to the increasing prestige of the profession (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 107).

Finland abolished the ability grouping of children (streaming) established under GERM. Children with special educational needs were identified early in order to implement helpful intervention measures (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 62). Almost 60% of all students were identified as needing special education and students are monitored to ensure they are making progress in their learning. The curriculum is balanced for all students with equal weighting given to music, art, sports and academic results.

The Finnish system is lauded for its equity as much as for its high quality (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 4). The high equity and high achievement record of the Finnish approach to education resonates with many of the positive aspects of the Australian DSP, namely, the belief that with the right circumstances and support, all students are capable of achieving academic success. Sahlberg (2015, p. 152) argued that equity of outcomes in education means that students' socioeconomic status has little impact on how well they learn in school. Finland is consistently among the highest ranked countries in the world based on PISA test results, with the least gap between students in achievement. Sahlberg (2015, p. 6) describes the 'miracle' as:

> an example of a nation that lacks school inspection, and lacks reliance on externally collected data, standardized curriculum, high emphasis both on high-stakes student testing, test-based accountability, and a race to the top mentality with regard to educational change.

He commented that the teaching offered is congruent with the core values of the Finns, that is, social justice, caring for others and fostering happiness. The group working on educational policy defined pedagogy as educating for human development (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 14).

After the Second World War, most private schools in Finland were gradually closed in order to introduce a system of 'common schools' (Benn, 2018). Statistics indicate that, in 2000, 85% of the Finnish population were Lutheran. Such a significant sharing of group values makes it possible to promote and internalise a common ethos which enables policy to be carried forward, even though membership of the government may change. Although Sahlberg does not make this point, it is likely that the Finnish community, as a whole, accepts a values-based approach to the curriculum and to all aspects of schooling because these values are based on commonly held religious beliefs, with or without the practice of religion.

Despite Australia's different context, there are lessons to be learned from the Finnish experience. Finnish policies were motivating factors in South Australia's 2013 decision to introduce new requirements for teacher accreditation. The premier of the day, Jay Weatherill, proposed that by 2020 all beginning teachers would be required to have completed a master's degree. He believed that, as in Finland, the status of teachers would then be on a par with doctors and engineers. Other Australian states expressed interest in following the lead of South Australia. However, despite the universal belief in the fundamental importance of teachers achieving a master's level of education in their subject matter in order to give appropriate care to students, this policy was not able to be implemented due to a lack of support from the funding authority, the Australian Federal Government.

The undertakings to achieve excellence in education found in Finland are not likely to be replicated in South Australia. We do not have the history of politicians and stakeholders with the vision and commitment to formulate long-standing strategies. Policies, or perhaps more accurately, slogans, such as 'Your child–Our future', change as governments change, or as the latest budgets are announced.

This thesis will argue, however, that even if those entrusted with educational policy at a state level are unable to bring about change, schools themselves are able to effect change at the micro-level of the system. Campbell (2014), reflecting on the influence of *Making the Difference* (Connell et al., 1982), noted that reproduction theory has often been criticised as "underestimating the agency of individuals and groups in the making of their own lives" (Campbell, 2014, p. 2). Bearing this in mind, the focus of this study has been encouraged by recent research findings that have discovered ways of achieving equity and success for students from low SES backgrounds, enabling them to shape their own lives.

2.6 Section 5: Presentation of a New Paradigm, the Social Imaginary for Assisting Students from Low SES Backgrounds to Achieve Academic and Personal Success

2.6.1 Emergence of a new paradigm, a social imaginary, leading to success for low SES students

The last two decades have seen researchers (though not governments) turning from the tenets of neoliberalism, and focusing again on student success, both personal and academic, and the quality of teachers and schools needed to help students in achievement. In contrast to the earlier, largely pessimistic conclusions regarding the future for low SES students, there is a growing body of research (Considine and Zappala, 2002;Gustafson, 2002; Milne & Plourde, 2006; Irizarry and Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Quagliata, 2008; Gonski, Boston, Greiner, Lawrence, Scales and Tanner, 2011; Truebridge, 2015;), carried out predominantly in this century, that rejects the presumption of inevitability of low SES students' experience of educational failure and instead identifies and focuses on factors that will lead to success. Wrigley, Lingard and Thomson (2012, p. 98) outlined their ideas for a new paradigm, "a social imaginary" to replace that of neoliberalism. They introduced the notion of "pedagogies of transformation", rejecting the "official rhetoric of raising standards", arguing that under this banner "education is trivialised, literature treated as technical matter divorced from pleasure and purpose, and knowledge passed on as a set of inert facts".

2.6.2 The role of school ethos in the construction of student identity

The role of school ethos in the construction of student identity has emerged as an important factor to consider in this study in relation to students' success. According to Allder (1993), ethos is commonly understood not only as something to be experienced, but something that can be shaped by leadership and staff to have an influence on the education of students as well as being shaped by the responses of the students themselves. Ethos influences all aspects of education, not just the teaching of the formal curriculum, but across all activities of school life, including, and especially, the personal development of students (Connell, 2013a, p. 104).

Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, Ouston and Smith (1979, p. 154) explained ethos as "the style and quality of school life, patterns of student and teacher behaviour, management and treatment of students and care of buildings and grounds". In the findings of *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (Rutter et al., 1979) the concept of school ethos was used to explain the differences in academic attainment in schools. The researchers also found that "not only were pupils influenced by the way they were dealt with as individuals, but also there was a group influence resulting from the ethos of the school as an institution" (Rutter et al., 1979, p. 205).

The Consultative Green Paper to the British Government**,** *Schools Building on Success* (DfES, 2001), claimed that "evidence suggests that schools with a strong sense of identity or ethos perform best'. The report highlighted the educative importance of ethos and set out its own aim for a secondary system where "every school has a distinct ethos and character" (DfES, 2001, p. 5). The Green Paper (p. 61) affirms the role of the school in developing in students combinations of skills, attitudes, habits and team work which encourage students to make a contribution to the school community. The authors argued that where students developed a positive, respectful and can-do ethos, they would achieve high academic results.

Internalising the ethos of a school is part of the socialisation of the student, either confirming early family primary socialisation, or resulting in secondary socialisation within the school (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), in either case providing a compass for decision making. Furthermore, the ethos of the school, if internalised by teachers, results in a tertiary socialisation of teachers, posing the challenges for them to seek new paths of pedagogy, new ways of interacting with students and new ways of perceiving the self.

2.6.3 The role of leadership in the construction of student identity

The tenets of neoliberalism focus on the management skills of the principal rather than on leadership in the construction of student identity. However, in embracing the proposed social imaginary, the type of leadership adopted by individual principals and those holding delegated leadership responsibilities within a school depends on an acceptance and promotion of the vision and values on which the school is based and on the personal attributes of those in leadership. A recent report from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2018) claimed that effective principals have a significant impact on student learning by the way in which they shape a school's culture and create a shared vision among the whole school community. Smyth (2010, p. 80) asserts that the leadership of a school should have a "central unswerving passion and commitment to making the school work in the interest of the least advantaged". Shields (2013, p. 19) defined the twofold goal of this form of leadership as critiquing the underlying social, cultural and economic norms and finding ways to "equalise opportunities to deliver high quality education, inclusive citizenship and social justice for all".

Smyth and Wrigley (2013) reported on what they described as refreshing notions about culture and community in two Australian school communities. They described leaders who had developed school structures and organisation built around "social cohesion, empathy, caring, respect, reciprocity and trust" (Smyth and Wrigley, 2013, p. 167) as contributing to successful outcomes for students. Day et al. (2009, p. 194) emphasised the importance of the "vision, values, qualities,

diagnostic skills, strategic acumen, management competencies and behaviours" of individual leaders, describing these attributes as their moral purpose. From their research, Day and Sammons (2016) found that shared leadership, when leadership positions are distributed throughout the school, empowering teachers in areas of importance to them, were likely to result in improved student outcomes.

Another contemporary theory relating to leadership is that of instructional/pedagogical leadership. Robinson (2007) claimed that this approach is important for promoting better academic outcomes for students. She believed that the more leaders focus on their relationships with teachers and on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater will be their influence on student outcomes. However, she posited that if the focus is totally on leader/follower relations, the result may be a weakening of the effect on student outcomes. Day and Sammons (2016) contributed to this debate with their conclusion that transformative leadership and instructional/pedagogical leadership are not mutually exclusive. They suggested that a combination of strategies from both approaches can be used to ensure success in promoting student outcomes and improving conditions for teaching and learning

2.6.4 Significance of the construction of student identity in achieving success

Marks, McMillan and Hillman (2001, p. 56) found that one of the critical factors in achieving success in schools is the construction of the identity of a student with high expectations and belief in the self as an achiever. This perception of identity is the result of a sense of the self, fostered and maintained by the perceived expectations of significant others. They concluded that school factors which contributed to lifting tertiary entrance performance included "giving students confidence in their own abilities, providing an environment conducive to learning and in which students are likely to experience high expectations for educational success" (Marks et al., 2001, p. 56).

A recent study conducted by Devlin and MacKay (2014) challenged the claim proffered by those supporting the deficit discourse that low SES students have lower aspirations than their high SES peers. They reported that the low socioeconomic students who participated in their study "expressed high levels of aspiration and determination to succeed in their [university] studies" (Devlin and McKay, 2014, p. 112). According to Appadurai, "it is not a matter of raising aspirations but of providing opportunities for students to develop, describe, experiment with and experience the realisation of their aspirations" (cited in Sellar, et al., 2009, p. 69). Success is likely when all forces transmit, directly and indirectly, messages which affirm for students their value as a person and as a successful student.

2.6.5 The importance of highly qualified teachers

Teachers are the linchpin of any research findings into factors which nurture the student's self-image. We have seen how, under the aegis of the DSP, teachers themselves flourished when given the opportunity to do action research and implement their findings in their own classrooms. The research findings of Auguste, Kihn and Miller (2010) reported that high-achieving/high-equity schooling systems developed strategic and systematic approaches to attract and retain the most talented teachers and ensure that skilled teachers served students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. The Gonski Panel drew attention to research which showed that "high-achieving and high-equity schooling systems typically invest in building quality and capacity in school leaders and teachers" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 107). The Finnish education system, discussed above, is an excellent example of this approach.

Smyth (2012, p. 12) asserted that the model of a socially just school described a school which has "a clear and decisive mission [and] philosophy" and understands that its *raison d'etre* is about improving the life chances of all of its students. For Smyth, "a socially just school takes great pride in advancing the interests of its students by setting high standards and engaging its students in a rigorous curriculum, together with enriching co-curricular activities" (Smyth, 2012, p. 12). Furthermore, Smyth claims that problems associated with mandatory testing are circumvented by socially just schools. In other words, teachers reflecting the ethos of the school, will not "teach to the test" (Smyth 2012, p.12.), will not measure their achievements and the development of students with reference to their place in league tables, and will not give their major effort only to those subjects being tested. Hargreaves (cited in Sahlberg, 2015) was critical of those who are not defining or developing their own shared visions as moral purposes. He believed that "values are about shared ownership and the development of a community's own compelling purposes. They are not something to be rented" (Hargreaves, 2015, cited in Sahlberg, 2015, p. xvi).

2.6.6 The importance of caring, respectful teacher/student relationships

Talent is only one of the attributes of a good teacher. Marks claimed that teachers who "show an interest in every student's learning, provide personal support, hold high expectations for all, work with enthusiasm and take pride in their school have better results" (Marks, 2016, p. 6). He recognised that the quality of teachers is the greatest school related influence on student outcomes. The quality of teachers can be seen in their command of, and passion for, their subject; they will flourish if the school requires them to teach only in their area of expertise. Of itself, this is not enough to bring about the positive teacher/student relationships which will result in the structuring of a positive student identity. The teacher is charged also with the key element in constructing a positive identity, authentic care and respect for students (Rose, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Smyth,

Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson and Wurst, 2000; Wrigley, 2000; Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez and Garrett, 2003; Noddings, 2005; Antrop-Gonzalez and de Jesus, 2006; Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard, 2006; Connell, 2013a; Smyth and Wrigley, 2013; Marks, 2016; Dweck, 2016). In these research findings, students identified a caring teacher as "one who truly knows you as a person and to whom they could talk about personal problems" (Antrop-Gonzalez and de Jesus, 2006, p. 413). Care is not to be seen as mollycoddling. The research conducted by Antrop-Gonzalez and de Jesus (2006) in two Latino schools extended the notion of authentic care to include hard care, defined as being characterised by supportive instrumental relationships and high academic expectations.

Tronto's (2013) framework identifies five distinctive phases of care and their corresponding moral elements in providing a caring environment (elaborated in Chapter 7). They are:

1. *Caring About:* Recognising there is a need for care in order to address inequities.
2. *Caring For:* This involves taking responsibility for meeting individuals' needs and deciding how to respond.
3. *Care Giving:* This involves those who provide the actual work of caring for others.
4. *Care Receiving:* This involves the way in which the recipient responds to the care received from the caregiver.
5. *Caring with:* This involves the reiteration of the process of care where habits and patterns of care emerge through time.

In Tronto's (2001) framework for judging the 'integrity' of care, she emphasised that in order to achieve this, it is essential that every one of the phases, outlined above, is addressed. Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer (2014, p. 203) suggested that Tronto's ideas can be "used as a normative framework to judge the adequacy of care in education policies and practice". Tronto's framework will later be used to evaluate the adequacy of care in the actual policies and practices of the school selected for the study as they are articulated in the staff and student interviews (see Chapter 7).

Further constructs of Tronto's schema are elaborated by Zembylas et al. (2014). Firstly, as illustrated in her framework, care is more than a disposition, it is also a competence that is not necessarily an innate capability but is one that can be learned. Secondly, caring is not merely an individual practice; at its best it is an institutional competence, a collective commitment.

Connell (2013a, p. 104) also refers to the importance of care through her notion of 'encounter', which she believes implies respect and reciprocity, "a degree of mutual engagement by learner and teacher". She asserted that mutual respect is a necessary condition for "the complex communication through which complex learning occurs" (Connell, 2013a, pp. 104-105). The idea of 'mutuality', 'encounter' and 'reciprocity' of respect appears to be at the heart of authentic care. 'Respect' as an

element of care was the word most frequently used by the 209 young people involved in a study that explored why young people disconnect from school (Smyth et al., 2000).

Wrigley (2000, p. 169) indicated that teachers earn respect when they show respect to their students. In his study of successful inner-city schools, case studies revealed that respect rather than discipline was the key to fostering positive relationships. Wrigley asserted that personal support and respect enables students to "make the social, emotional and psychic investment necessary for learning" (Wrigley, 2000, cited in Smyth and Wrigley, 2013, p. 157). Such support needs to be based on respect towards the 'other', with emphasis placed on interactions that are directed towards the development of integrity or self-concept for each individual.

Respect embedded in authentic care is hardly a new goal for schools. Most schools project the philosophy of caring for the whole person. A glance at the site of MySchool profiles shows schools expressing their philosophy of being a caring, friendly school, of having outstanding pastoral care and a sense of community, of an emphasis on a growing sense of social justice, self-belief and confidence, of developing values in a spirit of care and cooperation (ACARA, 2018). Such approaches, if implemented, run counter to the theorising of those who maintain that schools, through their structures, reproduce the structures of an inequitable society (Connell et al., 1982, p.190) and, therefore, by implication, deem it not possible for teachers to change the status quo.

Many schools that promote their philosophy on their website believe that they *can* act as transformative agents and counter the inroads and effects of the government and the business world which impose the results of testing as the measure of a good or bad education. In other words, they aspire or claim to promote a transformative pedagogy, as defined by Wrigley and Lingard et al. (2012). This is already the espoused goal of most schools across all education sectors. Translating the rhetoric into reality, however, is the contemporary challenge facing schools in a context of commodified education.

2.6.7 Social inclusion/peer group support

Another element in the construction of identity is the role of social inclusion and the importance of the peer group members as significant others. Hayes et al. (2006, p. 177) refer to Coleman's assertion that "a pupil's achievement is strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of other students in the school" (Coleman, 1966, p. 22). Rutter et al. (1979, p. 154) concluded that "the presence of a relatively high concentration of pupils in the upper ability groups may work to the advantage not only of the pupils themselves but also to their peers". Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel and Lim (2014, p. 30) found that the most important influences determining choices to attend university were those of parents and peers. Wrigley and Lingard et al. (2012, p.

104) cite inclusion as a central issue for schools attempting to achieve socially just academic outcomes for their students. Seen as a microcosm of the society from which their students may be drawn, schools are faced with major divisions in society. In addressing these divisions, Wrigley and Lingard et al. (2012) asserted that it is paramount that the policies of a school should be inclusive of the whole school community.

In Australia, the Gonski Report (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 111) referred to the growing body of research findings that demonstrate that "the composition of a school's population has a significant impact on the outcomes achieved by all". Amongst this research, Thrupp's (1999, p. 5) research into the effects of what he terms 'school mix' or the social class composition of a school's student intake, suggested that aspects of schooling such as "student relations, classroom instruction and school organization and management may be powerfully influenced by school mix". He reached the conclusion that the likely outcome of this is to lift the mean levels of student achievement in low socioeconomic settings. Thrupp (1999, p. 123) also found that the student mix effect was best understood by looking at the cumulative outcome of many smaller effects related to exposure to higher socioeconomic peers, and direct and indirect instructional, organisational and management processes. He presented evidence which pointed to the "clear advantage accrued by students who attend middle class schools" (Thrupp, 1999, p. 123).

In the US, the policy of establishing school classes mixed from a financial viewpoint is inextricably tied to issues of race and the avoidance of racism. An analysis of current policy published in the US (Campbell, 2016) found that an increasing number of school districts (2 in 1996, 91 in 2016) were returning to the Coleman report to adopt a policy of mixing students of different income levels, thus avoiding any criticisms of being racist. In 2016, President Obama introduced the *Stronger Together* program which provided grants to school districts advocating economic integration. The US Secretary of Education, John B. King, asserted that "there is evidence from across the country that shows students who go to economically and racially diverse schools not only do better in K-12 but go on to success after graduation" (Abdul-Alim, 2016, p. 2).

The evidence of the positive effects of school mix were demonstrated as early as 1966 and continues to be demonstrated by writers across the decades. A number of authors (Coleman et al., 1966; Rutter et al., 1979; Thrupp, 1999; Hayes et al., 2006; Gonski et al., 2011; Abdul-Alim, 2016; Campbell, 2016) have presented evidence indicating that students who attend financially and racially diverse schools achieve success at school and beyond.

2.6.8 Features of high quality/high equity schooling

The next element to be considered in the construction of identity includes the role of expectations of academic success and attendance at a high quality/high equity schools (Marks et al., 2001, p. 53; Gemici, Lim and Karmel, 2013; Gonski et al., 2011; OECD, 2010; Rothman & McMillan, 2003). Lim, Gemici and Karmel (2013, p. 20) found that the academic quality of the school had a considerable effect on school completion and the probability of attending university for those from low SES backgrounds. They concluded that, for these students, "the quality of the school matters" (Lim et al., 2013, p. 20). Marks et al. (2001, p. 56) concluded from their study that school level factors which contributed to lifting tertiary entrance performance included "giving students confidence in their own abilities and providing an environment conducive to learning and in which students are likely to experience high expectations for educational success".

Having high expectations is critical to academic success (Nieto and Bode, 2012). For students in some environments, it is not 'cool' to complete their education to Year 12 nor to aspire to going on to university (Tranter, 2010). But if significant others, teachers and the rest of the students do manifest this aspiration and create an environment where such aspirations are the norm, then it is likely that most, if not all, of the class will embrace this aspiration (Gemici et al., 2014).

2.6.9 Major themes emerging from the literature review

To sum up, using the social imaginary described above, elements of the study will seek to explore in depth the insights arising from the literature that focus on key factors that are positive and have the potential to contribute to student success and which will be woven into a positive paradigm, the 'social imaginary', against which to measure the positive efforts made to help students achieve success. They include:

1. An environment (ethos) that fosters the enabling of positive student identity;
2. The role of leadership as a force for equity and social justice;
3. Construction of positive student identity, belief in the self as an achiever, can-do attitude, an effective agent in her own imaginary;
4. Caring, respectful teacher/student relationships;
5. Social inclusion/importance of the peer group; and,
6. Maintenance of high expectations within a high quality/high equity school.

Figure 2.1 encapsulates a model that illuminates the interactions between school elements that contribute towards the construction of students' positive identity. The model depicts the student interacting with, and being influenced by, each of the elements encircling the student, namely the relationships with teachers and support staff, the policy of social inclusion within the school, the

leadership and ethos of the school, and the high expectations of academic success. All of these factors interact to produce a high quality/high equity school with a learning environment that benefits the student, both academically and personally. It is posited that, interacting with each of these elements as 'significant others', students construct their identities as serious, committed students and enter into the process of secondary socialisation within the school.

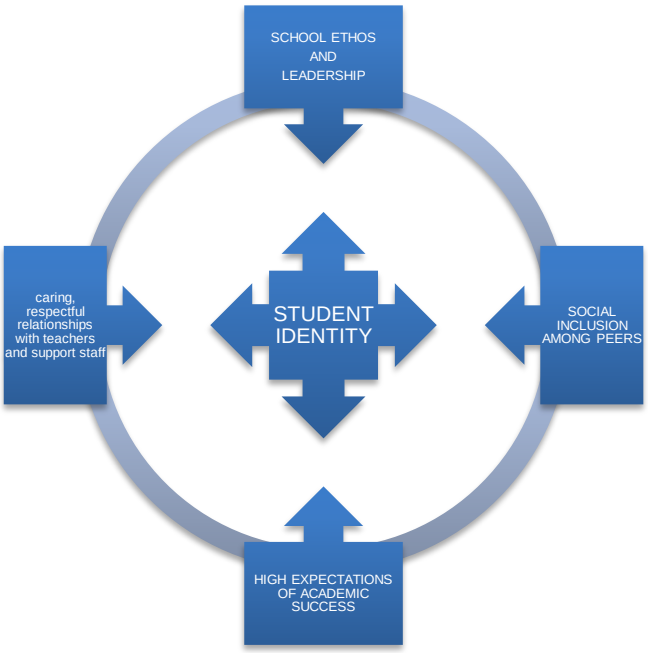

Figure 2.1: Interactions between school elements

According to Berger, "one identifies oneself as one is identified by others, by being located in a common world" (2013, p. 120). This constructed meaning represents the lived reality that will influence the actions, behaviour and identity of students. This study will examine this lived reality in the social and cultural environment of a selected school and how this reality contributes to the formation of a positive student identity.

2.7 Conclusion

In the last 15 years, a great deal of research has focused on positive outcomes of schooling and has undertaken to show how the mantra 'given the right conditions all students can be successful' (Gonski et al., 2011) translates into practice. This research seeks to examine what are the possible 'right conditions' in one school.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter will outline the theoretical perspective of the research and describe the methodological approach and design of the research process. It will briefly describe the research context that will be elaborated in Chapter 4 as well as the participants and the processes used to recruit and engage with them. The data generation and analysis processes will be described along with the limitations and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Questions

The key research question is:

What school-based factors contribute to successful academic and personal outcomes for students from low SES backgrounds?

To answer this question, the chosen approach is a case study on one school that has claimed to experience success in graduating students from low SES and marginal backgrounds. Incorporating knowledge of this case, the research will take place using two stages. The first stage will examine the case to be used following questions, namely,

1. What values and principles and strategies does the school use to address the educational and personal needs of students from low SES backgrounds?
2. What evidence is there of academic success for students of low SES backgrounds in the case study?

The second stage will use the following sub questions to help address the central research questions. They are:

1. What factors do Year 12 students of low SES background report as contributing to their academic success at school.

2. What factors do teaching/support staff perceive as those that positively contribute to the academic success of low SES students?

3. How do these factors compare with the insights of studies that have adopted a proactive stance towards the provision of education for low SES students?

3.2 Research Methodology

Crotty (1998) alleged that the imperative for people doing research is first to build a 'scaffold' on which to base their research. While some writers include ontology in such a schema, Crotty asserted that the notion of ontology overlaps the other items in the schema below, and that it is not necessary to address it as a separate category. For Crotty, ontology is more appropriately addressed in the categories of metaphysics and philosophy. Table 3.1, below, outlines the theoretical framework of this study, adapted from Crotty (1998, p. 5).

Table 3.1: Outlining the framework for this study

Epistemology	Methodology	Methods
• Constructivism	• Case Study • Interpretive approach	• Interviews • Narratives • Qualitative/Quantitative Data analysis • Analysis of school documents

An interpretive paradigm, founded on the theoretical position of constructivism, is adopted in order to understand how society, and identity within that society, is socially constructed. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the case study approach used in my research and outline the research design process.

3.2.1 Epistemology

This research adopts an interpretive research paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) and, in order to understand more fully what is happening in a particular context, it takes, temporarily, a micro approach, focusing on small scale, face-to-face interactions developed from an empirical study of data. Interpretive positions are founded on the theoretical position of constructivism, that is, society is socially constructed (Mertens, 1998, p. 11), and identity within that society is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Interpretive approaches rely typically on qualitative research methods, nevertheless, its findings may be supplemented by hard data. In this case, the examination of SACE results, choices of Year 12 subjects and selection of higher education courses will be used in describing the case to establish its appropriateness for the study.

This research takes the stance proposed by Connell (2013a) who advocated coming down from the balcony (of positivist research), entering into the life of the students and teachers being observed, and interacting with them to understand their perceived reality of the schooling process as it

affected them. This research is not intended to be of an interventionist nature, rather, it is meant to give a clearer understanding to staff at a particular school of processes taking place in their classrooms. It is possible that the school studied, and, indeed, other schools, may find that the research results can be used to affirm current policies and practices and as a basis of change in some areas.

3.2.2 Constructivism

The cornerstone of constructivism is that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 1998, p. 11). In explaining constructivism, Crotty (1998, p. 8) states: "there is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed".

Social constructivism is based on a sociology of knowledge, a concept developed by Berger and Luckmann (1967). Their theory, based on the writings of Schutz, Durkheim and Mead, develops the idea that when groups work collaboratively, they construct knowledge for one another and create a culture with shared meanings. When individuals are immersed in such a culture, they learn how to participate and become part of that culture on many levels.

Unlike those whose focus was on classes of people, Berger and Luckmann's (1967) sociology of knowledge approach focuses on individuals. Individuals, having constructed a primary identity within the family, then construct the identity of their secondary socialisation, usually within a school situation. This is applicable to all students. Berger and Luckmann's sociological understanding of identity will be explored further in this study in relation to the socialisation of low socioeconomic students.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain how schools do not necessarily reproduce the attributes of social disadvantage as is claimed by many researchers (Bourdieu, 1973). Individuals construct their understanding and meaning through their interaction with significant others who read back to the individuals defining characteristics. This constructed meaning represents the lived reality which will determine their actions and behaviour. Referring, in particular, to the work of Berger and Luckmann (1967), this study will examine this lived reality in the social and cultural environment of a school.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) proposed that individuals, interacting with a social system (here students interacting with teachers and the concept of 'school' as an entity), over time, form perceptions of the self, arising from the interventions of significant others in their lives. Over time, they internalise these perceptions, modify their behaviour, and produce characteristics leading to the possibility of predictions of behaviour ('Mary would never do a thing like that') and expectations of one's self ('It is just not like me to act like that'). Manifestly, the theorising of Berger and

Luckmann cannot be used as a basis for changing the structures of society. It is used in the current work to set out to explain how change can take place in the individual by bringing about secondary socialisation within an established social group.

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Case study approach

This research will use a case study approach through the use of qualitative research methodologies, supplemented by relevant quantitative data, to explore low SES students' experiences of schooling. In particular, it will seek to understand how the ethos, policies and structures of the school, including relationships between students and teachers, influence low SES students' attitudes, perceptions and aspirations.

The case study serves as the main unit of analysis in its exploration of the academic outcomes of students from low SES backgrounds. For this case study, the intrinsic approach (Greenaway 2011; Stake, 1995, 2003) fits comfortably in that it involves the exploration of one particular case for its own sake; it is designed, in Yin's terms (2003, p. 40), to "confirm, challenge or extend the theory". Yin, (2012, pp. 6-10), provided a useful framework for designing a case study. His framework included the following three steps, each of which will be considered in designing this particular case study: (1) defining a case; (2) selecting a case study design; (3) using theory in design work.

As a first step, Yin (2012) emphasised the importance of defining the case that will be studied. The objectives of the study, the review of the literature relevant to the topic and the research questions will define the case study. In Yin's terms, a case is a bounded entity, in this study, a particular group within an organisation. The case serves as the main unit of analysis in its exploration of the academic outcomes of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Yin suggested that case studies are pertinent when the research addresses an exploratory question: 'How or why did something happen?' In this instance, 'Why/How do disadvantaged students succeed personally and academically'? (Yin, 2012).

Yin's second step involves the selection of the type of case study that is most appropriate for the present research. The choice was that of a holistic single case study. Yin's third step involves deciding whether or not to use theory to assist in the design of research questions, the organisation of data analysis and the findings from the case study. The use of theory in this study is confined to the use of Berger and Luckmann's (1967) explanations regarding the social construction of identity formation, based on the selection of issues that have been identified by theorists in the review of the relevant literature for building a persona of a committed student. This case study will attempt, as

stated above, to challenge the generally held view that low socioeconomic students are unlikely to achieve success in their Year 12 studies and gain access to higher education.

Greenaway (2011, p. 1) asserted that the strengths of the case study method lie in "the capacity for in-depth study of complex social phenomenon in real-life settings". This case study aims to derive an in-depth understanding of a single cohort of low socioeconomic students set within the context of the school. An analysis of the results of Year 12 students who attended the school between 2008 to 2014 will also be made to allow comparisons to be made between the results of the School Card students compared with the rest of the Year 12 cohorts over this seven-year time span (see Table 4.2).

3.4 Research Context

The context of this study, the case, is a Catholic school for girls, established by the Religious Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, with an enrolment of 1,300 students from Pre-school to Year 12. This context will be outlined more fully in Chapter 4.

3.5 Research Design

Accepting the epistemology of constructivism, it is proposed to gather data in researching the main question posed by the study, namely, what are some of the key factors affecting the academic and personal outcomes of low SES students in the school as they themselves perceive them and as teachers perceive them. Using qualitative research, supported by relevant quantitative data (but without adopting a quantitative paradigm or employing quantitative measures of validity), this study will investigate the academic and personal outcomes of graduates from low SES backgrounds within a particular school with emphasis on a selected cohort of students, namely, those who graduated in 2012.

This thesis will provide an account of the ways in which the everyday life of a school has contributed to these graduates' growth in self-confidence and motivation to succeed. Using the voices of past students and staff, the study will investigate their immediate lived experiences to identify the structures of the school which, in their opinions, contributed to students' academic and personal success.

3.6 Data Sources and Generation

The research design has two distinct stages:

Stage 1: Defining the case: This will occur through:

(i) Analysis of relevant school documents relating to the ethos, polices and strategies of the school.

(ii) Analysis of Year 12 results of students on School Card in 2012.

Stage 2: Generating the research data which will employ interviews that will come from two different sources, namely:

(i) Interviews with leaders, teachers and support staff regarding their perceptions of their role and expectations in their support for students on School Card in achieving success.

(ii) Interviews with six graduates regarding their lived experience and perceptions of the school environment including curriculum, peers and teachers and its influences on their learning and life aspirations.

The methods for generating these data are now outlined firstly for stage one, defining and exploring the case, and secondly for generating the research data.

3.6.1 Defining and examining the case:

i. School Documents

School documents that are relevant to this study will be analysed. They include the Mission, Vision and Value Statements formulated in 1993 (see Appendix 1), as well as the enrolment practices, all of which outline the core beliefs underpinning every aspect of the life and work of the school. This study focuses on the years 1983-2013.

ii. Student Outcomes Data

An analysis of the Year 12 SACE results of low SES students who attended the school between 2008 and 2014 will be made (Table 4.2). The subjects studied and the post-school destinations of low SES graduates (Table 4.3) will also be analysed. The quantitative data provides evidence to support the claims of the school's success in achieving positive educational outcomes for School Card students.

These data will be analysed to make comparisons between the results of the 2012 low SES students compared with the rest of the Year 12 cohorts in this seven-year time span (Table 4.2).

3.6.2 Research data: Stakeholders Lived Experiences

i. Staff interviews

Participants to be interviewed in this study will be invited from three different groups:

- **Leadership Team:** Principal, Deputy Principals and Business Manager
- **Teachers** of subjects undertaken by the 2012 Year 12 cohort of School Card students.
- **Support staff** who worked with School Card students in 2012.

ii. Graduate interviews

A sample of graduate students on School Card from the 2012, Year 12 cohort will be interviewed. The choice of this year allows sufficient time from the graduates' completion of Year 12 to enable them to reflect on their school experience and to comment on their post-school pathways.

3.7 Recruitment Processes for Interviewees

Eleven teachers and support staff who were most involved in teaching and working with the students in this study were invited to participate. The study had the full support of the current Principal and Leadership Team who were willing to take part.

Twenty students were listed as low SES students in Year 12 in 2012. After listing them in order of their ATAR scores, from highest to lowest, every third student was invited to attend an interview. Attempts were made to contact the first nine identified, and thereafter each student, in order, until six students had accepted the invitation to participate. With approval of the College authorities, graduate student contact details were sourced from the college archives.

3.8 Interview Process

The interviews consisted of an open-ended question, followed by supplementary questions related to the responses of the participants (Foddy, 1993). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Foddy (1993, p. 23) pointed out that "both the researcher and respondent exhibit a kind of reflexive intelligence as they negotiate the meaning of questions on the one hand, and the meaning of answers on the other". In her research, Tranter (2010, p. 97) acknowledged "both the power of the interviewer in the research relationship and also the power of the interviewee who is able to decide what to say and what to not say". Both individuals who conducted the interviews had considerable understanding of the context being researched, which assisted in their probing questions and the interpretation of the data. As a sensitivity to the ethical constraints of interviews between staff and a

former principal, these interviews were conducted by a research assistant with no recent connection with the school or staff.

3.8.1 Analysis of interview data

Data from the interviews were systematically analysed using Yin's (2012, pp. 15-16) 'pattern matching' analytic technique. This involved stipulating an expected outcome at the outset of the case study. Using a 'pattern-matching' logic enabled comparisons to be made between the empirical pattern, based on the data collected from the interviews, and the predicted pattern based on the findings from the literature review.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Approval for this research was required from the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee and the principal of the school selected for the study (see Appendix 4).

An information sheet, outlining the study was prepared for all those being invited to participate in the study. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information provided and their anonymity safeguarded in the findings to be included in the research report. No names or other identifying factors would be used. According to Greenaway (2011, p. 2), a main ethical consideration in case study research is "protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants". The storage and disposal of materials gathered during the study will be conducted in accordance with Flinders University policy.

Participants were also reminded that their participation would be voluntary and that they might withdraw from the research at any time. All participants provided informed consent by way of signing a consent form prior to the commencement of their interview.

An important ethical consideration in this study relates to the relationship between the main researcher and the participants, former Year 12 students. From an ethical point of view, it is noted that Yin (2003, p. 1), when defining the use of case studies as the preferred technique when 'how' or 'why' questions are being asked, suggests that the investigator should "have little control over events". The graduates involved in this study were interviewed by the main researcher who was the principal of their school when they completed Year 12 in 2012. During the interviews, the possibility existed that they might respond to the questions by giving answers that they thought the researcher wanted to hear, rather than their honest opinions. As noted earlier, where a direct relationship was present between the researcher and the interviewees, namely leaders and staff, an independent research assistant was engaged.

The researcher for this study has previously had control over events at the school as Principal. However, for the past six years she has had no contact with the former students involved in this study or with the making of policy in the school.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

The research involves an in-depth study of a particular group of Year 12 students in the selected school at a point in time and, therefore, the findings cannot be considered as generalisable to other schools (Mertens, 1998). This is seen as a limitation of this research, accepting that all schools have unique characteristics, including ethos, climate, administrative structures, policies, and wide ranging socioeconomic/multicultural student populations. Though the study is designed to be limited in its scope, the data generated by the interviews with students and staff will provide a qualitative contribution to balance the predominantly quantitative Australian literature on the Year 12 achievement of low socio-economic students and their access to higher education.

In addition to seeking perceptions from former students, the Leadership Team, Year 12 teachers responsible for teaching subjects chosen by the students in this study and support staff will also be asked to offer their perceptions.

A further limitation of this study is that it is limited to the school population and opinions were not sought from students' parents/caregivers. Rather than discussing the important influence of families, the focus of this research is on the ways the school, with its ethos, culture, policies and strategies, influenced students' perceptions, aspirations and achievements.

There is an important issue regarding the possibility of implementing findings of this research in schools where the student population consists of a majority of low SES students. The 'social imaginary' is based on a predominantly middle class school enrolling a proportion of low SES students.

The following chapter provides background information relevant to the selected school as the context for this research.

CHAPTER 4 THE SCHOOL: DEFINING THE CASE

This chapter introduces the selected school, tracing its historical background from 1880 to the present time. The school is a Catholic college, enrolling girls from Preschool to Year 12. In order to preserve a degree of anonymity, the school will be referred to as St Ethnea. Located in the heart of a capital city, the school includes a broad range of students, drawn from over sixty-five nationalities and from more than one hundred and thirty-five postcodes.

For the period under investigation, this chapter will outline the school's foundation values and the key strategies that framed a deliberate plan to assist students from low SES backgrounds to gain maximum benefit from their schooling experience. In order to establish the school's record of success for vulnerable students, the chapter concludes with an analysis of data of the 2012 cohort of low SES students.

4.1 Foundation Values of Catholic Education

In the 1880s, the Irish people in Australia were commonly described as the 'dirt poor', who were escaping from famine through migration. There were some exceptions, such as the political convicts, who later figured as architects and in various other professions. But, on the whole, in Australia, the Irish were rejected not only because of their low social status, but also because of a prevailing anti-Catholic sentiment. As a matter of policy and social bias, they were often refused employment by businesses. However, today, this kind of sentiment has dissipated, and a great change can be seen in the social standing of descendants of Irish Catholics. Catholic Education has played a significant role is this change.

Arguably, schools established by religious communities, especially the Catholic schools with their focus on the poorer migrant communities, have had a significant influence on the development of South Australian culture and values (Fogarty, 1959; Whitelock, 1977; Hilliard, 2000). Catholic schools, in the first instances of colonisation, focused on serving the underprivileged and sought to break the cycle of social and economic marginalisation for these poverty-stricken families. From such Catholic schooling, large numbers of graduates, who have come from impoverished back grounds, have gone on to serve Australia in various professions. Thus, it is argued here that many Catholic schools became agents of social mobility, and the case of St Ethnea is no exception. Indeed, government schools also acted as agents of social mobility for migrant communities, including Greeks and Italians. Bordieu's (1973) contention that schools reproduce the structures of power of the wider society is not borne out. Education, in general, in Australia became the means of social mobility

4.2 Mercy Charism

The charism of Mercy, which was espoused by the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, is a significant legacy which has been handed down to all institutions which operate under the aegis of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea. Today, the Sisters and their partners in Mercy are:

> dedicated to serving people who suffer from injustices related to poverty, sickness or lack of education, and have continually endeavoured to respond to a range of local and global needs (Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea 2018).

This Mercy charism, with its accent on compassion, hospitality, respect, justice, and service defines the policies and procedures developed in the school and inspires the relationships between all members of the school community.

4.3 History of the School

The origins of the school are significant. The Mercy ethos is a story carried down through history. The Religious Institute of the Sisters of Mercy was founded in 1831 in Dublin, Ireland, with the express purpose of educating poor children and training poor women and girls to enable them to obtain work and to take their place in society. The Institute flourished and, following this, Sisters were sent from Ireland to English speaking countries throughout the world (as well as Argentina in 1856) to minister to the influx of Irish immigrants. Later, in 1880, in a time of political and religious unrest in Buenos Aires, the Sisters sought refuge in Australia, obtaining land in the centre of an Australian capital city and establishing two educational enterprises, one that focused on the needs of young Irish immigrant women, meeting them as they arrived by ship and then training them in domestic skills to enable them to apply for work, and the other, the foundation of St Ethnea, an academic school and St Cecilia's school for the very poor. From these beginnings, until the present time, St Ethnea has reached out to those who are poor and marginalised and to successive waves of refugees coming to Australia from countries in chaos.

4.4 Engagement with Social Justice Issues

Commitment to social justice values is evident in the school's support for local works associated with the Sisters of Mercy such as a day centre for homeless persons, a refuge and housing for women experiencing homelessness and domestic violence, and accommodation for men transitioning from homelessness to independent living. The school has introduced programs that engage its students with these local social support initiatives as well as enabling students to engage in similar programs further afield. One such program is in Argentina (maintaining the link with the

founding source of the Sisters) which is directed at the extremely poor communities in the barrios. The St Ethnea school community and students were responsible for raising funds to build a community centre, to organise water supply, to establish a refuge from domestic violence for women and children and for the refurbishment of a preschool centre where children would be cared for while their mothers sought work. Another program involves a partnership with the school and an Indigenous school and community in Pipalyatjara, located in the APY lands in north western South Australia, aimed at fostering relationships and understanding between students and staff involved in this program. Students studying for the Duke of Edinburgh Award at Gold level are actively involved in supporting projects in Bathurst Island. All students routinely take part in raising money for humanitarian aid in the aftermath of world disasters. All these projects form an important part of the school's program to expose students to social justice issues.

4.5 Fostering High Educational Expectations and Aspirations

Since the school's foundation in 1880, many graduates have taken up significant positions in many parts of the world, bearing the fruits of the social justice ethos of the school. Former students include the first woman graduate in Law (1916); the first Australian woman lawyer seconded to the United Nations (1950-1958); the first woman in South Australia to be awarded a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), 1988; the first person to gain a Master of Education in South Australia (1964); the first female Queen's Counsel in Australia (1962); the first Chair of the Human Rights Commission (1981-1986); the first female Governor of an Australian State (1991-1996); the first female Supreme Court Judge (1965-1983); and the first and second female chancellor of a university in the Commonwealth (1980 and 1988). Today's graduates work all over the world; in Cambodia, Thailand, Pakistan, Kenya and the United Nations.

4.6 A Critical Moment for Change

Despite these successes, in the 1990s it became apparent that there were significant external influences and internal challenges that gave rise to the need for change, including the rise of neoliberalism, with its imperatives for the world of education to behave more like businesses (Thomson, 2007).

An external influence was that the Association of Non-Government Education Employees (ANGEE) was pressing for the introduction into schools of positions of responsibility (POR) that would offer teachers greater roles in supervision and decision making. Along with these new responsibilities came the introduction of salary incentives. From 1989, awards were being

restructured around “the structural efficiency principle” (Seidel, 2018). Once the new managerial changes were promulgated, schools were faced with significantly increased budgetary demands.

There were several internal imperatives for rethinking St Ethnea’s operations and practices. Particular curriculum approaches were placing onerous burdens on the school’s budget. One such example of this was Integrated Studies which, in this context, was an interdisciplinary approach whereby the class teacher was responsible for teaching Religion, English, Social Studies and Science. Integrated Studies was timetabled in blocks of time to provide for classes or individuals to access the resources of the city surrounding the school. At a considerable cost, Integrated Studies required teachers to be released from the classroom for extended planning time each week. Though higher percentages of young people continued at school until the completion of Year 12, the prevailing curriculum structure neither challenged middle class students nor benefitted students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It appeared that the prevailing Integrated Studies approach in Years 8-10, initiated in the 1970s, was not addressing the needs of students from low SES backgrounds who were often left floundering. A critical concern was the results of Year 12 students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds. Their preparation for university studies, based on the policy of Integrated Studies, proved to be unsuccessful and seemingly inappropriate. All of these factors resulted in declining enrolments which gave rise to concerns about the school’s financial liquidity.

Another internal concern was that the Integrated Studies approach resulted in the allocation of some staff who had no formal qualifications in their teaching area. The breadth and variety of subjects taught in Integrated Studies made it almost impossible to employ teachers who had expertise across all areas in which they were required to teach.

Until the 1960s, the school relied largely on religious Sisters of Mercy to staff and guide the school with their shared beliefs about education based on their religious order. As a result, the school had not had a practice of formally documenting its core values and intent because such values were tacit to the communal life of the religious order. It became apparent that the school leadership needed to examine closely whether the strategies chosen to confront the economic challenges they now faced would ensure that they remained faithful to their founding principles. In particular, they realised the need to underscore their mission to provide an education that would enable students from impoverished backgrounds to experience educational success and access to options in their post school lives.

A major renewal and restructuring were initiated and documented. There were three key domains that needed attention in the review. Firstly, the renewal process prompted leadership and staff to

turn their gaze to the school's mission and purpose, explicitly highlighting the values to guide the way forward. They resolved that some very deliberate choices were needed to ensure that new policies and practices would foster the core values of Mercy. namely, compassion, justice, inclusivity, hospitality, service of those in need, respect and the pursuit of excellence. The second domain was aimed at the improvement in educational quality to enhance students' success. The focus of this was twofold, namely, restructuring the secondary school curriculum and enhancing teachers' capabilities to meet their responsibilities. The third domain was managerial which included achieving financial liquidity to underwrite the new initiatives and to realign the new management structure to support the new order of operations.

4.7 Outcomes of the Reform

Following on from the review of these three domains of ethos, educational quality and alignment of management, there were significant and positive outcomes that became embedded in the school's practices aimed at contributing to enhanced student success.

4.7.1 Shared ethos and values

A focus of the reform was an articulation and documentation of the core values of the school that resulted in three formal statements formulated by the wider school community in 1993. These documents were the *Mission Statement*, the *Vision Statement* and the *Values Statement* (Appendix 1). These statements guided the school in responding to the ecclesial, political and social pressures, and to the personal, social and educational needs of those currently enrolled in the school, including new arrivals from Vietnam and Cambodia seeking refuge from their war-ravaged countries. The core values enshrined in these documents proclaimed the centrality of Gospel values, based on the life and teachings of Jesus, and made explicit in the charism of Mercy, in determining the quality of relationships, policies and procedures within the school. These values have been held by those involved with the school since its foundation and are drawn from the legacy of Catherine McAuley (Bourke, 1987; McLay, 1996; Gale, 2000).

The 1993 documents identified the importance of respect for the uniqueness of each person and encouraged the pursuit of the "joys, freedoms and challenges of all aspects of learning and truth, through a balanced, dynamic curriculum" (Mission Statement, 1993). There was a statement of acknowledgement that diversity brings with it a responsibility to cater for wide-ranging interests, talents and educational needs. The necessity of encouraging students how to be self-disciplined and purposeful as they strove to achieve personal excellence was recognised. Emphasis on an intention to foster a critical awareness of the world about them and to develop a strong sense of social justice and a desire to reach out to those in need was made explicit. In an ever-changing society, caring for

the environment and adopting a balanced approach to living became a challenge for everyone. The 1993 revisioning statements remained as guiding documents for the next 25 years until the school realigned itself afresh to the Mercy vision with the release of the Strategic Plan 2017-2021.

4.7.2 Financial recovery to support educational quality and student success

The organisational reform achieved a number of positive changes to the bottom line of the budget. The restructure of the curriculum involved abandoning Integrated Studies. The review of staff responsibilities, as a result of that change, caused a number of positions to become redundant, thus making it possible to redirect funding into services that would better support student learning. Furthermore, the intensive teacher preparation time no longer required for the Integrated studies program, made it possible to redirect funds into student support services.

A number of entrepreneurial initiatives were introduced aimed at increasing the financial viability of the school. It was decided to increase the numbers of students in the international program, which had commenced in 1989, to promote study tours for groups of students from overseas and to establish an English Language Centre for students and adults. These initiatives succeeded in bringing financial viability to the school and enhanced ongoing capacity to offer reduced fees to low SES students.

4.7.3 Curriculum reform and teacher capability building

Following the renewal and restructure in 1990, the school introduced a comprehensive curriculum in Years 8-10 and, in Years 11 and 12, a broad range of theoretical and applied subjects that would offer all students opportunities to enter diverse and personally appropriate educational pathways**.** The funds saved by the change from an integrated curriculum, as well as by the staff redundancies referred to earlier, were redirected to hire specialist teachers and support staff to address the specific needs of low SES students; to assist teachers to further their professional development to achieve high standards, and to appoint them to teach only in areas where they held relevant qualifications.

4.7.4 Inclusive enrolment

There was a deliberate effort to make the enrolment available to those in need and, in particular, to accommodate refugees, Indigenous students and the financially disadvantaged. Financial assistance was kept confidential and support was offered in a way that respected the dignity of the recipient. No test for the ability to pay school fees is applied. The Business Manager assists families to apply for a School Card where there is hardship which can be shown to meet eligibility requirements. For those whose applications are rejected, the Business Manager negotiates the payment (or reduction or waiving) of school fees. No member of staff, other than the Business Manager, has access to this

information. In a total school population of 1,127 students in 2012, 214 students were successful in their applications for School Card. An additional 53 students applied for a school card but were rejected by the State Government department. Fee remissions were then offered to these students. In addition to the reduction and remission of fees, a number of scholarships are offered that are named after two high profile successful graduates of the school. One is awarded to Indigenous students on the basis of financial hardship and another is offered for students from low SES backgrounds.

The values of hospitality and inclusion supported a strategy of enrolment without entrance tests of any kind, academic, religious or financial. The school's enrolment practices give preference to students from Catholic backgrounds. Apart from this one criterion, however, the school has open-ended enrolment. The school is multi-faith. In 1983, following discussions by the leadership of the school and the members of the State Aboriginal Education Committee, the school made a deliberate decision to support Indigenous students who had demonstrated an aptitude for study. This has resulted in maintenance of a regular enrolment of 30 Indigenous students. Students from refugee backgrounds are actively welcomed and peers are taught how to help them feel part of the school community. A Peer Support Program, involving groups of students from Year 11 working with Year 8 students, trains students to develop skills in welcoming and caring for new students. Specialist staff are employed to offer assistance to newly arrived students and their families. The success of this deliberate inclusion is evidenced by recently arrived refugees and Indigenous students being attracted to the school by word of mouth from amongst their own communities. In addition, the state Department of Education and Child Development or another school will sometimes request the school to enrol a child facing particular challenges to give them a fresh start in what is perceived to be a nurturing environment for vulnerable students.

The reform process determined that the proportion of low SES students in the school should not be capped. Individualised plans and strategies for academic and personal success in the growth of identity are constructed and implemented. The support and guidance of class and subject teachers, school counsellors, psychologists, special and adaptive education staff and teachers of English as an Additional Language (EAL) are all directed towards helping the students to progress along a pathway of success. Intensive help is provided, both in the classroom and beyond, and specialist teachers assist staff to devise strategies for classroom teachers to adapt their methodology to develop individual strategies for learning.

The following summary profile identifies the practical decisions that were initiated or affirmed to ensure that the school's new directions and practices aligned with the ethos and charism of Mercy. These initiatives focused on four main areas; (i)school organisation and curriculum, (ii) selection of

teachers, (iii) systematic monitoring of student progress and engagement and (iv) development of extra-curricular programs. A table outlining the strategies employed by the school to assist low SES students to achieve success, and their alignment with the values, is included as Appendix 2.

4.8 Evidence of Student Success

The following tables provide evidence of the successful achievements of the cohort of graduates who were involved in this study. Table 4.1 compares for the years 2008-2014 the relative numbers of School Card holders against the total enrolment for Year 12. This excludes international students who were not eligible for the School Card.

Table 4.1: Number of School Card students within Year 12 cohort by year, excluding international students

Year	Number of School Card students	Total cohort (minus International Students)	Percentage of School Card students
2008	16	105	15.24%
2009	25	105	23.81%
2010	13	83	15.66%
2011	16	86	18.60%
2012	20	97	20.61%
2013	19	88	19.88%
2014	21	114	18.42%

Source: College archival documents.

Table 4.2: School Card (SC) students' attainment of SACE/ATAR compared with the remainder of local cohort (RLC), excluding international students

Year	Total no. of students		% of students achieving SACE		% of students receiving an ATAR		Median student score for SACE Stage 2		High SACE scores
	SC	RLC	SC	RLC	SC	RLC	SC	RLC	
2008	16	89	100%	98.6%	75%	82.2%	74.4	75.7	*29 students from the total cohort scored 90-99.9*
2009	25	80	92%	100%	92%	91.3%	73.4	80.5	*34 students from the total cohort scored 90-99.85*
2010	13	70	92.3%	97.1%	84.6%	75.7%	69.5	75.1	*22 students from the total cohort scored 90-98.5*
2011	16	70	81.3%	95.7%	81.3%	81.4	82.2	81.28	*42 students from the total cohort scored 91.5-99.95*
2012	20	77	100%	97.4%	95%	81.8%	77.7	79.1	*27 students from the total cohort scored 90-99.1*
2013	19	69	100%	100%	94.7%	81.2%	72.2	81.1	*28 students from the total cohort scored 90-99.85*
2014	21	93	100%	100%	100%	80.7%	68.9	80.5	*36 students from the total cohort scored 90.5-99.45*

Source: College archival documents.

An analysis of the results of Year 12 School Card students, who attended St Ethnea from 2008 to 2014, allows comparisons to be made between the results of School Card holders and the rest of the Year 12 cohorts over this seven-year time span. The results show a high degree of success for those holding School Cards in achieving SACE and an ATAR. In 2008 and 2012, the results of the School Card holders approximated those of students who were not School Card holders. The results in 2011 were better for School Card students than non-School Card students (see Table 4.2). In 2012, 95% of School Card students at the College received an ATAR. Information supplied in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 supports the claim that this school meets the criteria, according to Marks et al. (2001, p.61), for it to be judged as "effective". Using their criteria, the school in this study has developed an environment which is conducive to learning, where students perform well academically and hold high educational expectations.

Table 4.3: SACE Stage 2 subject choice and HE pathways for 2012 Cohort of School Card students (numbered 1-20)

Student	ATAR	SACE Stage 2 Subjects	Higher Education Pathway
1	99.1	Physics, Specialist Maths, Chemistry, Maths Studies, Research Project B	B. Engineering (Chemical) Uni A
2	97.45	Biology, Chemistry, English Communication, Maths Studies, Research Project B	B. Oral Health Uni A
3	96.75	Chemistry, English Studies, Physics, Maths Studies, Research Project B	B. Medical Radiation Science Uni C
4	91.55	Biology, Chemistry, English Communication, Maths Studies, Research Project B	B. Medical Radiation Science Uni C
5	90.1	Biology, ESL Studies, Maths Applications, Research Project B, Visual Arts (Art)	Science Uni C
6	90.1	Chemistry, Chinese, English Communication, Maths Studies, Research Project B	B. Education/Disability Studies Uni B
7	89.25	Business & Enterprise, Economics, English Communication, Society & Culture, Research Project B	B. International Studies/B Arts Uni A
8	82.65	Business & Enterprise, ESL Studies, Information Processing & Publishing, Visual Arts (Design), Research Project B	B. Midwifery Uni A
9	78.3	Society & Culture, Research Project B, English Communication, Modern History, Psychology	B. Design Studies Uni A
10	77.05	English Studies, Maths Studies, Research Project B, Visual Arts (Art), Society & Culture	B. Urban & Regional Planning Uni C
11	75.25	ESL Studies, Information Processing & Publishing, Maths Applications, Workplace Practices, Research Project B	B. Nursing Uni C
12	65.0	English Studies, Psychology, Research Project B, Society & Culture, Legal Studies	B. Justice & Society/Law Pathway Uni B
13	63.05	Accounting, Chemistry, ESL Studies, Maths Studies, Research Project B	B. Science (Forensic & Analytical Science) Uni B
14	62.2	Business & Enterprise, English Communications, Information Processing & Publishing, Maths, Maths Applications, Research Project B	B. Nursing Uni C
15	61.0	Biology, Chemistry, Psychology, Research Project B, Visual Arts (Art)	B. Visual Arts Uni C
16	59.0	Biology, ESL Studies, Information Processing & Publishing, Maths Applications, Research Project B	B. Health Sciences Uni A
17	50.5	English Communications, Maths Applications, Physical Education, Society & Culture, Research Project B	B. Science Uni B
18	39.0	Biology, Drama, ESL Studies, Maths Studies, Research Project B	-?
19	32.6	Business & Enterprise, ESL, Psychology, Research Project B, Workplace Practices	-?
20	-	ESL Studies, Research Project B, Workplace Practices, Communication & the Community	Foundation Studies (Health Strand) Uni C

Source: College archival documents.

The distribution of the total cohort of students is roughly equally distributed between the three universities in the state, with 28 students enrolled at University A (GO8), 24 at University B (IRU) and 27 at University C (ATN). Choice of courses show a wide distribution.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Teese (2000) claim that subjects chosen for study show the power exerted in the structure of schooling, with the disadvantaged choosing the 'soft options', or subjects seen as less academically demanding. The results of Year 12 School Card students at SAC do not, in general, bear out Bourdieu and Teese's claims regarding the subject choices of students from low SES backgrounds, at school or for their university courses. Table 4.3 demonstrates that, of the low SES graduates from 2012, thirteen out of 20 low SES students opted to include Mathematics in their choice of subjects, with one student choosing both Specialist Maths and Maths Studies, a total of eight choosing Maths Studies and five choosing Maths Applications. Chemistry was chosen by seven students, with six choosing Biology and three choosing Psychology. Sixteen of the twenty students included subjects that are sometimes referred to as 'hard' subjects, as opposed to 'soft' options such as vocational subjects.

4.9 Conclusion

Commencing in 1997, a monitoring measure was introduced such that in each year, the results of School Card students were carefully tracked. This was introduced to ensure that students from low SES backgrounds were achieving at a level comparable with the rest of their cohort. The leadership of the school interpreted these results as an indication that the combined effects of curriculum reorientation, teacher quality, strategies to support all students and the prevailing environment of inclusion appeared to be strong elements aiding the success of students from low SES backgrounds. Establishing the factors that were perceived by those interviewed as contributing most strongly to this improvement is the focus of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5 LEADERSHIP AND STAFF PERCEPTIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the perceptions of the senior leaders and staff, based on their lived experiences at St Ethnea, about the responsibility of schools to assure educational success for students from marginalised and low SES backgrounds. In the previous chapter describing the school selected for the study, it was demonstrated that students from disadvantaged backgrounds enrolled at St Ethnea have sustained a record of being successful in completing Year 12. This success is evidenced in their record of gaining a South Australian Certificate of Education and an ATAR that enabled them to apply for entry to higher education.

5.2 Data Source

The data in this chapter is based on an analysis of transcripts of interviews conducted with the Leadership Team and staff who engaged with students in teaching, administrative and support roles. As described in Chapter 3, an independent interviewer who had no connection with the school conducted the interviews with the Leadership Team and staff using the researcher's interview framework. The open-ended interview question was, 'Based on your experience at this school, what school factors do you believe can lead to personal and educational success for students from low SES backgrounds?'

At the conclusion of each interview, individuals were given five blank cards and asked to reflect on the prior discussion and, using a word, phrase or sentence, to select what they considered to be the key factors contributing to success for low SES students at the school. They were also asked to rate them in priority order.

In listening to these voices, the perceptions held by leadership and teachers and support staff are identified and analysed to ascertain their congruence or divergence with the school's vision and strategies of the school (as outlined in the previous chapter) as well as with the scholarly literature on the education of students from low SES backgrounds. The analysis of the interview data involved thematic coding of each interview focusing on the school factors and the participants' final summation and prioritisation of school factors. Based on this analysis, twelve key elements were identified. After further analysis, these elements were grouped into the following three main themes, namely:

Table 5.1: Key themes drawn from the interviews of staff and leaders

Key Themes	Key Elements
Ethos/Vision	hospitality; sense of purpose collectively owned; holistic approach; leadership; students not defined by their background; committed staff
Educational Environment	high expectations; culture of success; curriculum breadth; career advice; role models; monitoring of academic progress and attendance; Professional Development of staff; outstanding educators; explicit teaching of skills for student success; scaffolded approach; differentiating the curriculum.
Social Environment	personal relationships between teachers and students; authentic care; respect; feedback; equity for all; safety; extra support for students in need; inclusive.

Each of these themes will now be discussed using the voices of those who work in the school. Part One will focus on the interviews of the Leadership Team and Part Two will focus on the voices of the staff.

5.3 Part One: Perceptions of the Leadership Team

The leadership group consisted of the Principal, Deputy Principals and the Business Manager. They all indicated in the interview that they supported the purpose of the study, believed that it was well-justified and wanted to participate.

5.3.1 Ethos and vision

During the interviews with the leaders, one of the most frequently cited factors that would contribute to achieving student success was what they termed ‘Mercy values’. In stating Mercy values, they were referring to a prevailing ethos governing the interactions in the school as being compassion, justice (social justice), respect, service and hospitality (inclusion) that were outlined in the previous chapter.

One reflected on the Mercy values in this way:

> They're all intrinsically linked with each other, but the first one that comes to mind is **respect**. We treat [students]with the utmost respect, we listen to them, we value their opinions, their contributions… and we treat them equally as well. In terms of **hospitality,** we welcome all students. We encourage their voices, their opinions. We collaborate with those voices and opinions and we include them. When I came here it was like a sense of being at home, and that was a product of the welcoming and hospitality that I'd received and so in my own interaction with students, you know, you're in a home, loving, supportive learning environment. That's how I regard hospitality. In terms of **compassion**, which is another Mercy value, we look after those who are most in need, whether it's personal or illness or their literacy needs. We are compassionate and understanding and will do things and accommodate students whether it's through special provisions, for example, in SACE, but we make sure that every student is treated with compassion and dignity as well. In terms of **service** we're here to serve our students in the best possible way that we can and, therefore, we serve the school, but students come first, that's our core business. In terms of **justice** we are a just, caring community. We don't look inward; we look for ways to reach out and help others and the culture of addressing disadvantage and championing causes and charities and people who experience injustice is a mindset that shapes the way that we interact with others. (Emphasis added to highlight terms specific to Mercy values).

5.3.2 Educational environment

A number of important features contributing to educational quality were identified. These included student centredness, mixed ability classes, adequate resourcing in terms of specialist teachers, provision of professional development of staff and career guidance for students. They also identified that an environment that reflected a 'culture of success' included a number of critical elements. These included having high expectations of both students and staff, monitoring student progress and attendance and persistence in helping students meet their individual challenges.

One leader framed the focus of her comments on the importance of staff/student interaction and placing the needs of students at the centre of decision making. She also expressed the belief that "every student is important and different and every student deserves an effort by staff to help them achieve".

> These (Mercy) values guide the way we interact with students. They guide the willingness not to leave a child behind. We will go the extra mile, we will spend extra time with students if they're struggling. We have great expectations for everyone in the room. You're encouraging, you're positive and you give them feedback that helps them to improve their own work and their own learning. We treat students respectfully, treat them as young adults, listen to them, encourage their participation and build really strong foundations and relationships with them.

Structuring mixed ability classes until the end of Year 10 was identified by one leader as illustrative of the commitment of the school to achieving equity for all students. The leaders acknowledged that the school accepts that this approach is both challenging and demanding for teachers but, over many

years, the school has seen the benefits to be gained by students. They also described the essential nature of employing only highly skilled and qualified teachers who understand the school's approach and commit to making it work for students. In recognition of the challenges which teachers may face, a team of EAL and Special Education teachers and support staff work with the teachers to assist them in modifying their learning plans and assessments to be inclusive. The leader emphasised the importance of providing the resources, extra staff and teaching aids required to teach all students to a very high level.

> It's that inclusion in the curriculum as well as inclusion socially…a really strong commitment to not streaming classes. It's a belief that every learner is a capable learner and that if they are engaged with appropriate resources they will be successful. We don't separate them out into here's the A students, here's the B students, here's the C students. That has underpinned the sort of inclusion that enables good results at the end point because it allows students to be positive about themselves and therefore they're in a better head space to learn.

One deputy observed that "all students are treated with equivalent, but different care". She went on to comment, "teachers do not know who School Card students are, nor do they want to know".

All members of the Leadership Team identified the importance of supporting staff and students to facilitate effective learning by differentiating the curriculum. One of the deputies explained:

> Staff need to be sure that they understand how they can adjust the curriculum to individual needs and for students who are having difficulties. Students who are having problems need to believe they will be supported. If they believe this, they're prepared to take risks and to achieve more highly. It's important that all staff support and understand the school ethos of achievement.

The importance of professional development is underlined by many of the Leadership Team. The acquisition of the knowledge and skills is paramount to assist the diversity of students within the school community. One noted that:

> a lot of time goes into how to work with a student who needs help with language, how to work with dyslexic students, how to work with students with auditory processing difficulties … we don't just teach to the middle.

The importance of attention paid to staff development so that staff as a whole were able to be continuous learners and notably highly professional in their behaviour and aspirations was emphasised.

> There is a high degree of professionalism within the school. Teachers teach only in their subject of expertise, a rather obvious observation, but a practice not universally followed. Staff, too, set high expectations of their work.

A culture of high expectations in the culture of the school was emphasised as having been firmly established over the course of many generations of students. It was the leaders' perceptions that

both staff and students identify with these high expectations and are encouraged always to aim higher. This culture of high expectations was described as:

> enveloping all the practices in the school–high expectations of staff, high expectations of students. This high expectation is modelled for students by their peer group and by recent graduates returning to the school to speak about their success at university and beyond. The idea of celebrating success is really powerful modelling. There is also an assembly held at the end of each semester where the students from Years 7-12 who have achieved 'A's in all subjects are acknowledged.

One leader concluded that the answer to what the school contributes to students' success is:

> about developing a culture of success where teachers believe that every student can be successful.

Another believed that an important element that underpinned the school's success was unswerving persistence against all challenges in supporting students.

> We don't give up on any student. It's about saving the lost sheep. 99% are going to be fine. It's the 1% that's going to cause all the grief and heartache but that's the one you are going to get reward from. You've got them over the line.

Another leader compared the culture of success at this school, in contrast to her former experience in a different school, by describing St Ethnea's strategy of appointing an academic review committee with responsibility to review each student's progress every term. In this process, individual students who were flagged as under-achieving were individually case managed within the Leadership Team. Where a student was struggling, the year level coordinator also consulted with the student and parents and kept monitoring progress. Staff provided support to all students, whatever their needs, and it was made clear to staff that a punitive approach to struggling students was not an option.

One leader described the school's approach as forgiving and restorative. "We are quite restorative and forgiving in our approach to behaviour management," adding, "it's the perfect alignment of school values and my personal identity and values that keeps me here. It was like teacher heaven when I came here."

She added, "this school was not the place for a 'three strikes and you're out' teacher view". New staff were told "No, you are not going to give that person a zero for that piece of work; that's not the way we do it here". She described how it was understood by staff that ways must be found for the student to be successful. A new date for resubmission of her work must be negotiated. "Responsibility will be placed back on the teacher with this question: 'How are you going to make sure that this student meets the minimum amount?'"

Allied to the need for monitoring students' progress, a leader identified regular school attendance by students as being of prime importance, stating, "put quite baldly, if students do not attend, for whatever reason, they cannot be taught". The procedures for follow up were described:

> Students and families are individually followed up with input from a variety of staff: class teachers, coordinators, counsellor and front office [staff]. Attendance is also made possible by the extraordinary contribution of the Business Manager, in organising his finances so that there is money for families to be helped in the sense that pressure is taken off them with regard to paying fees, and then in order to help with attendance, pressure is taken off the students to get part-time jobs to supplement the family income. Furthermore, money is made available for the funding of specialists in the classroom.

Help given to students in choosing career paths was perceived by one leader as enormously important. She described how students were offered the opportunity to understand:

> that their future is not pre-set; that it doesn't have to be the same as it was for their parents, that education gives them the key to a different sort of life; and whatever career they opt for, learning does not stop there.

5.3.3 Social environment

In describing what they perceived to be ways that a school contributes to successful education for students from low SES backgrounds, the leaders described social features of the school experience. Their perceptions focused on the importance of mutual respect, quality of relationships and valuing the individual members of the school community. They related to the interactions between administration and staff, students and staff as well as peer to peer relationships. A leader commented:

> There is not only a sense of inclusion for all students, but that applies to staff also in their interaction with each other. There is something really unique about the staff culture of this school. It's nurturing, it's encouraging and supportive. That staff culture then permeates to students and they see everyone is respected and valued in this community.

These leaders knew that some other schools had also worked to have their students made aware of the needs of students who were disadvantaged. They had addressed these needs by setting up after-school homework clubs in the local community. They recognised that St Ethnea had responded differently because those in need were not 'others' from outside the immediate environment, they were among them, in relationship with them and valued members of their community.

> We seem to have managed to create here a culture where those students are sitting next to you in class and that is a completely different experience of learning and understanding. That's why our graduates are so well able to make their way in the world because they have been part of a very diverse community and you learn things from that that you can't get from books.

The diversity of the school population was seen as part of an initial stage of identity formation.

> The school gives students from very different backgrounds the opportunity to be themselves in the school environment and not to be defined by their backgrounds.

It was noted by the Principal, however, that, "as times change, and the backgrounds of refugees change, the sorts of support offered will change". She reported that, in 2014, there were 88 students who were refugees at the school. Enrolments of students formerly detained on Nauru were anticipated.

> It is important to recognise that those who come from Nauru will have mental health issues that differ from those of refugees who have lived in Australia for a time. It is important that they are not treated as exotic 'others' any more than School Card students are treated as 'others'.

The Business Manager confirmed that the needy were not only the School Card holders.

> The middle class hit road blocks too. There are cases of bereavement, for example, where a father has not provided adequately for the family. The school steps in to provide continuity.

There were also hardships in cases of separation or divorce where parents needed time out.

> Their first instinct is to take their daughter out of school, then work out how much money they have. We try and talk to the family and we give them breathing space that might be time or it might be fee relief. Then there are redundancies resulting in asset rich and cash poor situations where it is just not practical for them to liquidate their assets.

The school Business Manager had authority to give full or partial remission of fees. Nevertheless, every family was expected to contribute something, however small. He believed "that way they value what they are getting and their dignity is respected". According to him, "being part of this community, this school, you cannot escape the feeling of Mercy, compassion and the core values". For him there is one core value above all: "If it's not going to have an impact on an outcome in the classroom, we really have to question if it's worth doing."

The Registrar described the arrival at the school of the early waves of refugees; first the Vietnamese, then the Cambodians, followed by the Afghanis.

> The Government was treating them badly. They were on nothing visas… parents couldn't work, they weren't entitled to anything...they were just living on handouts. We [staff and leaders] wrote letters to [Senator] Amanda Vanstone to obtain some justice. In the end she amended their visas. Most of these students have now finished university, many with doctorates, and are working in the professions, making contributions to society.

The Registrar also related how the leadership took up the cause of entry to university for refugee students. They were classified as international students when they applied for entry to university; a

path, therefore, completely closed to them. An initiative was taken to lobby the Vice Chancellor at a local university who took up the cause.

> …The result, in the end, was that students were given entry to university on a Humanitarian visa, so then the HECS fee would apply.

5.4 Part Two: Perceptions of the Teachers and Support Staff

The staff who were invited to participate in the interviews had taught the graduates of Year 12 in 2012. Teachers who had supported the graduates in their specialist capacities and support staff who offered assistance to these young women throughout the time that they attended St Ethnea were included in the interviews. Their perceptions are recorded under the three main themes of ethos/vision, educational quality and social environment.

5.4.1 Ethos and vision

In their reflections on the significance of the ethos of the school, staff recognised that the shared understanding of what mattered most, and the implications of that for everyone's decision making was important. Staff affirmed that special attention had been drawn to the values of Mercy in order to assist staff and students to appreciate more readily the qualities of Mercy and to understand fully what 'Mercy in practice' meant. When members of staff were asked to identify what helped students to be successful, they all pointed immediately to the school ethos which they described as compassion, going the extra mile and giving every student the opportunity to succeed.

> The Mercy ethos drives our decision making at school, so it's not just a slogan. Because it underpins our discussions and decisions, I think it pervades everyone's decision making at the school. The Leadership Team talk about being merciful, in staff meetings and in general discussions. We all pick up on that, and that's the way you do things.

Another teacher commented that:

> the way students are talked about here is always respectful. I have come out of other environments where there was no confidentiality for what was going on in students' lives. It was shared willy-nilly as a way of saying 'aren't we great the way we care for these poor things?' Here that's been sacrosanct…the student's dignity is very sacred here.

Newcomers to the staff soon observe a way of being, a way of relating, in exchanges with other staff and with students and, observing these exchanges, detecting respectful relationships and the care with which staff relate to each other and to students. The absence of excessive rules relating to students, and the way in which staff deal compassionately with students who may be late or fall behind in completing assignments, sometimes calls for a period of adjustment from staff who may have come from schools with more rigid ways of dealing with these issues. In one of the interviews

a teacher referred to the ethos as 'it': "When teachers start working here, they either get 'it' or they don't".

A member of the staff, whose daughter had recently graduated from the school, made the following insightful observation about what she considered distinguished the school from other schools.

> There is that magic factor, a belief that you can do what you want, what your dreams are…. The students believe the world is open to them. They believe they have a role to play in the world…it's just who they are. They believe everyone thinks like that. Most of them aren't doing careers just for their own success…they really see supporting others and doing good in the world is just what everyone does…they don't see that as being unique…nothing is closed to you because you are female...they call it the Mercy ethos.

One of the teachers observed how staff see themselves growing into a 'Mercy' identity and the importance of the role modelling by the school leadership.

> You get inspired by the people around you… the Leadership Team, the compassion they show… they are strong women… our Principal is a role model, seen as strong but sensitive.

Another staff member attributed the culture of the school to the Mercy ethos: "…It just rubs off on you, and you want to help."

5.4.2 Educational environment

In considering the educational factors, the staff discussed a number of key issues. These included the meaning, culture and expectations of success, staff commitment to student success and prioritising of students' needs. They also discussed the importance of feeling that their efforts in regard to student support were recognised and valued by the Leadership Team. The voices of staff in this regard will be elaborated in this section.

In considering the meaning of success, one teacher immediately stated, "success means success for all". She went on to say:

> Teachers take on board that culture of success to put in place structures and mechanisms to actually make the completion of Year 12 and the attainment of SACE and an ATAR a real possibility, allowing students' entry to their chosen course a goal for everyone.

She went on further to claim that the deeply held expectations of success on the part of both students and teachers is brought about "by osmosis", best explained as an unwritten expectation, a claim echoed by a number of others in different contexts.

> It's never openly stated that you must have 100% success, but I think that through the celebration of success that message comes across quite clearly.

Mention was made by almost all those interviewed–teachers, support staff, Leadership Team, and the administration–of the willingness of staff to give up their time before, after and during school hours, running the Home Work Club, staffing the library after hours, running holiday programs. One of the staff spoke about the dedication of staff:

> [They] do whatever it takes for students where there is sometimes this one chance to succeed. I wonder if the quite driven for purpose meaning that is constantly on public display around our social justice commitment and our equity and our involvement in various programs [motivates staff]. My work outside the educational environment will tell me [that] you give people a purpose in the workforce and they will give you their heart and soul.

A member of staff commented

> The real key is the teacher, embracing Mercy values that inform teaching. The skill, the expertise, the commitment, the organisation, the support. The teacher these days is mentor, facilitator, counsellor, academic expert. That's the real key.

The positive effects of the school's Personal Learning Studies, which predates but includes the SACE Personal Learning Plan, was emphasised by a staff member as an important strategy helping students to be successful.

> It is really about cementing for our students some fundamental core skills and knowledge around what it takes to be a successful student.

She remarked that regardless of the socioeconomic background of individual students, it cannot be assumed that they come to school with those skills and knowledge about the workplace in the context of the wider society.

A teacher commented on how important it was for teachers to feel valued by the Leadership Team in terms of individual attention and understanding of their personal circumstances.

> The Principal would make extended time throughout Term 3 to meet with every member of staff, for half an hour, or an hour to hear about how the year had gone, what their concerns were, what they were hoping for the next year…I think that was a really important part of the structure. Staff would comment on feeling individually known and cared for and valued. The Leadership Team also made a priority of supporting women who needed to work part time, who had families or who were supporting their parents, and that's a tough gig. There's women here who've been supported through really tough times in their lives and there's a bit of wanting to pass on that model of being cared for to the students that they're looking after and teaching.

5.4.3 Social environment

5.4.3.1 Introduction

In considering the social environment of the school, staff described the importance of developing authentic relationships, showing that they "really care". Staff also perceived that having an explicit policy of inclusion supporting equity meant providing the school with a diverse community. A high value was given to the multicultural nature of the community.

One staff member described the school ethos as being "holistic".

> In a broad sense, [the ethos is] about developing relationships, communication and support mechanisms. It's about a sense of community, that it's no one teacher's responsibility to ensure success… It's all of the counsellors, the support staff, the school Leadership Team, the coordinators. There are not many written procedures or policies. Where they exist, they'll be named in terms of Mercy. In this place we give chances, and we give chances, and we give chances.

Another staff member echoed this view, saying that it was the "personal nature of relationships" in the school that made everything work: "If you had everything else but didn't have that, it wouldn't work." When asked what drives the culture of the school, one of the staff offered her belief that:

> The key is that we really do develop strong relationships with the students to the point where we know what's going on. We're very sympathetic and supportive of those students who do struggle because there's a non-English speaking background, or students are sole carers of their one parent.

The expression of social justice and inclusion was not only reserved for granting access to people of financial disadvantaged and cultural marginalised backgrounds, but also to the physically disabled. A staff member stated that students were accepted for who they were:

> It's in the environment… there is all that acceptance and they're very much learning about themselves and who they are.

A member of staff reflected on her perspective of social justice and its effect on the school community.

> …It's real, it always has been real at St Ethnea. It always has informed the quality of the relationship that takes place between teachers and students.
>
> It has the sense of equity; the equity and respect between the teachers and the students which tries to provide a real space of freedom for students while at the same time enacting the safety constraints and the structures that are required for them to learn, but always there's kind of a mutuality in the learning moment.

Parents, mindful of the future of their daughters living and working in a multicultural society, actively choose the school for its ethos and its multicultural nature.

The school psychologist indicated that:

> There are students who are borderline homeless, in and out of shelters, and what is really excellent is the sense of welcome and an experience of not having to explain yourself when you go into the classroom. There is a warmth 'It's wonderful to see you back', an expectation we'll meet you where you're at and we'll do whatever we can to support you. Clean slate.

One of the teachers refers to the very diverse population of the school:

> We know that it's a high School Card population, a high refugee cohort, extremely diverse socioeconomic ethnic backgrounds, we have indigenous students.

She points out that it is necessary to know the background of the student, to understand what's going on in that student's life. This often involves also having a conversation with parents to get their support: "So there's the conversation with the parent, conversation with the student, conversation with each of the subject teachers."

Staff themselves initiated a project whereby teachers interviewed students to try to understand some of the pressures of the home situation.

> They were blown away by the home responsibilities students sometimes bore. When you understand the home pressures, you understand that the extra help given to students is a matter of equity.

Staff members described how every effort was made by the school to remove any opportunities for identification of economic disadvantage for refugees, Indigenous students or others. As a result, rules were established such as requiring a uniform to be worn by all and forbidding the wearing of jewellery because it might show financial advantage. Other strategies used to reduce differentiation in advantage included not charging for school outings and camps as an extra, but including the cost in the fees, which could then be privately adjusted in cases of need. The school provided laptops for all so that no-one could come with an elaborate laptop which displayed their wealth.

One teacher spoke about how staff encourage students not to be limited in their thinking about the future:

> I think in our relations with students we don't give them boundaries, we really encourage them and show them role models. Whether it's university or any other paths, we don't talk as if there's a boundary or don't talk as if something might stop them. The world is their oyster. When I show them examples of other students' work, they see 'oh well it's not just someone sitting in an Art Gallery that can do this stuff. This is people like me' and it just makes it more real to them, that this kind of world can be open to them.

Looking to the future, staff highlighted the issue that that there had been careful forethought taken to maintain a policy of providing funds to continue to enrol students from across the broad spectrum of socioeconomic classes and to make it possible for low SES students to be made welcome and have a sense of belonging in every way.

At the conclusion of the interviews staff were asked to summarise on blank cards their perception of five of the strengths (the key factors) in the school which led to successful outcomes for students. The insights of staff are recorded in Appendix 3.

5.5 Discussion

5.5.1 Ethos and vision

Ethos and vision, in this context, refers to the espoused beliefs articulated in the school vision (see Vision, Mission and Value Statements, Appendix 1). The leadership group and staff referred to the vision as not fixed, but remaining open to re-interpretation over time as new needs arise. The Vision's impulse can "blossom into something creatively different in the school community that embraces it with understanding and commitment into a new future" (O'Toole and Sharkey, 2000, pp. 34-35). The Mercy spirit, which animates the school, is "inevitably a process of discovery where those who know the Mercy tradition walk with those who do not know". Staff who are "committed to the Mercy ethos journey with those who are just beginning to walk this particular road of God's gracious Mercy" (O'Toole and Sharkey, 2000, p. 33).

Within this theme, key elements identified during the interview process with staff included the following sub-themes:

1. Mercy charism and Values: embracing the values of compassion, justice, service, inclusion, respect, hospitality and pursuit of excellence.
2. Leadership: One of the key responsibilities was to influence staff and students to understand and embrace the mission and values of the school, ensuring that the needs of every member of the school community were met, reflecting Greenleaf's notion of servanthood, (1998, p. 4). The staff

underlined the importance of leadership valuing staff contributions and providing opportunities for shared leadership through delegated responsibility.

3. Collectively owned ethos: Staff also identified the pervading presence of a sense of purpose that was collectively owned and was larger than the self. This gave rise to their sense of collective identity and response to those in need within and beyond the school community.
4. Holistic approach: Staff supported the idea of a balanced approach to studies and social life by contributing to extracurricular activities for students, creating a joyful and productive learning environment.
5. Welcoming hospitality: Joining the school was an inviting experience due to initiatives to assist new students and staff to feel at home.

The Principal and Leadership Team were charged with the responsibility for inducting staff into an appreciation of the ethos and vision, and for ensuring that the latter underpinned all procedures, policies and relationships within the school. Similarly, staff were responsible for inducting students into an appreciation of the central role of the ethos and vision in the day to day life of the school.

O'Toole and Sharkey (2000, p. 21) noted that "vision unfolds in the midst of daily encounters. A group's Vision is glimpsed in the midst of very human situations and concrete circumstances." This 'unfolding' of the vision requires that staff regularly reflect on the changing dynamics within the school and society in order to realign the Vision to reflect changing needs.

5.5.2 Educational environment

A significant component of the educational quality of the school was vested in the expertise, dedication and commitment to the professional development of staff to ensure the best possible outcomes for students. The key elements or sub-themes identified during the interview process with staff included:

1. Recruitment of expert teachers: All staff were highly qualified and required to teach only in their area of expertise
2. Professional development of staff: It was noted that all staff were encouraged to participate in professional development within their specific fields to ensure that they were regularly updating their knowledge. Thus, further personal study was fostered to update their qualifications including opportunities to attend interstate conferences and to accompany students on overseas study tours.
3. Explicit teaching of skills for student success: Student learning was facilitated by differentiating the curriculum and using a scaffolded pedagogy to assist students who might be struggling.

4. Career advice: Teachers noted the importance of ensuring that students were given the skills and knowledge to understand the workplace which was essential for students from diverse backgrounds who were often the first in their family to consider university pathways.
5. Monitoring of progress and attendance: Teachers stressed the significance of careful monitoring of student progress to identify and support those at risk of failing in their studies. Similarly, monitoring of attendance by staff who followed up on student absences was perceived as important.
6. Curriculum breadth: The comprehensive curriculum for all students with opportunities to study more than one language and choose from a wide range of theoretical and applied subjects offered in Years 11 and 12 was important to meet the diverse interests and capabilities of students.
7. High expectations with a culture of success: Staff expectations for their students and commitment to ensuring that students were provided with the necessary support to succeed had an emotional impact on students. This 'culture of success' was seen as pervasive throughout the school.

5.5.3 Social environment

The social environment was seen as central to implementing the Vision. The quality of the relationships between students and staff, between students and their peers and between staff and their colleagues, was perceived as enabling everyone to feel included and respected, irrespective of their background. Students felt they were known as individuals and, in turn, knew their teachers as persons. The key elements or sub-themes identified during the interview process with staff included:

1. Personal relationships: At every level recognition of the individual in interactions was valued.
2. Respect: It was taken for granted by staff that all relationships would be respectful and everyone would work together in harmony.
3. Equity for all: Equity was seen by staff to operate in every aspect of the school, including open enrolment policies, mixed ability classes, behaviour management policies, financial support with fees and assistance with uniforms and excursions.
4. Policy of inclusion: This was evident in mixed ability classes, a multicultural student body where more than 65 nationalities were represented and open enrolment for students who were refugees and Indigenous students.

5. Confidentiality: Students were not defined by their background. Students were accepted for who they were. Staff appreciated the strict confidentiality regarding information about students from families receiving social welfare.

5.5.4 Alignment of the documented policies and practices of the school with relevant literature and the interview data

There is a strong alignment between the documented values of the school, outlined in Chapter 4 and Appendix 2, and the delivery of education at St Ethnea. Staff spoke about the respect which is shown to students by the way staff interact with them, listen to them and offer them encouragement. Wrigley (2013, p. 170) claimed that personal support and respect enables students to "make the social, emotional and psychic investment necessary for learning". Wrigley (2000, p. 169), in his case studies of inner-city schools, revealed that respect rather than discipline was the key to fostering positive relationships. 'Respect' was a leitmotif within almost every interview.

At St Ethnea, students are offered "authentic care" by staff who show that they are prepared to "go the extra mile" to help students succeed and not fail. Their care is not mollycoddling, but rather that described by Antrop-Gonzalez and de Jesus (2006) who extended the notion of authentic care to include hard care, defined as being characterised by supportive instrumental relationships and high academic expectations (Antrop-Gonzalez & de Jesus, 2006, p. 413). There is an echo here of one of the teachers whose words to students were "you will not fail". Staff are strongly committed to the culture of success for the benefit of all students.

The notion of care was paramount in all of the observations made by all of the participants. The school's care for students will be explored more fully in the final chapter where Tronto's (1993) schema will be used as a framework to determine whether the approach of the school accords with the 'integrity of care' outlined by Tronto (Zembylas et al, 2014, pp. 204-205).

Participants in this study talked about the quality of care. This was acknowledged as important by everyone interviewed. Caring wasn't just 'being nice', it involved making hard decisions and making thoughtful decisions. 'Hard care' was seen in the maintenance of high standards for all; teachers were highly qualified and taught only in their area of expertise. 'Authentic care' was experienced in the care which knew its recipient as a 'person'. Teachers gave the students respect; they showed a passion for their subject of expertise, but the student was the centre of all of their efforts. Teachers reported that staff with specialist backgrounds were employed to help classroom teachers to break down curriculum practices into units more easily grasped, to assist in the classroom, and to provide a scaffolded pedagogy to enhance further understanding and learning. Additional English teachers were employed in the classroom and it was reported that leadership

members worked to establish systems for early identification of students experiencing difficulty in order to provide personal learning programs for them. The awareness, dispositions and capabilities of staff to be effective as educators and also as care givers was pre-eminent. The attributes of care were deliberately fostered by the school through recruitment of skilled and capable staff, provision of induction and professional development as well as through respect and modelling by the leadership.

The type of leadership seen to be offered by those holding leadership responsibilities was perceived by staff to impact on student success. A recent report from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (n.d.), cited in the literature review, claimed that effective principals have a significant impact on student learning by the way in which they shape a school's culture and create a shared vision among the whole school community. The interviews reveal that the leadership and staff of St Ethnea created what Smyth (2012, p. 12) refers to as a "socially just school" which has "a clear and decisive mission and philosophy", and understands that its *raison d'etre* is about improving the life chances of all its students.

Staff described how students at St Ethnea were encouraged and assisted to have aspirations for their lives. Devlin & McKay (2014, p. 112) challenged those supporting the deficit discourse that low SES students have lower aspirations than their high SES peers by reporting that low SES students in their study "expressed high levels of aspiration and determination to succeed in their [university] studies". Those interviewed in the present study indicated that they found this to be true of their students. Staff demonstrated support for Appadurai's (cited in Sellar, Gale and Parker 2009, p. 69), notion that "it is not a matter of raising aspirations but of providing opportunities (and support) for students to develop, describe, experiment with and experience the realisation of their aspirations".

Central to the school's philosophy is the development of values in a spirit of care and co-operation. The comments of staff in the interviews clearly express the school's intention to run counter to the theorising of those who maintain that schools, through their structures, reproduce the structures of an inequitable society (Connell et al., 1982, p. 90).

Using the first and second priority responses from the summative card exercise, the chapter will conclude with a discussion regarding the degree of alignment of priorities between the responses of the Leadership Team and the staff. Participants were asked to nominate the most important factors to ensure educational and personal success for students from low SES backgrounds and, by implication, for all students. The complete list of leadership and staff responses is included in Appendix 3.

The following table indicates the first and second priorities nominated by the Leadership Team and the teachers and support staff during the summative card exercise.

Table 5.2: Factors listed as top priority by staff interviewed

	Leadership (N=6)	Teachers/Support Staff (N=11)
FIRST PRIORITY	• Mercy ethos • Monitoring attendance • No student defined by background • Belief that every student is important and different and deserves to achieve • Mercy values clearly articulated and lived out by the community • Social Justice for families	• Good curriculum, scaffolded pedagogy and professional development • Mercy ethos drives decision-making, all working towards student success • Mercy values • Welcoming to school, assistance with initial enrolment • Teachers giving tirelessly of their free time to support students • Recruit and retain diversity in student cohort • Personal relationships, supporting and encouraging individuals, both students and staff • Expertise of teachers • Justice and Mercy group encouraging all students to participate • Mercy charism with a focus on education of women, rich and poor • High expectations for all–students, staff and parents
SECOND PRIORITY	• Generosity of staff in helping students • Teachers who have success at the heart of their work • Inclusive learning environment, no streaming, mixed-ability classes, promotion of growth mindset and peer support • Culture of success–individuals can succeed • Extra funding for supporting student needs–EAL/Special Ed • Offering opportunity for low SES students to receive a quality education	• Mutual respect between teachers and students • Leadership Team, Business Manager and teachers all have students' best interests at heart • Committed staff • Extra help for students by academic staff during recess and lunch times, and Homework Club after school • Strong communication between teachers and support staff, EAL and Special Ed • Welcome to the classroom that never runs out • Continuing financial support for a rich and wide curriculum • Holistic approach of all staff • As a staff we are encouraged to attend professional development to learn about inclusive practices • Leadership: Leadership Team operate out of Mercy charism in enrolment, curriculum and behaviour management • Explicit teaching and modelling of behaviours and skills needed to be a successful student

5.5.5 Observations from the summative card exercise

Comparative analysis of the perceptions and priorities given by the Leadership Team and the staff identifies that there is an alignment between these two stakeholder groups in relation to the Mercy ethos and values. The conditions arising from this shared understanding of key values and the actions they foster has the potential to lead to satisfaction for the teachers and positive outcomes for their students.

The recognition that every student is different and deserves every support to achieve was nominated three times as first priority by the leaders. Their second priority was the culture of success, the fostering of the belief that everyone can be successful. The culture of success was fostered by the teachers who have success at the heart of their work, the inclusive learning environment with mixed

ability classes and the promotion of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016). Leaders aligned their strategy of providing extra funding to support students in need which they believed resulted in offering opportunities for low SES students to receive a high quality education. This table provides evidence that the strategies for success adopted by the school, outlined in Chapter 4, are being translated into practice.

Staff recognised, as a first priority, the generosity of their peers in working tirelessly in their free time to support students as well as the diverse and ongoing development of teacher expertise and the high expectations held by every member of the school community. Their second priority was an acknowledgement that the leaders and staff all have students' interests at heart, the commitment of staff and their generosity in providing extra help for students.

Staff also nominated the importance of a good curriculum design, together with scaffolded pedagogy and professional development, as a first priority. Their second priorities included an affirmation of the continuing financial support for a rich and wide curriculum and an appreciation for the encouragement to attend professional development to learn about inclusive practices, including the teaching and modelling of behaviours and skills needed to be a successful student.

5.6 Conclusion

There were four factors identified from analysing the interviews of the Leadership Team and staff. The first was the powerful influence of having *a shared vison* that, in this case, was identified as the Mercy ethos. This was claimed to be understood by everyone and its implications for practice was embraced, forming the basis of everyday life at the school and decision making. The Mercy ethos was perceived to be the touchstone for everything that happened in the school.

The second was *appreciation for the Principal and Leadership Team*, with staff acknowledging that they felt valued by the Leadership Team. Leaders were entrusted to oversee the equitable use of funds, ensuring that staff were equipped to adhere to the school's stated strategies and that new staff recruited were well qualified and willing to embrace the school's policies. Teachers and support staff were perceived as placing paramount importance on achieving high quality education for all students. The Leadership Team and staff emphasised this factor in their comments about the necessity of providing professional development that would equip both leaders and teachers with the latest knowledge and strategies to meet students' needs. Staff emphasised the importance of leaders' encouragement of staff to upgrade their qualifications. In the review of the literature, attention was drawn to the need to promote quality teachers as an important factor in achieving student success (Auguste, Kihn and Miller 2010; Gonski, 2011; Sahlberg, 2015).

The third factor was the emphasis on the *quality of the relationships*. At every level, caring relationships were described as being a significant factor relating to the personal and academic success of all students, including those from low SES backgrounds. In most instances, staff had no knowledge of the socioeconomic background of students coming from poor families, but their focus was on meeting the needs of every individual, irrespective of their background.

The fourth factor was the school's focus on *achieving a balance of high quality and high equity*. This included policies of inclusion to assist every student to achieve successful outcomes, behaviour management policies based on restorative justice, an open enrolment policy and financial policies to support those in need. The monitoring of the academic performance of students meant that no student was left behind. Staff understood that the school was committed to the pursuit of excellence, a legacy from the founders of the school.

It is interesting to note that one other possible factor was not mentioned, namely, the school's built environment, specialist facilities and outdoor areas; these did not feature in the comments made by leaders and staff. This silence serves to place an even greater emphasis on the four factors mentioned above.

This study suggests that these factors might be classified as 'strong' in terms of the findings from the study undertaken by Marks et al. (2001). In their study, they noted that policy makers and others concerned with educational outcomes, "often ask which are the most important influences from the plethora of factors" that have been identified by researchers (Marks et al., 2001, p. 61). They concluded that, "from a policy perspective, it is important to understand which influences are 'weak' and which are 'strong' so that policies can be directed at influences that can make a difference" (Marks et al., 2001, pp. 61-62). The current study suggests that clearly defined ethos, wise and strong leadership, high quality teachers and high quality interpersonal relationships based on an integrity of care are clearly strong factors, while buildings and facilities are seen to be weak factors.

The next chapter will offer an opportunity to hear the voices of the graduates the perceptions of those who have received their education at St Ethnea under the guidance of these members of staff.

CHAPTER 6 GRADUATES' NARRATIVES OF THEIR EXPERIENCE OF BEING A SCHOOL STUDENT

> The ethos of the school is deeply embedded into all of us (Mary, 2012 graduate).
>
> No matter where you're from or what your family does, you'll always have support, whether it's financial like we did, or whether it's academic. The teachers are so supportive, and it's a great place to make friends from all different backgrounds (Elly, 2012 graduate).

This chapter reports on an analysis of the perceptions of graduates of St Ethnea, who came from low SES backgrounds, on their lived experience when they were students. The intention is to identify the possible impact of the deliberate school strategies implemented to support the educational success of students from low SES backgrounds and their explanations about what assisted them to experience success at school and beyond. In addition, links will be sought from the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 2 to explain the impacts that the school processes had on graduates' personal experiences and their educational successes.

The participants are six graduates from the 2012 Year 12 cohort. Their reflections focus on their perceptions of their experience of being a student at the school, including the impact it had on them at the time and on their current life experiences and choices. In this chapter, the analysis will seek to find links between the features of the school experience raised by graduates and the deliberate strategies employed at the school to enable student success.

6.1 Structure of the Chapter

In the first instance, this chapter will relate the individual narratives of the graduates who were interviewed. Each graduate was invited to choose an alias. One of the graduates chose a double alias, 'Faye Mellino'.

The chapter concludes with an interpretation and analysis of graduate perceptions and the ways in which their narratives reflect the findings of the studies that have examined and identified what schools can do to enable students from low SES backgrounds to be successful in education and life choices.

6.2 The Interview Process

The interviews were designed to be conversations that would provoke the graduates to reflect on, and share, their perceptions of their experiences of their secondary education and the ways in which it impacted on their educational outcomes and the construction of their identity as part of their secondary socialisation. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed, informal setting at a mutually

agreed location, at a distance from the school. The graduates spoke readily about their time at school and their post school experiences, generating rich personal stories that have been used as data. At the conclusion of each interview, graduates were invited to reflect on the preceding discussion and to nominate up to five key points that they believed were responsible for their personal success. They were asked to take five blank cards and write a word or phrase on each card and then place them in priority order.

6.3 Analysis of Graduate Transcripts

The analysis of the transcripts consisted of coding each comment and assigning it to a category. Ten categories were identified as having had an impact on each graduate's sense of self and her academic progress. Graduates gave greater emphasis to five of the ten categories which will form the basis of reporting about the perceptions of each graduate. These five categories are: ethos, inclusiveness, teacher/student relationships, peer group support and high expectations/culture of success. The remaining five categories were career advice, holistic approach of all staff, monitoring of attendance and academic progress, curriculum breadth/choice of subjects, and reports/feedback.

6.4 The Narratives of the Six Graduates

What follows is the narratives of the six graduates to explain the impact of their experience of school and the life choices they have made. An analysis of the implications will follow.

6.4.1 Faye Mellino's story

Faye Mellino has a multicultural, European migrant background. She commenced at the school in Year 7 and reported her introduction to the school as follows:

> I moved for the last year of primary, which was weird but beneficial … we had the orientation that I went to in 2006….by the end of lunch time the two girls that showed me around were the girls that I was in a friendship group with in Year 12.

6.4.1.1 The impact of the school ethos

Faye Mellino identified the ethos of the school as a significant factor in contributing to her academic success. She quotes the impact of her participation in the Mercy in Action visit to Argentina in 2010.

> It was Argentina…there was that undertone of something more than learning Maths or learning English…and I have it permanently on my skin now. It was Mercy and Mercy in action. It made the whole thing different.

She described that her desire to travel to Argentina had begun in 2007 when she was in Year 7:

> I went home and I was like, 'there's this mission' and mum was like, 'OK'. And then in 2010 we could apply. We couldn't afford it and she was like, 'you're going'. So we managed to do that somehow.

Faye Mellino offered the opinion that the school's strategy of exposing them to different and challenging environments had helped her to see, in her words, a "bigger picture"; that there was more than school, more than Australia; a view that the school had given her. She also described how the obvious 'works of Mercy' like doing can drives for the homeless or raising money for charities, paled into insignificance after seeing the poverty in the barrios of Argentina and seeing the impact that the contribution that she and the girls were able to achieve.

> We gave money for bricks to build houses and then we went and saw the houses that had been built…it changed everything. That's why I did Urban Planning [at university] and most of the things I want to do [are] because of that.

Faye Mellino perceived these involvements in social activities as another way of connecting to religion through the ethos of Mercy in Action, which she reported had a profound effect on her:

> There's religion and then there is Mercy, where I can talk to Sarah or Muslim girls and it's universally understood. It's less that 'this is my religion, that's your religion' which can divide people.

Faye Mellino reflected on the impact of this program of Mercy in Action on how the students were able to regard themselves differently as a result of their participation. She described that after such programs she saw the girls as standing up and being prepared to speak their minds, irrespective of the opinions of others: "…we're actually more true to ourselves. The girls would speak out with confidence with fewer voices behind us."

> There is more out there…the Argentina mission was completely invaluable to me. There's no way I would have done the [university] course I have done…or have the mentality that I have, if I had not gone…And the human interaction…

She expressed an awareness of the long term importance to her life of coming to understand the 'bigger picture' that was achieved through engagement in the school's international exchange programs.

Faye Mellino went on to illustrate how this impact was evident in her post-school work. She described how her subsequent studies and her employment had all been in male dominated contexts, including her university courses where most of the students were male, and later in her administration role within a construction company which was "still really male dominated". When

she reflected on this, she could perceive her own sense of resilience in functioning in a male dominated society.

> In the weirdest way, considering I was educated in an all girls' school it was water off a duck's back. My attitude to the men was 'I am not going to be submissive to you'.

6.4.1.2 The influence of teachers

Faye Mellino described her teachers as inspirational, not only for their teaching skills but also for their attitude to students' failure. She relates how one teacher sought her out to see how she was progressing. When Faye said she had failed Maths, the look on the teacher's face stayed with her and she recalled how it brought the following reaction to mind:

> I'm already disappointed in myself. Please don't react…and the look on her [the teacher's] face was just like what are you doing? Get your life together. It was just like, 'are you OK?' There is still authority there. But I have respect for people as people first.

Faye Mellino's comments reflect many of the quotes from students in the reviews of the research literature. Students need respect from the teachers as well as respect for the subject taught to enable them to return this respect (Smyth et al., 2000; Wrigley, 2000; Noddings, 2005; Tranter, 2010; Connell, 2013a; Marks, 2016).

Faye Mellino observed:

> I never understood why some teachers [I had before I enrolled at St Ethnea] had to go and puff out their chest, which not many teachers at this school did.

She recalled an incident in class when she was chewing gum. Her report about the incident revealed her sharp observation of how her teacher maintained good working relationships with his students in a socially supportive environment. She came to understand that the teacher's different approach, in choosing not to publicly challenge her, and his avoidance in using an authoritarian manner, allowed her to use her own initiative in managing classroom behaviour.

> You're not supposed to have gum. Well I had gum and instead of the music teacher being like 'can you not, chuck it out and sit back down' instead he just started this anecdote while we were supposed to be doing this drum beat. He's like 'isn't it weird the way some people chew their gum, they do it this weird way and they stick their tongue out with the gum'. And I was just, like, oh, you're talking about me. And I was just like OK and I took it out by myself. I was like, I hear what you're saying.

Faye Mellino also recognised that teachers' perception of their role in the school regarding students was one of providing support. This tangible attitude meant that students' understanding was that teachers were there to help and to be always available.

> You can ask for help and we will always be there, not only help with studies, but help with personal issues. I was very anti-counsellor, because then that made it an issue, whereas if I am just asking a teacher, then for all anyone else knows, it could be about English homework. But then also to give help. There are ways that you can be outside yourself in that giving sense and also receive help.

Faye Mellino was aware that her trusting relationship with teachers meant that she valued the fact that students could choose the subjects to study and then refine the choice "in a safe environment", an environment where the students felt secure. When asked what advice she would give to a potential future student, she stated:

> Coming to this school would be an easy decision to make. It gives you more than an education. If you just want to learn how to count or draw, go somewhere else. If you want actual life skills and to build a personality or to have some degree of self-discovery, in a safe place, at a young age…then choose this school.

6.4.1.3 Faye Mellino's summary of key factors

Using the blank cards, Faye Mellino identified what she believed were the significant factors that assisted low SES students to achieve success and she ordered each card in terms of its priority. Her factors were: (1) Mercy in Action–character building; (2) Self-led learning–fewer compulsory subjects; (3) Insight into the Bigger Picture–Exchange programs & Argentina Mission; (4) Help, seeking and giving; (5) Self Expression–flexible uniform rules.

6.4.1.4 Suggestions for the future

When asked what the school might do to improve its support for students from low SES backgrounds, Faye Mellino had two suggestions for the school to consider in the future.

The first was the reintroduction of the Argentina Mission. She considered that this experience for her had been completely invaluable and life-changing: "There's already been 5 years of students who haven't been able to do it. It breaks my heart. It's too good [not to be available for current students]".

Secondly, she suggested adding food preparation to the curriculum. She spoke about the need to be able to prepare food as an important life skill for all students, enabling them to be self-sufficient during their time at school and in the future.

6.4.1.5 Post school

After graduating from school, Faye Mellino completed two university degrees: Innovation Honours degree and Regional and Urban Planning Honours degree. She reported that she is currently seeking to work in areas in which she will be able to apply her commitment to meeting the needs of those

living in poverty through the use of the knowledge acquired through her practical and theoretical studies at university.

6.4.1.6 Reflections on the key features of Faye Mellino's narrative

There are several issues raised by Faye Mellino's narrative to note in going forward.

The first is the significance of the ethos of the school with its accent on service to others, experienced by Faye Mellino. This aligns with the school's aspirations (Appendix 1) which acknowledges the personal development that flows from making a difference to those in need. The Department for Education and Skills *Schools: Building on Success* report (2001) argued that there was reasonable evidence that schools with a strong sense of identity or ethos perform best. Smyth (2012, p. 12) asserts that the model of a socially just school is one which has "a clear and decisive mission and philosophy" and understands that its *raison d'etre* is about improving the life chances of all its students.

The second issue of note is the importance that Faye Mellino placed on the teachers' dispositions towards their students. Describing her teachers as "inspirational", she identified the positive relationships between teachers and their students as a key feature of her time at school. Marks et al. (2001, p. 6) claimed that teachers who "show an interest in every student's learning, provide personal support, hold high expectations for all, work with enthusiasm and take pride in their school have better results". Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez & Garrett (2003, p. 425) identified the potential for teachers showing authentic care to influence academic achievement. Students in their research identified a caring teacher as "one who truly knows you as a person and to whom they could talk to about personal problems".

6.4.2 Rosalie's story

Rosalie, whose parents are refugee migrants from a war ravaged eastern European country, lived in a situation of great deprivation. Her father left the family when Rosalie was three years of age and when she came to the school she had no known extended family and no family photos. Her search for identity is illustrated in a portrait that she brought to the interview, together with a folio of her work. It was a striking self-portrait, a haunted face criss-crossed by bars, which she called 'a search for identity'. Rosalie described the portrait in the following way:

> In an attempt to connect and relate the unknown to the almost known self through practice I have produced self portraits as a response to a developing uncertainty concerning identity as an emotional experience.

Rosalie's mother proved incapable of caring for her when she was young. Rosalie roamed the streets until a person living in the same street noticed the child was never at school. The neighbour recognised Rosalie as a child with great needs, took the child into her care and enrolled her at the local primary school and then later at St Ethnea. Rosalie commenced in Year 8. Although she felt welcomed when she came to the school, at first, she was unable to identify with other students. She saw them as having the look of "shiny new students who were sort of like skinny and they looked posh to me coming from a poor background". She reported that she saw herself as 'other' and determined that she would not make friends: "I just decided that if I was going to fit in I'd just be quiet and not bother anyone." Gradually, however, she made friends as she progressed through the school, stating that, "Having events with the whole cohort made us feel closer together."

Rosalie discussed the growth in her confidence between Year 8 and Year 12. She recognised that she was less shy and grew in confidence in her art studies and knew that this was what she intended to pursue after graduation from school. She also spoke about some areas in her life where she didn't feel confident and was aware that she needed to work on them. In pursuing a career in art, she spoke of the need to network and considered that this was not a skill she had learnt

> …the real-life skill of just approaching people, putting yourself out there, that's like really hard. For some people it's easy but it's an effort for me and it's also exhausting because I still have to work.

6.4.2.1 The impact of the school ethos

Rosalie reported that the school provided a safe environment, a comment reflecting her at-risk background. The street in which her house was located had a number of apartments housing itinerant tenants. This had worried Rosalie's 'carer' when she found Rosalie wandering in the street.

> Just being in a safe environment helps you to focus on what you want to do. In the city it gets really crazy sometimes, so I like just knowing you're in a school that's in the city but somehow you feel safe. That's a pretty big deal. We were pretty enclosed, so I guess you didn't really have to think about anyone coming in and we had some good security.

Compared to her primary school, Rosalie reflected that the school was, in her own words, "a lot more focused on community and teamwork". Rosalie considered that the Mercy fundraising activities such as the Walkathon and Can Drive were a good influence because they encouraged students "to bring goodness and help into the world". She went on to comment that "it's what we should do anyway".

Rosalie acknowledged that it was the support networks and relationships in the school that helped her to be successful. For her, one of these was within the Finance Office, under the leadership of the Business Manager: "If you're struggling for finance then I'm sure they can help you out."

6.4.2.2 The influence of teachers and peers

Rosalie described her appreciation for the motivation she received from teachers to "do better". She described her teachers as passionate, enthusiastic and ready to be helpful. Rosalie commented that she thought it was good that teachers expected hard work from the students and she came to see that "you can only get out what you put in".

> ...they wanted to help you and I think that's what you want from a teacher. Like they're interested in your learning and they're passionate about what their subject is. That definitely helped.
>
> … it's all good just to rock up to class and be like 'here's, another day of learning and fun' but I think it's good that teachers expected hard work from us.

Her end of year results from Years 8 to 11 revealed steady progress leading up to Year 12. Rosalie described the importance of, and her gratitude for, the guidance she was offered from her teachers and the career counsellor, acknowledging that there are many different pathways to consider at the end of secondary school. She described how she persevered with her Year 12 studies, gaining an ATAR enabling her to study Visual Arts at university.

Rosalie explained that she felt that achieving a high ATAR was not important: "As long as it's something that you want to do and you want to put in the work to do it, as long as you're passionate about it, you'll find a way eventually."

Rosalie named support from friends as one of the chief factors helping her to be successful: "If you weren't able to go up to them and tell them about your problems and get support, that would be really hard."

She expressed appreciation for the multicultural nature of the school and thought that "…every school should be like that". Rosalie commented that most of the students were friendly and accepting of students from a range of different cultures. She did have one concern relating to some of the students from Muslim backgrounds in that "…they often wouldn't get picked when we were doing sports. It's less to do with the school and more the people in it."

One of Rosalie's personal regrets was that she chose too many science subjects because of her interest in and love for science. In hindsight, she thought English and Maths might have been better choices. She conceded that art was always going to be her first preference and it was offered to her.

Rosalie summed up her school experience as: "School was fun…. Definitely fun."

When asked if she would recommend the school to a potential future student, Rosalie stated, "The school offers a lot of opportunities like after school and sometimes interstate." She also highlighted

that the school has “so many physical activities like water polo and volleyball.... we have a pretty decent library that’s usually open”.

6.4.2.3 Rosalie’s summary of key factors assisting students to achieve success

1. Support from friends and teachers
2. Motivation from teachers to do better
3. Being in an environment where you felt safe
4. Knowing that there are going to be different pathways outside high school and having help to know which one to take
5. Having events in the cohort that helped make us feel closer together or be better friends to each other

6.4.2.4 Suggestions for the future

Rosalie had one suggestion for the school to consider for the future, namely, tutoring or a homework club for students needing extra assistance, especially for those unable to afford the cost of individual tutoring.

6.4.2.5 Post school

When Rosalie finished Year 12, her substitute mother retired and moved away and Rosalie returned to her home to support her mother. University studies were hard as she had to financially support herself and her mother and, in order to obtain enough money to support them both, she worked at two jobs while studying full time. Despite this, she persevered, including having twice failed the theory component of her studies. Eventually she obtained her degree. Rosalie was awarded a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Arts in 2017. She continues to work at two jobs, seeing that as her first obligation. At present, she feels unable to pursue a career using her degree in visual arts due to the number of hours she is working to maintain herself and her mother. Rosalie has come a long way from being a street child to being a serious committed student; a confident young woman who can accept the constrained circumstances of her life. When asked what she would do with her degree, she said, “I will probably frame it”.

6.4.2.6 Reflective summary of key features of Rosalie’s narrative

There are several issues raised by Rosalie’s narrative to note in going forward. The first is the significance of supportive teachers, passionate about their subject and interested in students’ learning. Rosalie used words such as ‘amazing’, ‘passionate’ and ‘enthusiastic’ to describe her teachers. Marks et al. (2001, p. 56) found that one of the critical factors in achieving success in school is the construction of the identity of a student with high expectations and belief in the self as

an achiever. This perception of identity is the result of a sense of the self, fostered and maintained by the perceived expectations of significant others.

The second issue of note is the importance of the peer group as 'significant others'. Rosalie spoke at length about the significance of friends at school and later at university. She traced her 'making friends' journey through the school leading to her "feeling more part of a bigger group". At university, she acknowledged her reliance on her friends to help her finish her degree, admitting that, "I thought I could tough it out, like you know I'm smart enough to do it but I think the moral support really does help". A number of authors presented evidence that indicated that students who attend economically and racially diverse schools achieve success at school and beyond. Gonski et al. (2011, p. 111) referred to the growing body of research findings that demonstrate that "the composition of a school's population has a significant impact on the outcomes achieved by all".

The third issue is the importance of providing a safe environment. Rosalie named this as a key feature. The concept of safety does not appear in the findings of the research literature. Safety, as expressed by the graduates seemed to apply to a psychological safety, freeing students to make choices without being judged, but also to safety within a secure city environment.

6.4.3 Hannah's story

Hannah's mother was born in East Asia and later moved with her parents to South East Asia. Hannah's mother later escaped from an oppressive regime and sought refuge in a Thai refugee camp before migrating to Australia. Hannah's father was born in South East Asia and received sponsorship to migrate to Australia. Hannah's parents separated soon after their marriage in Australia. Hannah's mother completed primary school and was anxious to provide every opportunity for her daughter and young son to benefit from their education. Hannah commenced at St Ethnea in Year 8. She described settling in to the school as "a fun experience". She achieved outstanding results in all subjects throughout her secondary schooling and was Dux of the School in her final year.

6.4.3.1 The impact of the school ethos

Hannah considered that an important aspect of the school was that it helped her to achieve 'balance'.

> I think I had a well-rounded experience and that contributed to my success. All the extra-curricular experiences helped me to find more of a balance instead of just solely studying the entire time.

> The exposure to themes of Mercy and Justice meant that you're not just learning your Algebra and whatnot; there's a lot more to be learned. I had a really good balance of subjects, but also having to participate in things like Mercy Day. I felt that was quite crucial, because I felt that without those things I probably would have gone quite overboard in terms of my studies.
>
> I think the philosophy of Mercy is a great underlying theme to have at the school…because it's showing you there's a lot more to be learnt and that's the whole idea of exposing us to things like Mercy and Justice.

6.4.3.2 The influence of teachers

Hannah found that her teachers were extremely helpful and managed to assist every student in their mixed ability classes.

> They definitely went beyond and above. She [her Maths teacher] definitely gave us each an equal amount of time in the class despite the different levels we were at. Teachers were willing to extend their time, or make another meeting time, foregoing their lunch.

She attributed her post-school choice to the expectations of her teachers, supported by her mother, that she would "go on and do something like a STEM degree or a medical based degree". Hannah was really grateful for the opportunity to talk with people from universities and industry during her schooling.

6.4.3.3 The influence of peers

Hannah considered that her peer group members were "extremely" important to her. She spoke about going through some rough passages and appreciating the support of her friends.

> I don't know how I would have got through high school without my friends. I definitely appreciated my friendship group throughout high school and we still see each other 'til now so I guess that shows how strong [the friendship bonds are].
>
> I did have a bit of like family issues when I was in Year 8, 9 and 10 and was grateful for friends, not just for the help they gave at school, but also…just having a life besides, outside of school work.

Hannah described feeling secure in herself. She reported that she knew she was a capable student with a "bubbly" personality.

> I knew that I could do well. I definitely didn't think that I was, you know, the best of the bunch or anything because I had a lot of other friends who were really good on other subjects…but I think in subjects like Maths and stuff, those kind of topics just came kind of naturally to me. Yeah, I did get branded like that from my friends and my classmates. For example, when I got Dux, they were like 'we weren't surprised, we were just expecting it'. But I think also my friends would have described me as being pretty bubbly… My idea of being bubbly was probably from them as well. Yeah, maybe the way they described me…did kind of cement how I would describe my personality.

Hannah reflected regretfully on how friends had influenced her decisions not to become involved in many of the optional extracurricular activities, but she acknowledged that it had provided her with the impetus to become more involved at university.

> …it's not a bad thing, but my friends weren't quite active in doing many extracurricular activities. I remember I really wanted to join, what was it? The Social Justice Club but none of my friends wanted to do it so then I never ended up doing it. The Duke of Edinburgh Award as well. I was really interested but I had no other friends who were keen to do it… But when I actually went out of high school I didn't know anyone going into my course and I think it was from there that I finally went on to do activities and joining clubs like RoboGirls and going on exchange and putting my hand up for, like, all these different things.

The multicultural aspect of the school appealed to Hannah. She recalled that her class was "just so mixed" and she spoke about how much she loved it. She mentioned that she had really good friends from so many different cultures. Moving from high school to university from such a multicultural environment proved to be a smooth transition for her. She was aware that students coming from monocultural schools would find the university environment much more challenging.

6.4.3.4 Hannah's summary of key factors assisting students to achieve success

1. Balance
2. Encouraging teachers
3. Connecting with universities/post-high school pathways

6.4.3.5 Suggestions for the future

Hannah had two suggestions for the school to consider for the future. When she was in Years 8-10, she often finished her work quickly and she would have appreciated being given some extension work. Her second suggestion related to the possibility of students being able to complete particular Year 12 subjects during Year 11 to take some of the pressure from Year 12. For example, the possibility of studying Year 12 Chinese in Year 11 (she had attended ethnic school on Saturdays).

When asked if she would recommend the school to a potential future student, Hannah stated, "I would recommend this school because it is a great environment to be in". Hannah appreciated the mixture of modern and traditional buildings and liked its location in the centre of the city. She considered herself fortunate to be in the first cohort to use the new Year 8 building and thought that "the gymnasium was definitely a stand-out".

6.4.3.6 Post school

Hannah has been very successful at a Go8 University, completing a Chemical Engineering degree and participating in a half year exchange at a Chinese University. She also undertook a placement at

a multinational company, received a research scholarship at university and has now taken up a graduate position with a major mining company.

6.4.3.7 Reflective summary of key features of Hannah's narrative,

There are two issues raised by Hannah's narrative to note in going forward. The first issue relates to achieving balance. Hannah reported that she felt the school offered her balance and that was "fundamental" in terms of her success. She appreciated the good balance of subjects and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. This accords with one of the school's value statements: "We encourage our students to adopt a balanced approach to living" (Appendix 1).

The second issue relates to the importance of teachers being understanding and encouraging, who "really wanted" students to succeed and who were always available to offer extra assistance. Marks (2016, p. 6) asserted that "positive student relationships are closely related with high achievement and student wellbeing". This is an example of Tronto's (2013) notions of caregiving and care-receiving in which students are receptive to the care being offered by improving their knowledge, resulting in the development of trust and solidarity between teachers and students.

6.4.4 Olivia's story

Olivia's mother is Australian, her father has a European background and her parents are separated. Olivia appreciated that choosing a school was a "massive decision for parents to make". She described her parents as being not overly religious but that this personal belief didn't influence their choice of school. When asked whether her parents were happy with the outcome of their decision, Olivia replied:

> My dad, not so much probably, but my mum was always supportive. 'Cos my dad is strongly atheist, so he always had this, like, problem, but the school was great and Mum loved it.

Olivia enrolled at the school in Year 7 and described this as a very positive experience for her:

> It was really lovely. I built up some nice friendships. I didn't have any problems with the teachers. It was a very nice atmosphere to come into. Everyone was very welcoming.

6.4.4.1 The impact of the school ethos

Olivia described the multicultural mix of the school as interesting.

> …like all the different backgrounds and how people come together and find one common theme. I liked my year level a lot.

Olivia expressed appreciation for the fact that the school provided her with challenges.

> The school was challenging as well as welcoming. But a good challenge because I don't think it's easy to get bored there.
>
> You had music, drama, heaps of sciences which you could choose from. There's something there for everyone. I did a wide range of subjects. I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do so I tried a bit of everything. I think PE stood out for me. I liked that they try to [cater] for everyone. There's only so much you can do in a school environment but there's definitely...they definitely do a lot there.

Olivia found the many choices of subjects in the curriculum were helpful in allowing students to explore and "find their passion". Her personal problem, however, was that despite taking a variety of courses, she could never find her passion. She described how she took advantage of many of the optional extracurricular activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

> I went up to Silver [level] in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. As part of that I went up [as a volunteer] to the Tiwi Islands. The Duke's was awesome.

In listing the aspects of the school which helped her to succeed, she opted first for:

> The enriching environment, like you can have the best teachers, the best subjects but if the environment is crap you don't feel comfortable and you can't be yourself. The school was always friendly. You could have the worst morning and then come to school and you've always got friendly people there. And I honestly feel that truly. That's one of the main things that I appreciate from school.

Olivia appreciated the fact that learning could be fun.

> School was fun. Like, still learning, still very constructive but it was just good to have some fun. Never boring…. I think you can get very overwhelmed, especially in the later years of high school so to add a bit of fun in there is always good.

6.4.4.2 The influence of teachers

Olivia felt that, while teachers were passionate about their subjects, "they [also] really cared about the person". She remembered one test she didn't do well in, and "the teacher came up and said, 'Look, what happened? I'll try my best to help you out, I can teach you. I want to make sure you succeed'".

> She cared, which I appreciated. It's one thing to teach a course, and get grades and stuff, but I felt she really cared. It's another kind of care for the students. Any time I needed help I would just ask them, like, 'When are you free?' and they would reply 'Yeah. Sure, come for extra study, stay back after class'.

Olivia acknowledged the high expectations held by staff and the easy access for students to obtain help and guidance. She found that "all the teachers were very easy to approach".

> There was a massive push for high results and all that, but [teachers] had the help there to help the students. It's not kind of just throwing you out in the deep end and letting you do it for yourself. There's always someone there to back you up which I liked.

Olivia recalled the personal support that the teachers gave her.

> I had some personal stuff, as everyone does in Year 12. I probably wouldn't have been able to do it by myself because I wasn't the best student. The teachers were all very encouraging, just healthy encouragement and healthy criticism. I probably wouldn't have passed by myself, to be honest.

6.4.4.3 The influence of peers

Olivia identified the importance of the friendships she had with other students in the school.

> I still talk to some of the girls that I was friends with in Year 7 and we're still pretty close. I definitely built some nice friendships. Over the years a few friendships grow apart. Some are just friends because you're at school, you see them every day. But yeah, I've definitely still got a good group of girlfriends that I went to school with. Very important. You make your real kind of friends during high school.
>
> I remember days when I didn't feel like doing anything but having all the girls there in class supporting you, going through everything with you. Never had a boring day at high school.
>
> It's not a problem trying to find help that you need and when the teachers aren't available you've always got your peers to go to which is great.

Olivia recalled that she had faced friendship issues in mid-Year 11.

> That's where I had a lot of friendship issues come up. I had a lot of distractions, as you do growing up, and I think I let that kind of just grind me down the wrong path …there's one particular person that probably wasn't helpful in my decision making and I'd do it a lot differently now. I wasn't as strong a person back in Year 11 and 12 so I just kind of did what everyone else was doing and I followed the wrong crowd probably from mid Year 11 all through Year 12. Not the best.

When asked why she would advise a potential future student to enrol at the school Olivia stated, "It helps you grow up. It is just the welcoming and enriching environment I spoke about."

6.4.4.4 Olivia's summary of key factors assisting students to achieve success

1. Enriching environment
2. Fun
3. Wide range of subjects
4. High expectations with easy access to help and guidance

6.4.4.5 Post school

Upon completion of Year 12, Olivia was accepted into a Science degree at a university, but decided to defer and earn some money. She applied again, a few years later, and was accepted to study Forensic Science and Criminology, but again deferred. Olivia has been promoted to a full-time managerial position within a retail company. She explains, "I'm just not a person for university, I guess. So I work full-time and am happy doing that."

While she is attracted by the prospect of earning money, making it possible for her to travel, she admits that:

> …mums that I work with, like, they've gone back to study and are loving it. Yeah. Maybe. In the next couple of years or so [that might be me].

6.4.4.6 Reflective summary of the key features of Olivia's narrative.

There are three issues raised by Olivia's narrative to note in going forward. The first issue relates to the importance of the ethos of the school, described in Olivia's narrative as an 'enriching environment'. The Preface to the 2017 document on School Policies states:

> This school is a Mercy school based on the theological values of Mercy, enunciated by Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine's gratitude for God's mercy was the foundation of her enduring hospitality. We seek to create a spirit of hospitality which respects and rejoices in the uniqueness of each member of the community (Appendix 1).

The second issue focuses on a sense of fun and enjoyment in learning. Marks, McMillan & Hillman (2001) concluded from their study that school level factors which contributed to lifting tertiary entrance performance included "giving students confidence in their own abilities and providing an environment conducive to learning and in which students are likely to experience high expectations for educational success" (Marks et al., 2001, p. 56). According to Coleman (1966), acquiring the identity of a serious committed student is not limited to members of an upper or middle class. Olivia included the word 'fun' in a number of her comments, implying that the learning environment that she experienced at the school was enjoyable.

The third issue concerns the importance of friendly teachers with high expectations who are always there for you. Connell (2013a, p. 104) discusses the idea of care through his notion of encounter, which he believes implies respect and reciprocity, and "a degree of mutual engagement by learner and teacher". His study concluded that schools have "the opportunity to influence the affective relations between its students, and the direction and strength of their commitments to success" (Connell, 2013a, p. 366). Olivia recognised in her teachers, Dweck's (2016, p. 202) ideal teacher, one who challenges and nurtures at the same time.

6.4.5 Mary's story

Mary's mother transferred her from a suburban high school to the school at the beginning of Year 9. Mary came from a single parent family. The decision to enrol her, where a contribution towards fees would have to be negotiated, was an indication of the value Mary's mother placed on education.

6.4.5.1 The impact of the school ethos

At the time of Mary's entry into the school, her mother appreciated the flexibility of the payment plan offered by the Business Manager and the respectful way in which he assisted her.

> It meant a lot to my mum that she could send me to this school. It was really good that they were so receptive. She never ever felt as I would be taken from the school if she couldn't make a payment. They were so flexible and I think that that's really good to offer students that don't necessarily come from a high financial background.

Mary spoke about the contrast between this school and her previous school which she perceived as lacking in focus.

> When I went to the school it was cool to get good grades, like, everybody enjoyed learning, everybody enjoyed being there, so there was, yeah, a really good sense of focus.

Her choice of study at university was influenced by the Mercy ethos of the school.

> Being a social justice school and all of the activities I was involved in made me think this is what I want to do with my life. It was going to Argentina which by far was one of the experiences of my young life that shaped me into who I am, and definitely made me decide that I wanted to work in that sector. It's that raw poverty that you see in those barrios. The poverty in Argentina is quite different from that in Australia where it's not in your face.

Mary has discovered that the ethos of the school:

> …is deeply embedded and you don't realise it until you speak to someone from another school and you realise how different it was for them. So I'm really glad that we chose this school because I think that the Mercy spirit, even subconsciously, is embedded into all of us.

> I probably would have been thirteen when I first started at the school [and began] to grow and develop as an individual in a learning environment that was focused on social justice and social development. I was then able to frame my understanding of the world through [a] compassionate lens.

Mary noted that four other girls from her Year 12 cohort and herself had chosen degrees that would allow them to be agents of change.

> All of us said we were going to work in different fields and that one day we would come together, put all of our expertise together and continue the work [for the poor].

6.4.5.2 The influence of teachers

Mary thought that the teachers:

> …had a good balance between being quite personal and being professional. The teachers showed respect to the students, particularly in Year 11 and Year 12. By then, we had formed our own personalities and our own interests and our own direction; they were there to facilitate this. Even though the students knew there was like a big push to try to do our best, it was really fun. It was easy to relax and come to school every day and know that you are going to have a good time. I enjoyed every minute of school.

Mary found the teachers to be understanding.

> You could feel relaxed and a little bit at home if you ever had a problem or if you were having a bad day you'd know they would accommodate for that. At the same time, if you were being absolutely lazy, they weren't afraid to give you a bit of a push and be like, 'you need to focus now, knuckle down'.

Mary appreciated that teachers and the school had an expectation that students would take their schooling seriously.

> I think that's a good thing. It helped us to think about where we wanted to go so we wouldn't kind of take our time for granted. Especially in Year 11 and 12 it was like, OK, what do you want to do and how are you gonna get there? So all of us were trying to be strategic. So I definitely felt, you know, as if I wanted to go to uni and I wanted to do really well I knew that studying and kind of focusing was a big part of that.

> I remember the teachers when we were choosing our subjects and we had to put in our timetable, they were trying to be like, you know, what are you interested in? what would be good for you? So I think that really made me think at a young age, you know, it's easy to get caught up in your own high school and think that school's the end of the path but to choose your subjects wisely because you need to identify your strengths and you need to identify where you want to go. So that was a conversation that I had with a few different teachers to know what it is that you're interested in and what you're good at in order to play to your strengths.

Mary described how the teachers extended students' horizons by bringing in speakers from universities, business and industry.

> It was really good when visiting speakers would come in and talk to us. It opens up your mind a little bit more. It was good to hear that there's so many possibilities and opportunities.

6.4.5.3 The influence of peers

Mary acknowledged that other students were influential in her growth as a person.

> People you were surrounding yourself with as a young person definitely shape you and influence you. Some saw eye to eye but others were challenging. The challenges were good and I learnt a lot from the people around me. Even if you have people that you clash with, it was never a negative thing. You still had that foundation like, you know, you're Mercy girls.

Many reflected on the decision to join optional extracurricular groups.

> That's another way that students can impact so much. I was lucky because quite a few of my [new] friends did Social Justice and went to Argentina with me and did SRC. My [close] group actually didn't do any of that at all. My group was very different; they weren't interested in that. I think some of them did sports, that was their kind of interest, but for me, I would go to social Justice by myself and my group didn't join me. I tried to encourage them quite a few times but it wasn't their thing. It didn't bother me and I was close with some of the other girls who were there so that was fine. Yeah, I didn't let that stop me. That was something that I was interested in.

When asked if she would recommend the school to a potential future student Mary stated, "I would recommend the school "hands down…. I've taken so many good things from my experience at the school, especially positive energy and drive".

6.4.5.4 Mary's summary of key factors assisting students to achieve success

Mary chose to write the following statement on one card:

> Mercy in Action – Providing an environment where girls grow, learn and experience with the spirit of mercy in the back of their minds. This creates compassionate young people who are focused on problem solving for social justice and social development

6.4.5.5 Post school

Mary had begun her university studies with Law, but after the first semester decided she didn't want to practice as a lawyer. She switched to International Studies and Arts, believing this would be a greater help in pursuing a career in human rights advocacy. At the beginning of 2018, Mary spent a month on an internship in Cambodia, researching waste management and identifying recycling solutions. This experience confirmed her intended direction for the future. Mary graduated from university at the end of 2018.

6.4.5.6 Reflective summary of the key features of Mary's narrative.

There were two main issues raised by Mary's narrative to note in going forward. Mary was greatly influenced by the school's ethos with its focus on Mercy in action. Dweck (2016, p.195) would describe her as "a successful student whose primary goal is to expand [her] knowledge and [her] ways of thinking and investigating the world". Mary is a good example of a student who values knowledge, not only for its own sake but also for its instrumental use, hoping to make a contribution to society at large.

Mary's internalisation of the ethos of the school could be considered, in Berger and Luckmann's (1967) terms as part of her secondary socialisation, with her adoption of compassionate values and her focus on social justice and social development. One of the school's value statements claims,

"We believe in developing in students a critical awareness of the world about them, of their own needs and of the needs of others" (Appendix 1).

6.4.6 Elly's story

Elly's family is from South East Asia. Her mother is a single parent with two children, Elly and her older sister, who also attended the St Ethnea. The family members are Buddhists and regularly attend services at their temple. Elly enrolled at the school in Year 3. Her school reports were impressive, indicating high achievement every year.

6.4.6.1 The impact of the school ethos

Elly spoke about the importance of faith at school teaching students to become better persons and giving them something to believe in. Elly found that the Catholic ethos fitted with her Buddhist beliefs and was comforted to learn that "Jesus doesn't discriminate". This helped her to deal with the effects of racism in the wider society.

> I think it opened my mind. Now that I'm an adult I go to temples and am more involved with Buddhism. If you have that faith at school, you become a better person. It is important…it makes a big difference.
>
> I was never judged because of my race or anything like that. Everyone was very accepting even through high school because I was there for so long.

Religious studies was appreciated by Elly and seen as a critical influence in her construction of identity. This led her to accept her ethnicity and to renew her approach to Buddhism. She commented that she now regularly attends worship in a Buddhist temple in Melbourne.

Elly recalled her teacher telling the class that "no matter what your religion [is] you're accepted, it's your right to learn whatever religion you want".

> So I think that was really good. I think at one point I knew more about being Catholic than I did [about] being Buddhist and that was because I was obviously more exposed to it. Now I go to temples more and am more involved with Buddhism. But it was really good to learn about Catholic [beliefs].

Elly reflected on the fact that fundraising activities for the poor and disadvantaged had made her more giving. She recalled how it occurred to her at university that she was naturally more giving than her friends when donations were being sought for an orphanage in Cambodia. She attributed this spirit to the influence of her education at this school.

6.4.6.2 The influence of teachers

Elly described her relationships with her teachers and the assistance they gave her as being a very important factor in her success. When asked about what were the specific things that helped her to

succeed at school, Elly specified feedback: “Teachers were really able to help me to figure out what I needed to do to improve more.”

Elly explained that she felt that the teachers had high expectations but, at the same time, they insisted that the students had to be responsible for their grades. Nevertheless, the teachers balanced their expectations of student effort and responsibility for their learning with the provision of substantial guidance and personal support.

> They would still stay back after school to help you. Teachers were really loving and caring as well. They wanted to get to know you as a person. [They’re] not just your teacher but your friend as well…so I got to know my teachers as the person they were, not just the subjects they were teaching.

Elly appreciated the assistance from teachers in helping her to understand what might be possible in her life. She was aware that her background limited her in knowing what was possible for her future. She described how the teachers assisted her to refine her ideas about the future.

> Coming from a low SES background, I was just thinking of what I could do to make money, but we were pushed to do what we enjoyed and what interested us….From the Personal Learning Plan, which was connected to career counselling, I learned that I wanted to do something that was hands on and that helped other people as well.

6.4.6.3 The influence of peers

Elly had been bullied at her previous school but, once she came to St Ethnea, she found that she made friends easily and this also taught her how to include others in her friendship groups: “I was taught the value of friendship, so when I met new students I was actually very accepting of them.”

Elly described the importance of her peer group’s support and the effects that they had on her own expectations: “Others around me were getting good grades and I wanted that for myself as well”.

The notion of safety was named by Elly as one of the chief things helping her succeed. As with other graduates, this seemed to refer to a sense of belonging, of peer group support, as much as a place of refuge from the pressures outside school.

> I think you need support all along the way, moral support. If I got bad grades or something happened to my family, I would always be able to go to school and they’d be like a safe network or a safe place for me to be.

> I had a really good group of friends who were supportive in whatever I chose to do and it wasn’t just ‘let’s do this because we’ll be in the same group,’ it was really ‘oh, you’re really good at this’. We were really good at pointing out what each other was good at. I think it’s important to have friends who know you well.

Elly believed that team work helped to develop her character.

> In sport we had to work as a team to get results…and it was good. Team building is getting into the spirit of working together. It made me work so much harder. Everyone was in it together.

When asked if she would recommend the school to potential future students Elly stated:

> I would recommend it because it's a fantastic school. No matter where you're from or what your family does, you'll always have the support, whether it's financial like we did, or whether it's academic. The teachers are so supportive, and it's a great place to make friends from all different backgrounds. Both the teachers and the students make it a very enjoyable experience, something memorable.

6.4.6.4 Elly's summary of key factors assisting students to achieve success

1. Reports–comments from teachers, feedback
2. Career counselling
3. Friends, social groups
4. Team building–sports houses
5. Personal Learning Plan

6.4.6.5 Post school

Elly was awarded a Bachelor of Oral Health degree at the conclusion of her university studies. She now has a full-time position in a dental practice interstate.

6.4.6.6 Reflective summary of the key features of Elly's narrative.

There were three issues raised by Elly's narrative to note in going forward. Elly acknowledged social inclusion as a feature of the school. She expressed appreciation for the fact that she found everyone very accepting.

Elly's highest priority was feedback from teachers. She recognised that she could only improve by being receptive to feedback from her teachers who knew her well and gave her the confidence and support to succeed. Elly had trust in her teachers whom she felt she knew personally, not just as teachers of subjects. She described the teachers as "really kind and loving and caring as well". Elly's comments about feedback correlated with Tronto's (2013) definition of care-receiving and the moral element of responsiveness.

Elly highlighted that friends and social groups helped her to become a successful student. She claimed that "without friends at school I don't think I'd be able to enjoy going there every day". Elly felt that both friends and the teachers made school "an enjoyable and memorable experience". She also felt that her friends provided her with a safe network "or a safe place to be". In the

formation of her identity as a successful student, her peer group played an influential role as 'significant others'.

The study of Religion was appreciated by Elly with her background of Buddhism. She considered it to a critical influence in her construction of identity. This led her to accept her ethnicity and to renew her following of Buddhism. She commented that she now regularly attends worship in a Buddhist temple in Melbourne.

6.5 Discussion

The following table is a reflection on the combined experiences of these graduates' accounts of their lived experience, how it impacted on them while they were at school and how it had influenced their lives and life choices after graduation. The key issues that the graduates identified as contributing to the success at school aligned significantly with the approaches identified in the review of literature. The following table outlines how the graduates described or referred to the overriding values they experienced, or perceived, in their time at the school.

Table 6.1: Alignment of literature with interview data

Research Findings	Graduate perceptions
The school environment (ethos) that fosters the enabling of a positive student identity, collaboration, social responsibility (Allder, 1993; DfES, 2001, p. 61; Smyth, 2012, p.12).	The school ethos/Mercy values Welcoming Safe Inclusive
Teachers' dispositions and support; caring, respectful teacher/student relationships (Rose 1995; Valenzuela 1999; Smyth et al., 2000; Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2003; Tronto, 2013).	Teacher/student relationships Care and support Personal and educational encouragement
Social inclusion/importance of the peer group (Hayes et al., 2006, p. 177; Thrupp, 1999, p. 5; Wrigley, Lingard & Thomson 2012, p. 104).	Peer relationships Inclusion Student diversity
Maintenance of high expectations within a high quality/high equity school (Gonski,2011).	High expectations Support for students to achieve the best possible outcome

6.5.1 School ethos

While only one graduate actually used the word 'ethos', the concept was referred to frequently as 'the environment'. Other words used to describe it were 'atmosphere', 'spirit' and 'Mercy in action'.

It became clear from the graduate responses that the ethos of the school was, in their view, an important factor in building their academic success. They commented on the warmth of the welcome given to all, and the way in which those from disadvantaged backgrounds, whatever the nature of the disadvantage, were never identified, never singled out by staff or students. They recalled that support was offered to all students according to their needs, financial, academic or emotional. The sense of welcome was noted quite frequently in the graduates' responses as originating from the quality of the staff and the school's policies. Emily referred to the warmth of the welcome students received after returning from absences that disrupted their studies.

6.5.2 Mercy values

The experience of the Mercy ethos influenced the future career paths chosen by graduates, for example, Mary's choice of Bachelor International Studies. Her adoption of compassionate values and her focus on social justice reflect one of the school's Value Statements which states, "We believe in developing in students a critical awareness of the world about them, of their own needs and of the needs of others" (Appendix 1). The accent on service to others was noted by many of the graduates. Mary was greatly influenced by the school's ethos with its focus of Mercy in action. Dweck's (2016, p. 195) description of a successful student as "one whose primary goal is to expand [her] knowledge and [her] ways of thinking and investigating the world" could well be applied to these graduates. For most graduates, Mercy in action "made everything different". They reported that the experience of working for the poor, as an aspect of this ethos, influenced their life choices and their understanding of social justice

The school promotes community participation and accepts its contribution to learning, personal growth and happiness as well as promoting responsible citizenship and concern for others. The DfES report (2001, p. 61) claimed that "evidence suggests that schools with a strong sense of identity or ethos perform best". Smyth (2012, p. 12) asserts that the model of a socially just school is one which has "a clear and decisive mission and philosophy" and understands that its *raison d'etre* is about improving the life chances of all its students.

6.5.3 Teachers' dispositions and support

Graduates all described their teachers as supportive, passionate about their subject and interested in students' learning. Rosalie used words such as 'amazing' and 'enthusiastic' to describe her teachers. Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst (2000), Wrigley (2000) and Tranter (2010) emphasised the importance of respect, perceived in teachers and reciprocated by students, as a decisive factor in building relationships. The participants in the current study rarely specifically cited the concept of 'respect'. Instead, the word 'caring' was used constantly to describe an existing

characteristic of all of the teachers of the graduates interviewed. Students received 'authentic' care. Graduates claimed that teachers went "over and beyond what was expected"; they cared about each student "as a person"; they knew them "as a person" and the student knew the teacher "as a person". Dweck's (2016) ideal teacher, one who challenges and nurtures at the same time, was recognised by Olivia.

Describing her teachers as "inspirational", Faye Mellino named positive teacher/student relationships as one of the key features of her time at the school. Antrop-Gonzalez et al., (2003) identified the potential of teachers showing authentic care to influence academic achievement. Students in their research identified a caring teacher as "one who truly knows you as a person and to whom they could talk to about their personal problems" (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2003, p. 6).

The care described by the graduates reflects the concept of 'hard care' which Antrop-Gonzalez and de Jesus (2006, p. 411) characterise as "supportive instrumental relationships and high academic expectations". Connell (2013a, p. 104) puts the same notion differently as "engagement through encounter, which implies respect and reciprocity, a degree of mutual engagement by learner and teacher". This degree of care and commitment supposes a very special kind of teacher.

6.5.4 The Impact of Teachers' High Expectations

Olivia appreciated having friendly teachers with high expectations who were always there for you. Marks, McMillan and Hattam (2001, p. 56) found that one of the critical factors in achieving success in school is the construction of the identity of a student with high expectations and belief in the self as an achiever. This perception of identity is the result of a sense of the self, fostered and maintained by the perceived expectations of significant others, in this case, by their teachers. Marks et al. (2001, p. 6) also claimed that teachers who "show an interest in every student's learning, provide personal support, hold high expectations for all, work with enthusiasm and take pride in their school have better results". Failure on the part of the student was treated not with public disparagement, but in private as a personal concern on the part of the teacher who exhibited an understanding that one cause of failure may mean that things might not be going well with the student in their everyday lives. Faye Mellino's and Olivia's narratives clearly illustrate this point. In recounting their stories, it was obvious that the graduates' detailed memories of their interactions with teachers were still alive in their minds from five years ago.

Graduates noted that teachers were not "soft" on them, but differentiated laziness from real need. In their interviews, in the same strain, teachers admitted that they could be "fierce" if the circumstances required it. Mary, a graduate, stated that, as well as being accommodating, teachers

had high expectations of them, but if they thought a student was being lazy, teachers would challenge the student "to knuckle down".

Olivia, Hannah and Rosalie all included the word 'fun' in a number of their comments, suggesting that the learning environment that they experienced at school was enjoyable. Marks et al. (2001, p. 53) concluded from their study that school-level factors which contributed to lifting tertiary entrance performance included "giving students confidence in their own abilities and providing an environment conducive to learning and in which students are likely to experience high expectations for educational success".

Elly's highest priority was feedback from teachers. She recognised that she could only improve by being receptive to feedback from her teachers who knew her well and gave her the confidence and support to succeed. Elly trusted her teachers whom she felt she knew personally, not just as teachers of subjects. She described the teachers as "really kind and loving and caring as well". Elly's comments about feedback correlated with Tronto's (2012) definition of care-receiving and the moral element of responsiveness. Elly found the teachers' care to be effective because it increased her knowledge.

6.5.5 Maintenance of high expectations within a high quality/high equity school

Nieto and Bode (2012) claimed that having high expectations is critical to academic success. It was evident that all of the students interviewed had high expectations and the resilience to maintain them. During their high school studies, they all aspired to attend university. Unlike many of the students in Tranter's (2010) study, in which students admitted that it was not 'cool' to complete their Year 12 studies, nor had aspirations to participate in higher education, most of the graduates in this study enrolled in higher education courses which they completed successfully. Only one of the graduates declined university offers and instead joined the workforce. However, she is considering higher education in the future. Gemici et al. (2014) observed that if significant others, for example, teachers and other students, manifest an aspiration that expects students to continue on to higher education, and where there is an environment where such an aspiration is the norm, then it is likely that most, if not all of the graduating class will embrace this aspiration.

For the students in this study, the high academic quality of the school, outlined in Chapter 4, had a considerable effect, not only on successful school completion but also on the successful academic achievements of the low SES students in their higher education studies. Lim, Gemici and Karmel (2013, p. 20) found that the academic quality of a school had a considerable effect on successful outcomes for low SES students.

The high equity quality of the school reported in this study aimed to ensure that students' special needs and unequal socioeconomic backgrounds were catered for by providing appropriate resources and outstanding teachers. Masters (2018, p. 1) claimed that "a useful way to view equity is through the lens of 'fairness'". This implies that every student is offered the support that will help them to succeed. The graduates in this study expressed gratitude for the way in which teachers went out of their way to support them to be successful in their studies.

6.5.6 Social inclusion and the importance of the peer group

Graduates identified inclusion as the most important factor in making them feel welcome and giving them a sense of belonging in the school. The graduates interviewed were from extremely diverse socioeconomic and multicultural backgrounds. They commented on how they noticed the diversity in the school and how much they valued the multicultural mix, not only at school in widening their horizons, but also in giving them an acceptance and understanding of other individuals from different backgrounds whom they met at university.

Graduates were eager to talk about the multicultural mix of students in the school community. They felt this was a good preparation for the multicultural communities that they found themselves immersed in at their respective universities. They could mix freely with everyone.

An ethos of inclusion was evident to graduates in many forms, namely, finance, culture, religion and academic achievement. Students enrolling at the school are not tested, either for their academic achievement or the ability to pay fees. Several graduates mentioned their finances as being precarious, but said, matter-of-factly, that the school will fix something up, there is no need to worry about finances. Mary found this aspect of the school reassuring.

A number of authors (Thrupp, 1999; Hayes et al., 2006; Wrigley, Thomson & Lingard, 2012; Abdul-Alim, 2016) have presented evidence that indicates that students who attend economically and racially diverse schools achieve success at school. Gonski et al. (2011, p. 111) referred to the growing body of research findings that demonstrate that "the composition of a school's population has a significant impact on the outcomes achieved by all".

Graduates described their peer group as 'significant others', raising their expectations, being a source of comfort, and even providing a 'safe' environment, where they could be shielded from issues outside of school, and where they could safely make choices. The importance of the peer group as 'significant others' was emphasised by Rosalie who spoke at length about the significance of friends at school and later at university. She traced her 'making friends' journey through the time at school, leading to her "feeling more part of a bigger group". Later, at university, she acknowledged her reliance on her friends to help her to finish her degree, admitting that "I thought I

could tough it out, like you know I'm smart enough to do it but I think the moral support really does help".

Expectations for student success were projected by the peer group as well as the staff. For Mary, "the people you were surrounding yourself with definitely shape and influence you". Sometimes this was a support, sometimes it was a challenge, "but if you have people that you clash with, it's never a negative thing". Out of her cohort, several other girls had been to Argentina, including two who were studying Medicine; others had opted for different fields. They plan to come together "and put all [their] expertise together and continue the work [in Argentina]".

While peer group influence was largely spoken of in positive terms, peer group pressure sometimes caused students to miss out on optional extracurricular activities. This sometimes occurred when members of their friendship group were not interested in participating. Hannah spoke of this as a cause for regret, but it served as an incentive, later on, for her to join clubs at university.

6.5.7 The School as a safe place

A number of graduates identified the safety of the school environment as being significant. Faye Mellino identified the element of safety even in choosing subjects. She spoke of refining her choices of subjects in a "safe environment" where she felt secure. Safety, as a construct, was not found in the literature. It is evidence that the pressures outside school, to which the students were subjected, were often in direct contrast to the values of the school. Almost all of the graduates involved in this study came from single parent families, without a background of secondary school completion or higher education. Many of the graduates, when they were students, felt forced to work to support their families. Students reported that the school recognised the reality of these issues. For example, in response to student demand, the library staff agreed to keep the library open until 5pm each week day to ensure that students had a quiet place to complete their homework. The interview with the Information Services teacher revealed that many students did not have a quiet place to study at home.

6.5.8 Balance of Education and Quality of Life.

The idea of taking a holistic approach to education and balance was identified as important. The scope of this emphasis in the school ethos was emphasised by Hannah who attributed her success to the holistic approach offered at the school. This accords with one of the school's value statements, "We encourage our students to adopt a balanced approach to living". The broad curriculum and extracurricular activities which are included for all students, together with a range of voluntary programs, gave the graduates the opportunity for a well-rounded education that went beyond

academic achievement in which social values and social responsibility became "deeply embedded into all of us" (Mary, interview, 2018).

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter reported on the findings of interviews with the six graduates involved in this study. The reader will observe that there are many similarities in their responses. The interviews reveal the perceived importance of the following elements in achieving equity in schooling for all students:

- The school ethos
- Teacher/student relationships
- Educational expectations
- Inclusion and diversity of students
- Interaction with the peer group

These responses of the graduates are congruent with, and reflective of, the findings from studies that refrain from focusing on deficit aspects of the lives of students from low SES households, contained in Chapter 2.

6.6.1 Defining success from the lived experience of the graduates

From the graduates' responses, relating their real life and lived experience, success at school for low SES students was an outcome of the implementation of those values found predicted in Chapter 2 in the literature review suggesting positive strategies for student success. Not only were the graduates successful at school, but with the exception of one who felt that university was not a good fit for her at the time, and who declined offers for entry into two different university courses, all of the other graduates in the current study successfully completed their university degrees. An aspect of success, made apparent in the interviews, was the readiness of the graduates to acquire a moral purpose and to demonstrate a generosity of spirit in their present and future lives. They spoke about their strong desire to contribute to making a difference for those faced with extreme poverty. Many of them chose particular university courses which would assist them to fulfil this ambition. The development of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), encouraged by their teachers, made it possible for them to reach even higher levels of personal achievement. When the 2018 SACE results were released, Westwell (*The Advertiser*, 4 January 2018, p. 55), the SACE Board Chief Executive, in reflecting on the importance of celebrating excellence in academic achievement, reminded us to also celebrate those students "…who achieved beyond what they ever thought they could or have made it to the end of the certificate having dealt with personal difficulties or circumstances beyond their control".

He concluded that these students are the “unsung heroes of SACE” and that “they represent everything the SACE should be in South Australia, a springboard that enables them to make a positive contribution to life and to those around them”.

This perspective of success accords with the definition accepted in this study, which takes into account the academic achievement of students along with personal attributes of resilience, motivation, self-discipline and determination to be the best they can.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to answer the question, 'What school-based factors contribute to successful academic and personal outcomes for students from low SES backgrounds?' The study sets out to examine the proposition of how might schools contribute to successful educational outcomes for students from low SES groups when schools adopt the constructive interventionist approach such as that promoted by Karmel (1973), Sahlberg (2015) and other researchers.

Beginning with a critique of a prevailing deficit view regarding the educational success of students from low SES backgrounds (Bowden and Doughney, 2010; Shallcross and Hartley, 2009; Payne, 2005), It was argued that focusing research on the personal limitations, barriers and challenges that confront students from low SES backgrounds achieving educational success failed to enable social change. Following on from this argument, the initial stages of the study considered what constitutes success and focused on educational models and research studies that were based on principles of social justice and equity.

The study itself used a case study of a single, inner city, private girls' school to identify the impact of the values held and actions taken that schools might implement to assist student success. The school selected for the case study had a well-established, deliberate strategic approach to inclusiveness and student success, and a proven track record of success for all students, in particular those who were from low SES backgrounds (see Chapter 4).

The data for this thesis drew upon the perceptions and experiences of school leaders and staff as well as a representative group of graduates from the Year 12 cohort in 2012 who came from low SES backgrounds to identify which school factors were perceived as best contributing to students' success. This chapter concludes with a review of the issues arising from the study, and a discussion on the implications for the school studied, whether the findings of the research can have meaning for other schools/institutions and recommendations for further research.

The research in this thesis has been influenced by the views of Karmel (1973), Sahlberg (2015) and Gonski et al. (2011) that every child can succeed if given the right circumstances. It is based on the views of educational writers (Devlin and McKay, 2014; Marks et al., 2001) advocating research which is directed to ascertaining strategically constructive approaches to learning which will lead to success in schooling for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The study was based on a belief that the attainment of success will lead individual students to the formation of a positive identity and the gaining of self-confidence, motivation and aspiration. The argument was that students needed such confidence in their own abilities and that this was achieved through "providing an

environment conducive to learning and in which students are likely to experience high expectation for educational success" (Marks et al., 2001, p. 56). It is in this type of environment that a culture of success is nurtured.

Researchers (Marks et al., 2001; Truebridge, 2015) urged that quantitative research should be used where there is evidence of success for students from low SES backgrounds. While this has been a qualitative study, quantitative data in chapter 4 provided evidence of sustained student success at the school.

7.1 Emergent Themes for Contributing to Student Success

The responses in the interviews indicate a remarkable consensus between the three groups of participants. Chapters 5 and 6 generated evidence of the congruence between the perceptions of staff and students between these two groups of stakeholders and with the stated policies and strategies outlined in Chapter 4. The literature review identified positive approaches to supporting low SES students at school.

Each of the constructs emanating from the literature review found support in the interviews. All three groups interviewed (leaders, staff and graduates) identified the ethos of the school as providing the basis for decision making directed to the positive growth of each student. The Mercy ethos was seen to incorporate all the values needed to underpin student success and motivate teachers. Greatest support was given to the qualities embraced in the ethos: Compassion, Social Justice, Respect, Service, Hospitality and Inclusiveness (see Chapter 4).

Graduate responses suggested a broader definition of success than that usually found. They highlighted the values and non-quantifiable attributes internalised during their time at school. Resilience is evidenced in this study by those who allowed themselves to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances. They found that success was likely when their value as individuals was affirmed. They were transformed by the interactions in their lives with significant others who cared for them. They came to see an added dimension of success in their lives as that of young women whose actions were inspired by the Mercy ethos.

The following themes perceived as having the potential to contribute to student success are set out in Table 7.1 with student and staff voices attached to each theme.

Table 7.1: Congruence between the literature and participants' perceptions

Emerging Themes	Relevant Literature	Responses of Participants
Mercy ethos of respect	Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, Ouston & Smith (1979, p. 205): students were influenced by whether or not they were treated with respect as individuals, and that there was influence of the peer group resulting from the ethos of the school which had the potential to influence academic outcomes.	The Mercy ethos is deeply embedded in us and you don't realise it until you speak to someone from another school and you realise how different it was for them (Mary, Graduate). The Mercy ethos drives our decision making at school, so it's not just a slogan. It underpins our discussions and decisions (Teacher).
Strong leadership committed to maintaining an agreed ethos	The AITSL Report (2017) claimed that effective leadership had a significant impact on student learning by the way in which it shaped a school's culture and created a shared vision within the whole school. Robinson (2007), Shields (2013), Smyth & Wrigley (2013), Day & Sammons (2016) argue that there is a link between quality leadership and student outcomes. Successful leaders understand the importance of developing school structures around "social cohesion, empathy, caring, respect, reciprocity and trust" (Smyth & Wrigley, 2016, p. 167). Greenleaf's model of leadership (Spears, 1998, p. 4) placed serving others as the first priority for leaders. His notion of servant leadership emphasised "increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; the promotion of a sense of community; and a deep understanding of spirit in the workplace" (Spears, 1998, p. 4).	It's the perfect alignment of school values and my personal identity and values that keeps me here. It was like teacher heaven when I came here (Deputy). Staff and students emphasised that the strategies and practices employed by the Leadership team were based on their commitment to what was best for the students. The Leadership Team, together with staff and students, articulated evidence that they practiced the principles of the ethos of the school with its core values of care, compassion, hospitality, service, justice and respect. Leadership made a priority of supporting women who needed to work part time, who had families, who were supporting parents. Staff feel individually known and cared for and valued (Teacher). Leadership team are always supportive of new ideas and are willing to listen and give staff support to initiate change (Teacher). Senior staff operate out of the charism in enrolment, in curriculum and in behaviour management (Teacher). There is a clear synchronicity between Greenleaf's model of servant leadership and the Mercy ethos.
Social inclusion emphasising the importance of a diverse peer group	Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel, & Lim (2014, p. 30) found that one of the most important influences determining choices to attend university was the influence of peers. Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield & York (1966, p.22) asserted that "a pupil's achievement is strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of other students in the school".	There is not only a sense of inclusion for all students, but that applies to staff also in their interaction with each other. There is something really unique about the staff culture of this school. It's nurturing, it's encouraging and supportive. That staff culture then permeates to students and they see that everyone is respected and valued in this community (Principal). If you weren't able to go up to your friends and tell them about your problems and get support that would be really hard (Rosalie, Graduate). I don't know how I would have got through high school without my friends. I definitely appreciated my friendship group throughout school and we still see each other, so I guess that shows the strength of our friendships (Hannah, Graduate).
The integrity of care, respectful teacher student relationships	A key element in constructing a positive identity is the authentic care and respect shown to students (Rose, 1995; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013; Tronto, 2013).	There were students who were borderline homeless, in and out of shelters, and what was really excellent was the sense of welcome and an experience for the student of not having to explain herself when she went back into the classroom, an expectation that we'll meet you where you're at and we'll do whatever we can to support you. Clean slate (Teacher). The teachers were loving and caring. They would stay back after school and help you. They wanted to know you as a person. It's not just your teacher but your friend as well so I go to know my teachers as the persons they were, not just the subjects they were teaching (Elly, Graduate).
Teacher Quality	Marks (2016, p. 6) claimed that the quality of teachers is the greatest school related influence on student outcomes. Scholarship and passion for teaching are not enough.	The real key is the teacher embracing Mercy values that inform teaching (teacher). Teachers take on board the culture of success and put in place structures and mechanisms to make the completion of Year 12 and achieving and ATAR a real possibility (teacher). Teachers have high expectations for all students. They monitor student progress and attendance and help students meet their individual challenges (Deputy). Teachers were passionate about their subject (Rosalie, Graduate). Teachers were loving and caring and they wanted to get to know you as a person (Elly, Graduate).
Maintenance of high expectations and a culture of success within a high quality/high equity school	Lim, Gemici & Karmel (2013, p. 20) found that the academic quality of the school had a considerable effect on school completion and the probability of attending university. Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel & Lim (2014) noted that if significant others, for example teachers and peers, manifest an aspiration to achieve it is likely that most students, if not all, will embrace the same aspiration.	It's no one teacher's responsibility to ensure success…it's all of the counsellors, the support staff, the Leadership team, the coordinators (Teacher). We don't stream students and that way I think they gain confidence. They have examples of students from different backgrounds or different academic area so they can aspire to something different because they're exposed to such diversity (Deputy Principal). This school gives you more than an education. If you just want to learn how to count and draw, go somewhere else. If you want actual life skills and to build a personality or to have some degree of self-discovery, in a safe place, at a young age…then choose this school (Faye Mellino, Graduate).

7.2 Perceptions of Staff and Students of the Importance of Strong Leadership

The literature review reveals a strong connection between the leadership of the school and student outcomes (Robinson, 2007; Shields, 2013; Smyth and Wrigley, 2013; Day and Sammons, 2016). These writers argue convincingly that successful leaders will understand the importance of developing school structures around "social cohesion, empathy, caring, respect, reciprocity and trust" (Smyth and Wrigley, 2016, p. 167). It was emphasised by staff and students that the strategies and practices employed by the Leadership Team were based on their commitment to focus on what was best for the students.

Greenleaf's model of leadership (Spears, 1998, p. 4) placed serving others as the first priority for leaders. His notion of servant leadership emphasised "increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; the promotion of a sense of community; and a deep understanding of spirit in the workplace" (Spears, 1998, p. 4). There is a clear synchronicity between Greenleaf's model and the Mercy ethos. Greenleaf (1970) defined servant leaders as "affirmative builders of a better society. He saw the rock upon which a good society would be built as people caring for and serving one another" (Bordas, 2005, p. 231). The Leadership Team, together with staff and graduates, articulated evidence that they put into practice the principles of the ethos of the school with its core values of care: compassion, hospitality, service, justice and respect.

7.2.1 Ethos of care

In all responses of those interviewed, the greatest emphasis was placed on the role of care as fundamental to the implementation of the values defined by the school's ethos. What has been missing is an examination of the *quality* of the care offered. It seems appropriate to examine more closely the nature of the care offered, as it relates to Tronto's schema regarding the integrity of care. Zembylas et al. (2014, p. 202) have suggested that Tronto's (1993) definition of care can be used as a normative framework to judge the adequacy of care in education policies and practices. The data from interviews with the Leadership Team, staff and graduates enable a judgement to be made regarding the policies and practices of the school as they relate to Tronto's framework.

Using this framework, five phases of care and their corresponding moral elements are identified as those valued and exercised by both leadership and staff.

Table 7.2: Tronto's schema applied to the study

Element	Definition	Application to the study
First element: ***Caring about***	Corresponding moral element: attentiveness to those needing care Awareness that there is a need for care to address inequities	The school philosophy states that children need care for personal and academic growth Attentiveness to those needing care is a theme emerging from the interviews Staff reported that leadership within the school were committed to 'caring about' staff
Second element: ***Caring for***	Corresponding moral element: responsibility The actions taken in response to an awareness of the need for care	Students interviewed described staff as being always available and generous with their time Staff described the leadership team as supportive, both personally and professionally
Third element: ***Caregiving***	Corresponding moral element: competence The skills and knowledge required to give appropriate care; a capability to be acquired through learning	Students identified that the care extended to them wasn't just 'being nice', but involved difficult and thoughtful decisions Students claimed that the staff made the effort to know them as a person Staff affirmed the importance of being student-centred in all approaches
Fourth element: ***Care-receiving***	Corresponding moral element: responsiveness The willingness to receive care from the caregiver	Leadership and staff emphasised that care needs to be given in a way that respects the care receivers' dignity Graduates confirmed an appreciation for the care given All interviews affirmed that care was given and received between all stakeholders: students, teachers and leaders
Fifth element: ***Caring with***	Corresponding moral elements: trust and solidarity Developing habits of caring over time	Evidence of an institutional commitment to care as a practice within the school studied The importance of care is documented as policy

Source: Tronto, 1993.

The responses of staff and graduates show that there is positive affirmation of 'caring with' within the Mercy ethos shared by staff and graduates. The lived experiences of those participating in this study reflect those attributes and practices that meet Tronto's criteria for the 'integrity of care'. Based on the Vision and policy frameworks, and the professional learning that corresponded to this vision, it could be said that this school has adopted and fostered a successful organisational competence of care. This is also reflected in the graduates' comments relating to their choice of professions where their aim is to apply their knowledge to make a difference in the lives of those living in poverty.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) talk of this process of caring as the secondary socialisation which takes place usually in schools. Students are influenced by 'significant others' in their lives, in this

case, students are clearly influenced by their teachers and other students to internalise the integrity of care that is expressed in the Mercy ethos. It is significant also that teachers see themselves as influenced by other teachers and by the members of the Leadership Team whom they see as role models.

7.3 Emerging Issues not addressed in the review of the literature.

7.3.1 Tertiary socialisation of teachers

The process of tertiary socialisation undergone by the teachers is critical in the giving of care. Just as Berger and Luckmann (1967) showed us how students undergo a process of secondary socialisation in the school, so too, teachers at a school must undergo changes and adaptations to their concept of their own identity and how it relates to the values of the school. Like the students, they interact with 'significant' others, with other teachers, and indeed students as well as the ethos of the school, to construct an identity which reflects the values of the school. One of the teachers, described the outlook of some teachers coming on to the staff as "It's a job. I work nine to five, I'm efficient". She goes on to say:

> It's not that they're bad teachers. They are very efficient teachers. They can tick all the boxes about work, health and safety and their reports are in on time and all of that. But they are not centred on what is best for the students. Rather, their attitude is 'What about me?'. When you first come here you either think this is great, the vibe here's what I like, I can see what's happening or you go 'this is chaotic' and you move on.

Teachers of this latter persuasion cannot see why students are not automatically penalised for not handing up work on time, or why deadlines are negotiated taking into account the circumstances of the student. Conversely, other teachers affirmed in interviews the view that they had come to "teacher heaven", relating immediately to the values of the school and recognising them as being in one accord with their own, confirming their own identity.

7.3.2 Teacher respect for each other

A further factor which is not discussed in the literature is the importance in the school of teacher respect and support for each other. In the study, the existence of this respect was a model for the students. Teachers saw the members of the Leadership Team as models, 'significant others' to emulate. Teachers respected teachers, and they respected the value of subjects other than their own. Art, considered as a 'soft' subject by Teese (2000), was valued by the Leadership Team of the school and was well resourced.

7.3.3 Monitoring students' academic progress and attendance

Attendance was cited by staff as a key factor in seeking success. It is not mentioned in the literature. The 'right circumstances', to which Sahlberg (2015) and Gonski et al. (2011) refer as leading to successful outcomes for students in this school in this study were generated through complex practices of acceptance, inclusion, care, strategies to break down subjects in order to build a scaffolding for learning, and strategies to encourage attendance. Because of the diverse and impoverished backgrounds of the students and the home responsibilities required of some, attendance, and how the school counters the complex multitude factors impeding attendance, become major issues if the student is expected to succeed. It could be expected that the same problem of attendance would occur in any school having a significant number of disadvantaged students. Leadership responses relate how the school has devised structures to resolve problems associated with attendance. This involves a number of people, including the parent/s (these are mostly single parent families), to monitor attendance closely and note where attendance has been sporadic. Staff work with parents to remove obstacles facing the students, such as child minding, working to obtain extra income for parents, dropping off siblings to other schools, interpreting for parents who speak languages other than English and extra help is given to the student to catch up on schooling missed.

7.3.4 School as a safe environment

The designation by graduates of the school as a 'safe' environment is somewhat unexpected, and not mentioned in the literature surveyed. Yet, it was described as important to students who may live in homes where there is domestic violence, drug use or other pressures common in today's environment and where conditions conducive to study are almost impossible. Besides feeling physically safe and able to study in the library after hours or go to the homework club, students found a psychological safety in making decisions about their futures, supported by expert career advice and unimpeded by their home situation, where students might be expected to bring in income for the family, rather than proceed to higher education.

7.3.5 School ambience as a 'significant other' building identity

Ambience, or general atmosphere, is seen as the result of the coming together of all the aspects resulting from the implementation and internalisation of the ethos. The whole ambience of the school studied was seen as one of welcome; the totality of the components of ambience, (inclusion, personal relationships, care given, quality of school buildings) became, in their own right, a 'significant other' helping to build a positive identity.

As a result of the ambience created, students found school to be ‘fun’ and ‘never boring’. These comments were an acknowledgement of the ‘authentic care’ of teachers, their ‘hard care’ in the preparation and presentation of their subject, and the example given of the welcoming of the peer group after one student had ‘the worst morning ever’ at home. In this instance, ambience is seen as more than the collection of school buildings or the built environment, but as the totality of the school ethos in action.

It was unexpected that during the interviews there was little reference to the built environment. Surprisingly, it was only mentioned in passing by two of the graduates. This fact prompts an interesting question. Did this mean that staff and graduates do not value this aspect of the school environment? Or rather that it is accepted as a given, providing a warm, welcoming ambience, wherein all of the respondents were able to focus their comments on social relationships and the caring qualities of staff. This silence in this study suggests that funding authorities might see the need to focus on the quality of teachers over and above an ever-increasing emphasis on grandiose school buildings.

7.4 Implications of the Research for the School Studied

The results of the interviews showed that the school has already implemented policies meeting the suggestions found both in the literature, in the interviews and in the documented policies of the school. It would seem that, using the criteria for success, the measures taken in the school studied to attain academic and personal success are highly successful and the school can only be encouraged to persevere in all that it does to bring about this success.

Such perseverance includes the following issues:

a. **Funding for professional development of staff and for specialist teachers.**

The Gonski Report (2018) advocates the financing of resources for professional development and the financing of teacher specialists. Such funding is already high on the agenda of the school under consideration but needs to be kept under constant evaluation.

b. **Funding to attract, welcome and retain low SES students as part of the school’s mission.**

The enrolment of 15-20% of School Card students seems to work well. The funding operation has to continue both to attract students and to manage funds to finance the waiving/reduction of fees and of the financing of student needs, such as laptops, graphics calculators, uniforms, extracurricular activities and specialist support staff. These are all expensive but necessary in

achieving equity by attracting, welcoming and retaining low SES students. Funding for this purpose needs to be constantly reviewed.

c. The importance of relationships within the school.

In the construction of their identity as serious students, graduates stressed the importance of teacher/student relationships and peer group relationships, describing the peer group as significant others. From this study, it is also clear that positive leadership/teacher and teacher/teacher interactions are seen by all of the participants to be extremely important. The reality of the school ethos is constructed by all of these interactions. It is important that the school continues to place an emphasis on these relationships which are vital for the maintenance of the school ethos. It is clear from teacher responses that there are structures for new teachers to be inducted into the Mercy ethos, outlined in Appendix 2 and for the components of the ethos to be propagated as a basis on which decisions are made.

d. The significance of offering students a life changing experience.

The development of the whole person was an area overlooked by many of the educational writers but one given pre-eminent importance by the interview responses in this study. Out of all their experiences, the school visit to the barrios of Argentina was, for those graduates who undertook it, an experience which heightened their awareness of social justice issues in the world. Thinking about factors which have shaped their identity, they described the opportunity as a "life changing experience", motivating them in the choices they make today. From their experience of five or six years previously, the young women who were interviewed continue to make choices, in their lives and in their careers, based on a Mercy ethos of serving others.

7.5 Possibility of Replication of Research Findings

This study has demonstrated the importance of schools developing an organisational vision and mission. As part of this vision, the UK Government agreed that all schools need an ethos (DfES, 2001), a set of values embraced by all–parents, teachers and staff–that guide decision making in the school. The following questions arise: Can any of the distinctive characteristics of the social imaginary, encompassed in the Mercy ethos, be replicated in other schools? Is this ethos based in a particular religion and therefore not transferable? Would it be possible for a non-faith-based school to gain agreement amongst staff and students on the content of those moral values they wished to foster?

7.6 Ethos based on Mercy values

One possible attempt at an answer is found in the remarks of the graduates themselves given in the interviews. Faye Mellino gave the insight that the Mercy ethos, however described, is not necessarily attached to religion. For her, religion divides but the Mercy ethos belongs to all humanity. Elly found that the Mercy ethos made her a better Buddhist. Faith-based schools are likely to be founded on an ethos particular to each one, but based on Christian ideals and, therefore, open to all the values of the Mercy ethos. Schools that are not faith-based, may construct an ethos based on other traditions.

7.6.1 Ethos based on a philosophy of the importance of the individual

The philosophy of the importance of the individual, such as that promoted by Heidegger (1927), insisted that human beings are not just things, objects of service, that need to be taken care of. He saw individuals as oriented towards each other. As such, they should be seen as recipients of solicitude. He defined this type of care as being guided by qualities of considerateness and forbearance.

7.6.2 Ethos based on the secularisation of religious beliefs

An example of secularisation of religious beliefs can be found in Greenleaf's (1998) idealisation of the Servant Leader, growing out of the teachings of Christianity, but secularised in his construction of the leader as servant. Greenleaf's ideas have attracted a large following from the business world, and run counter to the practices of banks, for example, which openly pursue the tenets of greed and reward with financial gains for those who are part of these operations.

Or, to take an extreme example of secularisation of the Christian message, I was somewhat surprised, on walking into a classroom during my first visit to China in 1976 at the height of the Cultural Revolution, to find, on the blackboard, in English, this statement: "Every cadre in the Revolutionary Ranks must love one another and serve one another". Love for one another and service of one another was, and is, a very Christian virtue, in this instance derived from Marx's early Lutheran background, a virtue that diminished as China embraced capitalism. As China became industrialised, values became Westernised, and the early ethos of communism was replaced by the social construct of neoliberalism where 'management' for the financial success of an organisation replaces leadership for the interests of those involved, and financial success and greed outweigh all else and are accepted and rewarded. During my more recent trips to China in the 1990s, if one asked of Chinese the question, 'What has replaced the values you once held?' the answer was then, and is today, universally, 'Money'.

7.6.3 Ethos based on management principles and moral values

Gherardi & Rodeschini (2015, p. 266), in the same vein as Tronto, abstracted the notion of care from faith-based values and identified it as "an organisational competency, a situated knowing that a group of professionals enact while attending to their everyday tasks". These writers posited that care is not an innate human capacity; nor for them is it based on religious beliefs. Rather, they believe that, considered as organisational competence, based on 'moral' values, a construction of management, this competence should be enshrined in the ethos of all schools.

It should be noted, however, that in any attempt to replicate an ethos based on moral values, there is a problem in that Tronto (1993) and Gherhardi and Rodeschini (2015) posited the responses to various forms of caring as growing out of a moral base that they take to be a given in society. They offered 'moral values' as a basis for the care of individuals. Morality, however, is a social construct, its values differing from one generation to another, indeed from one class to another and from one culture to another. For an acceptance and promulgation of care in all its forms, there must be an agreement on the values forming the ethos of a particular school. For such an agreement to exist, whether based on religious values, derived from religious values or derived from a secular philosophy, a tertiary socialisation of teachers must occur. There cannot be an assumption that all members of staff hold similar values which form a moral base for the sustaining of an agreed social imaginary.

7.6.4 Social construction of an ethos based on educational principles

As has been shown in Finland, the agreement on a particular ethos for a whole system of education was accomplished by Sahlberg (2015) who brought together parents, teachers and politicians to agree on a new approach to equity in their schools. Such an approach could be replicated in Australia without any reference to 'Mercy' or religious values.

It can be seen from the interviews that a process of establishing habits and patterns of care can be developed and be more visible where there is agreement among all the staff of the values to be used in underpinning teachers' attitude to students, their belief that all students are worthy of care whatever their background, and that all students can attain success given the right circumstances. Qualities of trust and solidarity are built on the quality of staff/student relationships, whereby staff and students share the same ethos and the same values of compassion, inclusion, acceptance and service.

It could be argued, therefore, that, in a newly established school, a strong ethos could be established without any overt, acknowledged adherence to Christian values if a principal and her /his

Leadership Team and staff could construct and agree on a particular statement of values created collectively which they wished to establish in the school, and if they could choose staff who were open to this ethos and willing to participate in its articulation and implementation. This can take place in any school with an ethos that is embraced or constructed and shared by all. This would, of course, in government schools, suppose a change in policy permitting principals to choose staff whose values resonated with a school's ethos.

7.7 Significance of teacher capability and the integrity of care

In the interviews, teacher capability and disposition were perceived to be the key to implementing measures to help students succeed. In the same vein, Gonski et al. (2011) suggested a reform in education by creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert teachers. However, Gonski et al. does not address the issue of *how* to foster or create the distinctive profession of teachers who have the characteristics he values. Very little attention is paid in his recommendations to the all-important ethos of teacher preparation institutions committed not only to excellence in the preparation of subject matter, but also to a commitment of offering the concept of care to their students and resisting the pressures of a test-driven mentality which places the demand for high results above all else.

7.8 Importance of establishing the value of care

The insights of this study strongly support the importance of care given to students in their aim to be successful. It would seem to be obvious that more attention should be paid to teacher preparation institutions, their curriculum and their understanding of the role of teachers as a 'significant other' in the lives of their students. Only if the expert teachers, created under Gonski's plan, care for their students with "consideration and forbearance" (Heidegger, 1927), respect their students and devise strategies for the success of disadvantaged students, will they effect change for these students when they take up positions in schools. This also applies to the preparation of those aspiring to be principals. Every teacher has the possibility of being a 'significant other' in constructing student identity.

The interviews show the sharing of these values in the school being studied to be of a high level. Tronto (in Zembylas, Bozalek, & Shefer, 2014) spoke of a reiteration of the process of care which can be compared with the process of secondary socialisation which Berger and Luckmann (1967) outlined in relation to the formation of identity. Patterns of behaviour become internalised, the positive identity of a serious committed student is formed, positive teacher/student relationships are formed, and students respond to teachers' efforts to help them succeed.

7.9 Recommendations for Future Research

If schools wish to promote conditions leading to equity in schools, the following questions must be asked.

- What encouragement and conditions are required for schools to take seriously the need to evaluate and reform their approaches to promoting educational and personal success for students from low SES backgrounds?
- How might school systems or individual schools with a high success rate actively ensure student cohorts that include a significant percentage of 'disadvantaged' students in their enrolments and how will this be funded? Where funding is allocated on the basis of disadvantage, research should be pursued to determine whether this needs-based funding is actually directed at strategies to support teachers in the classroom with mixed classes and diverse cultural backgrounds.
- How should teacher education institutions respond to these research findings, especially those related to giving precedence in the curriculum to developing awareness, knowledge, capabilities and dispositions regarding the integrity of care in preparing future teachers for the teaching of classes that are not streamed, that are of mixed academic ability and of mixed cultural background?
- How should this emphasis on the significance of care as an organisational competence (Gherardi & Rodeschini, 2015) be incorporated in those institutions responsible for the education and development of school leaders.

7.10 Conclusion

The responses made in the interviews clearly relate to the issues identified in the review of positive literature: ethos, inclusion and, especially, care. Graduates, while not always naming the ever-present ethos of the school, spoke continually of the values basic to the ethos. There is nothing new in this. It is accepted that in any institution where there is a strong ethos, embraced by all, that ethos will be visible in action. Allder (1993) suggests that ethos influences all aspects of education, not just the formal curriculum, but across every activity including the personal development of students. In a similar vein, Smyth (2012, p. 12) asserts that a school which has "a clear and decisive mission and philosophy" will acknowledge that the reason for its existence is to improve the life chances of all of its students.

This study has shown that disadvantaged students can undergo secondary socialisation that enables them to internalise an identity as serious, committed students, able to choose 'hard' subjects, or

indeed choose whatever subjects that further their ambitions. Indeed, the graduates in this study have broadened their concept of success to include not only succeeding in university studies, but being a person who incorporates 'values' in her decision making, in particular in choosing careers in which she will serve others and effect change. One is reminded of Connell's (1982) insistence that we ensure that educational theorising does not exist solely in the realms of academe, but is rooted in the authentic, lived experiences of the students it is intended to serve. Indeed, this may be one of the insights for others found in this study. Today, 'disadvantaged' may be a category found across the classes. Nevertheless, the presence of high expectations, of clearly held strategies, of committed, qualified teachers sharing a common ethos, and exhibiting authentic care encompassing the solving together of problems inhibiting successful study, can lead to success in study, and personal success in the formation of a positive identity.

Policy makers and schools emphasising equity in school strategies could easily be discouraged by those aspects of neoliberalism which affect schools and universities. Connell (2013, p. 20) reminds us that "education itself has a resilience, has a grounding in social needs, that cannot be suppressed and that will be heard. As Shakespeare put it, in the direst of times, stones have been known to move and trees to speak".

APPENDIX 1: EXCERPTS FROM KEY SCHOOL DOCUMENTS AND POLICIES

The following text comprises excerpts from current and historical school documents which have been edited only for the purposes of de-identification.

1. MISSION STATEMENT

Situated in the heart of the city, St Ethnea College, a Catholic school or girls, is a community of students, parents and staff drawn to the educational opportunities offered in the Mercy tradition.

Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus, we pursue the joys, freedoms and challenges of all aspects of learning and truth, through a balanced, dynamic curriculum.

We respect the uniqueness of each person, and take pride and pleasure in the diversity of our community.

Our strong commitment to the wider community springs from the vision of Catherine McAuley, and challenges us to accept responsibility for an ever-changing society.

2. VISION STATEMENT

These beliefs are the hallmarks of St Ethnea College and form the foundations of our vision as a Mercy School and a local Church: -

- We believe in God.
- We believe in the sign of God's merciful justice–Jesus Christ.
- We believe in the Spirit, enabling us to be a sign of God's mercy in the community.
- We believe in the sacredness of life.
- We believe in our responsibility to all people.
- We believe in our responsibility for continuing the work of creation.

3. VALUES STATEMENT

- We believe that Gospel values guide all the activities of St Ethnea College.
- We recognise that the foundations of this school rest on the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- We encourage our students to be confident young women who, with Christian courage, will meet the challenges of the future.
- We nurture in our students an enduring zest for all aspects of life and learning.
- We offer a wide and rich curriculum that aims to provide for a diversity of interests, talents and educational needs.

- We encourage students to be self-disciplined and purposeful as they strive for personal excellence.
- We believe that by encouraging our students in imaginative and creative pursuits, we are celebrating and continuing God's creation.
- We care about our environment and encourage responsible use of the world's limited resources.
- We encourage our students to adapt a balanced approach to living.
- We believe in developing in students a critical awareness of the world about them, of their own needs and of the needs of others.
- We celebrate, as a community, our gifts and achievements, and we support one another, particularly in times of special need.

4. POLICIES DOCUMENT PREFACE

St Ethnea College is a Mercy School based on the theological values of Mercy enunciated by Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy.

Catherine McAuley's understanding of mercy was essentially a life-giving force and in this she was guided by those powerful words of Jesus:

"I have come so that the may have life and have it to the full."

Catherine's gratitude for God's mercy was the foundation for her enduring hospitality. We seek to create a spirit of hospitality which respects and rejoices in the uniqueness of each member of the community.

At St Ethnea College the Spirit of Mercy lives on... a spirit of loving kindness, an awareness of the worth and needs of others.

St Ethnea College policies are a reflection of these ideals.

5. BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT POLICY

A HARMONIOUS ENVIRONMENT AT St Ethnea College will be enhanced by mutual respect for each other and clearly stated codes of behaviour for students.

General Conduct

- Appropriate behaviour includes the following:
- Self-discipline, honesty, punctuality;
- Self respect – reflected by wearing of correct uniform/sports uniform and using appropriate language;
- Respect for others and tolerance of all people, regardless of race, sex, disability or age;
- Cooperative/positive relationships with teachers and other students by showing respect, consideration and courtesy;

- Pride in the school and respect for its facilities.

Respectful Behaviour

St Ethnea College requires all students to treat each other and other people in a civil and respectful manner both at school and elsewhere, including online, whether day, night, weekday, weekend or holiday. When travelling to, from or at the College or elsewhere for a school activity, a student's behaviour must reflect the standards of the College and be respectful of self and all other people.

Classroom Expectations

"Members of the class should behave in such a way that effective learning can take place by all."

For effective learning to take place, the following guidelines apply to all members of the classroom:

- Class members will listen while others are speaking.
- Everyone needs to be prepared and organised for the lesson.
- All class members and their property will be respected.
- Class members need to remain on task and allow others to do so.
- Classrooms are to be kept neat and tidy.

Strategies for Dealing with Breaches of These Requirements

Consequences for failure to abide by these requirements may be:

- Clarify with the student the behaviour which is required;
- Give the student a warning;
- Time out;
- Remove the student to a different setting for a period of time;
- Discussion with parent/guardian.

For serious and/or prolonged inappropriate behaviour, in-school suspension, at-home suspension and termination of enrolment may be the ultimate sanction applied to the student.

St Ethnea College reserves the right to discipline, suspend or expel a student for unacceptable behaviour, irrespective of where or when such behaviour occurs, including outside of school hours and during school holiday periods. The police may also be notified of an allegation.

6. HARASSMENT POLICY

"Our centre is God from whom all our actions should spring from as their source." Catherine McAuley

Introduction

St Ethnea College is committed to providing a safe environment where students can learn free from harassment.

Definition of Harassment

A person subjects another person to harassment if he/she acts in such an offensive way to the other person, be it verbal, physical or emotional, and in such a way or in such circumstances that the other person could reasonably be expected to feel offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Harassment can include bullying, cyber-bullying, racial discrimination and sexual harassment.

Some Examples of Bullying

Bullying includes:

- Pushing, hitting, physical assault, spitting, damaging the property of someone else;
- 'Put downs', calling names, ridiculing, threatening;
- Making rude or threatening signs;
- Demanding money, food or other belongings;
- Hurting friends by ignoring or isolating them, or by spreading rumours about them;
- Unwanted touching.

Bullying can result in:

- Feelings of fear;
- Feelings of loneliness;
- Physical sickness;
- Sleeplessness;
- Loss of self-esteem;
- Unhappiness;
- Unwillingness to come to school.

Some Examples of Racial Harassment

Racial harassment includes deliberate or repeated racist comments, gestures or any other conduct which hurts people, based on their nationality, country of origin, colour of skin, ancestry or any other related beliefs or behaviours.

Racial harassment can result in:

- Feelings of hurt;
- Feelings of anger;
- Feelings of loneliness;
- Unhappiness.

Some Examples of Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment is unlawful under the SA Equal Opportunity Act, 1984 and the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act, 1984.

Sexual harassment is any behaviour of a sexual nature which is unwelcome and which makes a person feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, afraid or upset.

Sexual harassment includes:

- Someone touching or brushing against you when you've asked the person to stop;
- Unwelcome staring, whistling, gesturing or making comments about your body, looks or clothes;
- Writing and distributing rude/unpleasant notes of a sexual nature about you;
- Telling jokes or showing reading matter/pictures that are sexually offensive;
- Making comments about your sexuality.

Sexual Harassment is not:

- Behaving with common courtesy
- Developing mutually acceptable friendships

Sexual Harassment can occur between:

- Students;
- Staff;
- Staff and students;
- Parents and staff;
- Adults or students who are visitors to the school.

Sexual harassment can result in:

- Feelings of fear, powerlessness, embarrassment;
- Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem;
- Loss of trust;
- Feelings of isolation and difficulties in forming friendships and relationships;
- Difficulties in concentration;
- Deterioration in work;
- Behavioural problems.

What Can You Do If You Feel You Are Being Harassed?

- Tell the person you don't like it and you want it to stop;
- Talk to someone you trust – eg a parent, friend, a teacher, Year Level Coordinator, a Student Counsellor, Deputy Principal, Principal.

What Will Happen If You Talk With a Teacher or Year Level Coordinator?

- They will listen to you and take your concerns seriously.
- They will offer you support and work with you until the harassment has stopped and you feel safe.
- The person(s) responsible for the harassment will be dealt with at the Principal's discretion.
- The offending students will be interviewed and if deemed guilty, appropriate sanctions will be applied by the school administration. Parents may be asked to attend an interview.

Possible Consequences

For any serious breach of school policy, the school reserves the right to suspend or terminate the enrolment of the student. St Ethnea College reserves the right to discipline, suspend or expel a student for unacceptable behaviour, irrespective of where or when such behaviour occurs, including outside of school hours and during school holiday periods. The police may also be notified of an allegation.

APPENDIX 2: ALIGNMENT BETWEEN SCHOOL VALUES AND STRATEGIES TO ASSIST LOW SES STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE

VALUES	STRATEGIES
Mercy ethos – the moral compass for all policies and strategies	Annual Professional Development Day for the whole staff on aspects of Mercy. New staff attend an orientation workshop with the Leadership Team and key teachers before they begin their service and are assigned to a mentor from their faculty to accompany them in their first months on staff. Students are socialised into the ethos of Mercy as they progress through the school.
Hospitality	Fostering a welcoming environment in the school community in a spirit of Mercy hospitality which is inclusive, safe and accepting of all. Peer Support Program involving Year 11 students as leaders work with Year 8 students. Encouragement to join Clubs and extra curricular activities.
Compassionate Caring	Staff respect students and each other and this is reciprocated by students. Students are offered authentic care by staff who show they are prepared to 'go the extra mile' to help students succeed.
Service of the poor and disadvantaged	Deliberate strategy to make enrolments available to low SES students. Financial assistance given in confidence and in a way that respects the dignity of the recipients. The proportion of low SES students is not capped.
Curriculum structure/Individualised education and care	Intensive support for students with individual needs. One on one assistance with studies; psychologist on staff to offer guidance, especially with friendship issues. Academic Review Committee monitoring each student's progress. Monitoring of student attendance. Carefully designed strategies for the follow up of absentee students Comprehensive curriculum in Years 8-10 and a broad range of theoretical and applied subjects in Years 11 and 12. Rejection of both streaming according to ability, and premature choice of subjects.
Social Justice	Outreach programs to APY Lands and the Tiwi Islands. Support for a Centre for women suffering from domestic violence, a Centre for homeless men and a boarding facility for homeless persons. Mission to Argentina every two years for students and staff to engage with the poorest people in the barrios Active support for many other social justice projects. Acceptance of the special needs of disadvantaged students.
Teacher Quality	Assistance for teachers to adapt their methodology and develop individual strategies for learning, including differentiating the curriculum and scaffolded pedagogy. Encouraging teachers to participate in professional associations within their specialist areas. Encouraging and supporting teachers wishing to continue with their academic studies. Assigning teachers to teach only in their qualified areas.
Pursuit of Excellence/Culture of success	Staff are encouraged to participate in SSABSA (now SACE) committees, including the marking of Year 12 exams and as moderators in their specialist fields. Celebration of individual and team achievements at Year levels and at whole school assemblies. In all of the school's activities, nurturing of high expectations of students and staff. Everyone is encouraged not to settle for less.

APPENDIX 3: KEY SCHOOL FACTORS LEADING TO STUDENT SUCCESS ACCORDING TO STAFF AND SCHOOL LEADERS

School Leaders

Participant code	Priorities
A	Mercy ethos
	Generosity of staff to help students, especially those in need
	Outstanding educators
	High expectations for all to achieve their potential (the sky's the limit)
	Financial flexibility on compassionate grounds (especially fees)
B	Monitoring attendance
	Teachers who have success at the heart of their work
	Monitoring student achievement and case managing strugglers
	Highly qualified teachers and ongoing Professional Development
	Treating School Card students the same as other students re: expectations
C	No student is defined or identified by their background
	Teachers are unaware of students' socioeconomic situation
	The learning environment is inclusive. Students are not streamed, and mixed ability classes promote a growth mindset and peer support
	A strength in learning support for both EAL (English as an additional language) and special Education, to ensure that every student achieves their potential
	Excellent pastoral care and strong, respectful relationships between students, teachers and families. This enables us to know when students need more support.
D	Belief that every individual is important and different and deserves every effort to achieve
	Culture of success – individuals can succeed
	Support for staff and students to enable effective learning and differentiation of the curriculum
	Ensuring all staff understand and support the ethos of achievement
	Monitoring of student academic achievement to identify difficulties and celebrating successes publicly in Assemblies
E	Mercy values, Catherine McAuley's charism clearly articulated and lived out by the community
	EAL/Special Education and extra funding supporting student needs
	Expertise of teachers and willingness to go the extra mile to get students over the line, e.g. Homework club, Lunchtime tutoring, after school support
	No streaming, therefore students are not labelled
	Positive role models so students see what is possible, e.g. Dux Assembly, Academic Awards, Old scholars stories
F	Social justice for families (we are not a profit making organisation)
	Offering the opportunity for low SES students to receive a quality education
	Keeping in regular contact with families who may not be able to speak good English
	Ensuring that our fees are affordable

Teachers

Participant code	Priorities
A	Good curriculum, scaffolded pedagogy and professional development
	Mutual respect between teachers and students
	A diverse and inclusive environment that models respect
	A sense of purpose larger than self that is collectively owned
	Role models, mentors and friends
B	Leadership team, Business Manager, teachers all have students' best interests at heart
	Leadership is always supportive of new ideas and willing to listen and give staff support to initiate changes
	Generosity of teachers giving time and support to enable all students to succeed
	The school is well resourced and all students have equal access to resources
	Relationships that teachers have with students is all important, they really care
C	Mercy values
	Committed staff
	Providing possible pathways to the future
	Supportive administration staff (financial and other)
	Former students and others speaking at Assemblies promoting this as a great school
D	Welcoming to school and assistance with initial enrolment
	Extra help for students by academic staff – Homework club, assistance for students during recess/lunch
	Leadership team response to students having difficulties
	Assistance with uniforms, books, computers for low SES students and additional resourcing from the Business Manager for needs identified by Sr Janet
	Support for families struggling to pay school fees
	Assistance and encouragement with tertiary applications, choice of subjects
E	Teachers giving tirelessly of their time (for free) lunchtime' 'freer' after school to support students. Library always open for students. Many quiet achievers on staff.
	Strong communication between staff and support staff (EAL and Special Needs)
	Non academic support by Sr Janet, helping with outside school problems and Business Manager assisting when he can
	Strong focus on social justice and administration support in terms of staff, money etc. for social justice
	Much Professional Development put into teachers learning how to make science accessible to those students with no science background, e.g. language strategies, scaffolding
F	Recruit and retain diversity in the student cohort (culture, language, socioeconomic, disability)
	Welcome in the classroom that never runs out
	Social justice discourse in all formal events
	Treating hardship as a skill or knowledge, not as a site for pity/grandstanding
	Expected that teaching/pastoral care will be tailored to each student
G	Personal relationships that support and encourage individuals, both for students and teachers
	Continuing support for a rich, wide curriculum (e.g. financially)
	Exposing students to a range of role models
	Encouragement of students to think big, to be brave and challenge themselves
	Awareness and support of the differing backgrounds of our students.
H	Expertise of teachers
	Holistic approach of all staff
	Consistent, structured and positive support of all students
	Strong, positive, constructive relationships

	Embracing Mercy values that inform teaching
	Support for students is very well coordinated. No one has to work alone. Year level coordinators, teachers EAL specialists, counsellors etc. communicate regularly and support each other.
I	Our Justice and Mercy group encourages all students to participate in activities. I think this is a positive experience for students whose home life might be challenging but who can help others.
	As staff, we are encouraged to attend professional development to learn about inclusive teaching practices.
	Afterschool Homework Club is a positive, encouraging environment for students to get help. It is, as often as possible, staffed by teachers across most subject areas.
	The Mercy tradition underpins our relationships with students, namely, that of valuing and respecting all students and genuinely wishing success for them.
J	Mercy charism from Ireland and the Adelaide Mercy tradition from Argentina, lived, imparted through annual professional development with a focus on education for women, rich and poor
	Leadership. Senior staff operate out of the Mercy charism: in enrolment, in curriculum, in behaviour management
	Social environment: multicultural, non- streamed classes, students equally valued regardless of background, students encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities to gain confidence
	Counselling support for students
	Staffing – selection, support, opportunities for personal development
	Curriculum – choices encouraged but students are able to choose subjects even against advice at senior levels. Curriculum - keeping a broad based comprehensive curriculum until the end of Yr 10
K	High expectations for all – students, staff and parents
	Explicit teaching and modelling of the behaviours and skills needed to be a successful student.
	Equity for all – no distinction between students of any socioeconomic background
	Providing rich educational opportunities beyond the classroom, of particular benefit to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds
	Providing opportunities for all students to engage in career development. Raising knowledge about post-school opportunities, making tertiary studies seem possible even if first in the family to go to university and raising students' aspirations for their future careers

APPENDIX 4: ETHICS APPROVAL

FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:	**7822**
Project Title:	Specific school factors contributing to successful academic outcomes for students: A case study
Principal Researcher:	Sister Judith Redden
Email:	reddenjordan@ozemail.com.au
Approval Date:	20 December 2017
Ethics Approval Expiry Date:	**31 July 2021**

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

1. **Participant Documentation**

   Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of student projects, to ensure that:

   - all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and formatting errors. The Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above mentioned errors.
   - the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction. The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and documentation should contain international dialling codes for all telephone and fax numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.
   - the SBREC contact details, listed below, are included in the footer of all letters of introduction and information sheets.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 'INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval'). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

2. **Annual Progress / Final Reports**

   In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (March 2007)* an annual progress report must be submitted each year on the **20 December** (approval anniversary date) for the duration of the ethics approval using the report template available from the Managing Your Ethics Approval SBREC web page. *Please retain this notice for reference when completing annual progress or final reports.*

If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please submit either (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request and an annual report.

Student Projects
The SBREC
recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, reviewed and approved. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend some changes that may include the collection of additional participant data.

Your first report is due on **20 December 2018** or on completion of the project, whichever is the earliest.

3. Modifications to Project

Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include:

- change of project title;
- change to research team (e.g., additions, removals, principal researcher or supervisor change);
- changes to research objectives;
- changes to research protocol;
- changes to participant recruitment methods;
- changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
- changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
- changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
- changes / additions to information and/or documentation to be provided to potential participants;
- changes to research tools (e.g., questionnaire, interview questions, focus group questions);
- extensions of time.

To notify the Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please complete and submit the *Modification Request Form* which is available from the Managing Your Ethics Approval SBREC web page. Download the form from the website every time a new modification request is submitted to ensure that the most recent form is used. Please note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

Change of Contact Details

Please ensure that you notify the Committee if either your mailing or email address changes to ensure that correspondence relating to this project can be sent to you. A modification request is not required to change your contact details.

4. Adverse Events and/or Complaints

Researchers should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 08 8201-3116 or human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au immediately if:

- any complaints regarding the research are received;
- a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that effects participants;
- an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

APPENDIX 5: WORD FREQUENCY DIAGRAMS

The following diagrams were generated using NVivo to analyse responses from the exercise whereby research participants indicated key factors supporting student success within the school.

STUDENTS

TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

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