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The experience of a retreat for adolescent boys : A case study in an Australian Anglican school

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The Experience of a Retreat for Adolescent Boys: A Case Study in an Australian Anglican School

Graham Bruce Rixon

GAICD., M.Ed., B.Ed., F.T.C.L., L.Mus.A., MACE.

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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Statement of Original Authorship

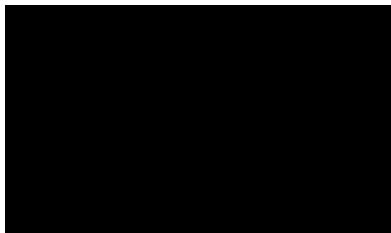
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All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant ethics committees (see Appendix A).

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Date: 26 May 2022

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I trust this work will add to the knowledge of retreats, and, more importantly, encourage all schools to engage in retreats as part of school life, and will encourage more research so students and teachers can benefit from retreat experiences.

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Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Affirmation	<p>The positive, spontaneous and authentic reinforcement that increases the value of self-worth (Sherman, 2013).</p> <p>Positive affirmation increases academic performance (Walton & Cohen, 2007) and serves to increase a person's wellbeing and self-worth.</p> <p>When the affirmation is unexpected it is particularly significant to the recipient (Sherman, 2013).</p>
Character education	<p>A purpose-designed training program for personal growth, and use of the language of self-discovery, responsibility, and citizenship (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Freeman, 2011).</p>
Mentor	<p>One who supports and guides the development of the (adolescent) person's character and moral development. Mentor, in this context, is defined as a supportive adult who works with the young person to build a structured and trusting relationship by offering guidance, support and encouragement to help the young persons' positive and healthy development of competence and character over a period of time (Chu, 2014).</p>
Morals	<p>Decisions based on values and moral judgements (Kohlberg, 1981)</p>
Resilience	<p>How we adapt to adversity, including trauma, threat and stress (Masten, 2014).</p>
Self-affirmation	<p>Focus on how individuals adapt to information, or experiences, that are threatening to their self-concept (Crocker et al., 2008; Harris et al., 2007).</p> <p>Self-affirmation is linked with self-integrity (McQueen & Klein, 2006).</p>
Self-efficacy	<p>Self-efficacy is one's belief in their capacity and ability in "doing" (Bandura, 1989).</p> <p>It is the overall value of "self".</p>

Self-esteem	<p>How we see ourselves (our self-image, such as body image, social capacity, personality trait), our inner self (Branden, 1992) and whether or not we approve of it.</p> <p>What we think, feel, and believe about ourselves.</p> <p>Self-esteem is defined by our ideals, values and how well we like ourselves (Cooper, 1992). Self-esteem is a psychological need.</p>
Self-integrity	<p>One's concept of self as a good, moral person, who acts in ways that are in accord with cultural and social norms.</p> <p>It is the very being of who we are; being authentic.</p> <p>To affirm is to maintain what is said to be true. This aspect of truth can be developed and extended to one's self, values, and morals.</p>
Self-worth	<p>The individual's value in themselves as a person (Rosenberg, 1965). It is more than how we feel about ourselves. Linked closely with self-esteem and self-respect.</p>
Spirituality	<p>For adolescents, this may be defined as a way of life for the individual who has a set of values and practices with which to view and engage in the world and the many daily life experiences of the adolescent boy (Harris & Moran, 1998; Smith, 2004).</p>
Values-affirmation	<p>Self and self-affirmation are evaluated through the lens of personal values (McQueen & Klein, 2006).</p> <p>Values affirmation affects people under threat and may assist in the reduction of stress that may arise from social identity threat (Briñol & Petty, 2009).</p>
Wellbeing	<p>The focus on <i>self</i> is key to the wellbeing of a person. It is how the person perceives themselves, their self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy, how they are affirmed by others, and how they self-affirm (Park & Crocker, 2008). It is the quality of a person's life.</p>

Abstract

Although student retreats are not unfamiliar to education, the efficacy of retreats has been the source of debate, research and contested assertions (Flynn & Mok, 2002). Little is known of the level of realisation of the retreat aim and objectives through the retreat experience. Hence, it was perceived as worthwhile to explore the effectiveness of the retreat experience through the lens of the student retreatants, the teachers leading the retreat, and the analysis of school documentation relevant to the retreat.

To this end, it is noted that literature on retreat experience acknowledges the important role that schools play in supporting social and character development, wellbeing, and the fostering of socially beneficial values in adolescents as identified in the documents produced by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2008) and the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019). Moreover, literature focused on the education of boys acknowledges the growing awareness of the importance for schools to address adolescent male wellbeing (Barry et al., 2017). Thus many schools have considered introducing student retreats as the capstone experience of their character development program. Within this context, the focus of this study is to understand the nature and extent of the influence of a retreat in an Australian Anglican boys' school.

The specific research question is:

In what ways do the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?

The research problem focuses on the efficacy of a retreat program for Year 11 students in an Australian Anglican boys' school. Conscious that the desired outcomes of a retreat can be enhanced or compromised by a number of factors, the research focused on themes significant within the relevant literature: planning and preparation, environment, program, staffing, the perceived value of the retreat (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Delbecq et al., 2004; Grossman et al., 2012; Lips-Wiersma, 2006), and the depth of post-retreat follow-up and evaluation (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). The engagement with the retreatants, the retreat staff, and documentation to gain insights into the phenomenon is a point of difference to assist schools in their future planning of retreats.

The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, underpinned by the epistemological framework of constructionism. Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical perspective for the

research in support of a case study methodology. Participants were selected purposely from among students and retreat staff in a bounded context and data were gathered using documentary analysis in conjunction interviews of individuals.

The overall view of students and teachers recognised an influence of the retreat experience on students' character-building, values, wellbeing, skill development, and their overall outlook on life. Student data confirmed the development of communication, social, and relationship skills which they transferred back to school and into their personal life. Student participants valued the mentoring of teachers and the life views of alumni presenters as they deliberated on resilience, self-esteem, values, and decision-making. Values, morals, and ethics were explored through socially accepted codes of conduct and, while the Christian perspective on values was noted, discussion on Christian principles was not explicit.

Data also confirmed the positive affirmation sessions and letters of affirmation from parents as a strong foundation to support student self-esteem, wellbeing, and self-worth. Sharing personal stories is an important component of the retreat. However, the sharing of deep personal stories can position one in a place of vulnerability, and this concern was mitigated through the establishment of a safe, trusting, non-judgemental environment. Sharing in this way permitted students to develop empathy, and to better understand, appreciate, and accept the situation of others. An outcome of students' sharing was the realisation that they were not alone with their concerns. While students, generally, acknowledged the influence of the retreat experience, some students noted that the retreat, though worthwhile, did not influence them and, once back at school, they resumed life as normal.

Teacher data also noted the positive influence of the retreat in relationships between students, and between students and teachers. They pointed to the combination of the purposeful grouping of students and the program activities as a catalyst for building relationships and development of close student / teacher relationships.

The limitations of this study reflect case study limitations together with the responsiveness of the participants, the small number of volunteers of existing students from one school, and the exclusion of those students who had graduated. The researcher ensured the establishment of participant confidentiality as well as the reliability and truthfulness of the research.

The interaction of literature with retreat data is developed in the discussion of six themes: Christian principles; values, morals, and ethics; character-building; wellbeing; retreat enablers; and retreat outcomes from which new understandings on the retreat phenomenon

emerged. New understandings centred on the integration of the Christian ethos to ensure the faith message is explicit to all students; the retreat experience to be an integral part of the ongoing pastoral and character-building programs; and a policy shift in both the training of staff and in the review of the program following each retreat.

The research generates nine conclusions that contribute to new knowledge:

First, there are challenges for curriculum planners regarding the integration of Christian principles and spirituality to meet the variability across student religious engagement;

Second, affirmation sessions and written affirmation received from parents create a positive influence on student wellbeing;

Third, the importance of personal storytelling as an integral component of the retreat is confirmed;

Fourth, the completion of an extensive program over three days is assured only by the implementation of a well-planned and well-balanced program;

Fifth, the organisation of post-retreat follow-up sessions on the retreatants' wellbeing, concepts explored during the retreat experience, and a formal review of the retreat program is warranted;

Sixth, a safe environment is valuable as an enabler to the establishment of a constructive retreat experience;

Seventh, the provision of appropriate teacher preparation and training so as to attend to the potential emotional and spiritual needs of the retreatants is acknowledged;

Eighth, the value of meaningful and purposeful mentoring of students is confirmed;

Ninth, the significance of focused time for the development of personal skills to equip students for their transition into adulthood is recognised;

In summary, this research creates new knowledge about the desired shift in perception of the retreat from being an independent experience to becoming an interdependent educational process central to the wider pastoral and character-building programs of the school. With this knowledge, it is anticipated that school leaders, both within the case study school, and more generally, will be better placed to assess carefully what actions and decisions might be needed to further enhance the character-building retreat experience for retreatants.

Chapter 1

Research Problem Identified

1.1. Introduction

I am an experienced educator, having worked many years in schools both as teacher and principal. Prior to my headship, I was Head of Music in Catholic and Anglican schools and was for sixteen years principal of Anglican and Muslim schools. When completing this thesis, I led one of the largest schools in Australia. The foundation of my interest in the focus of this study commenced when I moved to the case study school where I had a leadership and teaching role. It was from my experience of student retreats in other faith-based schools that inspired the formation and implementation of the reflection retreat that is the focus of this research. Following the successful pilot retreat experience of 25 students in 2006, the school formally introduced the first retreat program in 2007 for the entire year level of some 200 students. This case study is based on the retreat experience of 2019 for the entire year level of some 200 students. Adjustments made to the retreat program since 2007 related to logistics to arrive to the retreat camp site. The retreat experience program remained.

I left the case study school early in 2007 to take up a headship in a school in another part of Australia. While I have not had any formal association with the case study school since I left the school in 2007, I was always interested in gaining a deeper understanding about the relative benefits of the retreat experience established those many years ago, in particular, gaining explicit awareness pertaining to what the students may have gained from the retreat and if, indeed, the retreat realised the intended aim and objectives.

1.2 Research Context

I have had the privilege of teaching in three forms of educational institutions and this research emanates from two of them – Catholic and Anglican. Despite the obvious differences between the ecclesial and the mission statements of the respective schools, both of these teaching institutions had many similarities. Each had a strong spiritual dimension as an integral part of the curriculum and involving prayers and some form of liturgy. They had a strong curriculum focus and a strong pastoral care system. Through either the House System or Year Co-ordination, these schools were active in co-curricular programs, sport in particular, and they were very much aware of the need for the students to be actively involved in the wider community through a variety of community service programs. However, within the limitations of my experiences, there was one component or program that was present in one system but not in the other.

What was singularly different between the two school systems was that the Catholic school offered the opportunity for its students to have dedicated time to reflect on their relationship with their God, their family, their friends and on themselves. It was an opportunity for the students to more fully develop their spirituality, values, and beliefs perceived as being integral to the development of the whole person. The pivotal vehicle for this important dimension of learning was the student retreat program. Here the aim was to provide adolescents with the experience of community and relationships through relaxation, fun, prayer and Christian challenge in a safe, structured environment with others who care for them. Retreats help young people grow in faith (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002).

As an educational leader seeking to ensure that my school was able to meet the academic, physical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs of the students, I was compelled to consider all appropriate means possible to achieve this outcome. Clearly, this included the possibility of offering a reflective retreat experience. However, in the fiscally limited and time-poor context of a school today, with curriculum already on overload (Tullio, 2009), such an experience must be seen to achieve its anticipated outcomes. Therefore, it is important to explore whether the perceived benefits of a retreat are actually realised. Also, the question of whether these retreat experiences are universally applicable or suitable only in a Catholic context should be explored. Knowledge in this regard pertains not only to my professional role but also to the roles of all Anglican school principals, and indeed, principals of faith-based schools.

1.3 Research Problem

An Australian Anglican boys' school had developed and implemented a retreat for Year 11 students. However, although the efficacy of retreats has been the source of general debate, research and academic literature, little is explicitly known about the realisation of retreat aims and objectives from those who have actually experienced a retreat.

1.4 Research Design

The research design for this study is illustrated in Table 1.1 and described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Table 1.1*Summary of the Research Design*

Theoretical framework	Interpretivism
Ontology	Relativism
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical perspective	Symbolic interactionism
Methodology	Case study
Participants	Purposive selection
Data-gathering method	Document analysis Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students: paired, semi-structured, open-ended • Teachers: one-on-one, semi-structured, open-ended • Second interview to confirm information

1.4.1 Ontology

Ontology is the study of the way of being (Creswell, 2012). The ontological perspective in this study addresses the question of what the nature of reality is for the participants and facilitators of a retreat experience and how the researcher can come to know this reality. The research embraced a realist / relativist ontological perspective because, in this particular study, it was necessary for the researcher to insert himself into a continual process of meaning construction in order to understand the perceptions of the participants about the reflective retreat (Briggs et al., 2012). In adopting the realist / relativist approach, it was essential that the researcher not allow any personal reality to influence the interpretation of the data provided by the students and staff facilitators (Gergen et al., 2015).

1.4.2 Epistemology

This study is concerned with gaining and constructing understandings, knowledge and meanings from the standpoint of the students' and facilitating staff's reflective retreat experience (Neuman, 2014). Thus, the epistemological perspective of constructionism is most appropriate for informing this particular study as it supports investigation into the many ways in which individuals describe and explain their social interaction as constructed in a variety of contexts over a period of time (Crotty, 1998; Gergen et al., 2015).

Essentially, this study explored students' perceptions of their reflection retreat experiences and the resultant knowledge they created. More particularly, it investigated their

impressions pertaining to the personal perceptions of meaning, purposefulness, and applicability they created from these experiences. From this epistemological perspective, each student draws upon his own experience of the reflective retreat relative to his own personal background and constructs knowledge about what it has meant for him and his life.

1.4.3 Theoretical Perspective

This research is concerned with the lived experience of Year 11 students and teachers on a retreat. The participants engage in meaning-making from this experience (Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2014; Schwandt, 1997) and, as such, interpretivism was the theoretical perspective adopted for this research. Interpretivists accept that this understanding or meaning is constructed by the individual through their experience (Merriam, 1998) and the development of meaning may be constructed differently by each person as they make sense of their experiences through social interaction (Crotty, 1998).

Moreover, interpretivist research can be conducted in the form of hermeneutics, phenomenology or symbolic interactionism (Creswell, 2012). For this study, symbolic interactionism was deemed to be the most suitable. Symbolic interactionism is described as how one's experiences add subjective meaning to words expressed. The differing views gathered from students and staff of the same retreat experience provided the researcher with a fuller understanding of their experience of the retreat phenomenon.

1.4.4 Research Methodology

The methodology of research, "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3), is through case study. A case study approach lends itself particularly to this research as case study provides an holistic focus, enabling the researcher to gain the fullest understanding of a specific phenomenon of the case (Creswell, 2012). In this case, the central phenomenon is the students' experience of the reflective retreat and the personal perceptions of the students and retreat staff in regard to the outcomes achieved by the retreat experience, and how they perceive the influence of this on their overall personal development and preparation for their future life. In the case of the staff who facilitate the implementation of the retreat, the phenomenon is the retreat program and its alignment with the retreat aim and objectives.

1.4.5 Participants

Student participants were intentionally identified and selected to be interviewed and observed (Patton, 1990). They were from the same academic year grouping and attended the same retreat. This homogeneous sampling to analyse the phenomenon in-depth was the

preferred option for this case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). The selected staff were those who attended and led the same retreat program. The recruitment of the students and staff was on a volunteer basis. All Year 11 students who attended, and staff who attended and led the retreat program, were invited to be interviewed.

1.4.6 *Gathering Data Strategies*

The data gathering strategies adopted for this research are:

- Analysis of documents relevant to the retreat
- Student interviews = 8 students
- Staff interviews = 5 staff

1.5 Significance of the Research

This research is significant in that it provides evidence-based insight, through the lens of the students and staff, into the experience of a retreat program for adolescent boys in an Australian Anglican school. Retreats have been undertaken in schools for many years. While previous research literature has noted that the retreat programs in Catholic schools have been successful, the question remained regarding how the retreat benefits boys within an Australian Anglican school context. Research examined to date did not show evidence of research into retreats undertaken by Anglican schools.

Participant reflections on self-belief, self-efficacy, resilience, discernment, decision-making on sound ethics and moral values, the role of spirituality, and the overall influence on student wellbeing were explored. These insights informed the school as to the development of the retreat program and its potential interface with other pre-existing pastoral programs. Findings from this study will be of interest to other Anglican and faith-based schools throughout Australia and beyond. Also, the outcomes of this study have the potential to be of interest for schools generally wishing to enhance the character development aspects of their curriculum.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter One: Research problem identified. The chapter introduces the research context, justification, significance, and methodology. The outline of the chapter content provides the framework for the sequence of the research.

Chapter Two: Defining the research problem. The chapter contextualises the research problem that is explored in this study. It generates a rationale for the explanation of the research problem to be examined.

Chapter Three: Literature review. This chapter presents a critical exploration of relevant literature concerning student experiences of school retreats. Such a synthesis requires an initial review and analysis of a broad field of the research topics associated with male adolescent students, retreats, and spirituality which led to the addition of character education as a key area for review. Hence, further reading expanded the literature review to include that of values, morals, wellbeing, self-esteem, affirmation, mentoring, discernment, and staffing. The identification of these core elements aided the construction and refinement of the research question. Through the exploration of this literature, the research question underpinning this research was generated.

Chapter Four: Design of the research. This chapter explains and justifies the research design, including its theoretical foundations.

Chapter Five: Presentation of teacher data. This chapter presents teacher data gathered during interviews

Chapter Six: Presentation of student data. This chapter presents student data gathered during interviews

Chapter Seven: Discussion of new understandings. This chapter discusses new understandings identified from the emerging themes generated by the process of data analysis.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations. This chapter identifies and justifies conclusions and offers recommendations for the case study school, and other schools who engage in, or intend to engage in and offer retreats to adolescent students.

Chapter 2

Research Problem Defined

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican School from the perspective of documentary expectations and the perceptions of students and staff who attended this retreat. Specifically, it is to examine the relationship between the intended aim and objectives of the retreat with that of the experiences of the retreatants and teachers. To this end, the aim of this chapter is to contextualise and justify the research problem that is explored in this study.

Today, it is widely accepted that education is as much about building character, values, and life skills as it is about equipping students with specific academic knowledge and skills. It is argued that values-based education can strengthen a student's self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment and assist the student to exercise moral and ethical judgement and social responsibility, *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations DEST, 2005). For example, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) reaffirmed this premise, explaining that schools play a vital role in promoting intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and wellbeing of young Australians. A sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and personal identity that enables students to manage their emotional and spiritual wellbeing is essential to a child's education.

Schools respond in different ways to this educational framework for a child's well-being, personal values, and holistic development. More particularly in the context of this study, schools are being expected to play a major role in supporting and guiding students in their character development as they mature (Laursen, 2004; van Bockern, 2006). However, in today's complex world and pluralist society it is becoming increasingly more difficult for schools to influence students' character as they grow through adolescence into adulthood (McLaughlin, 2005). It is within this educational environment that the leaders of the focus school for this study observed retreat approaches and activities in other school systems and endorsed the implementation of a reflection retreat for their Year 11 boys. Hence, in 2007 the first retreat program was developed and implemented, and it continues as an integral component of the school's educational curriculum.

2.2 Situating the Study

The study is focused on the annual retreat of Year 11 students conducted by an Australian Anglican boys' school in a major city. The retreat was established to complement

other school activities to support the fostering of Christian principles, formation of values, and character-building, together with pastoral care designed for the wellbeing of students. With the retreat having been operating now for more than 10 years, attention has been directed to gaining an understanding into the retreat experience, the realisation of the aim and objectives of the retreat, and its influence on students. To achieve a deeper understanding of the retreat experience, the researcher perceived that responses to these considerations would be best explored through the lens of the retreatants themselves and the teachers leading the retreat. The following sections provide details of the research context, the aim and objectives of the retreat, the foundations which underpin the retreat program, staffing of the retreat, and the justification of the research. Through this process, the research problem was defined, the research purpose was crystallised, and a general research question was identified in readiness for further refinement following the literature review.

2.2.1 *Research Context*

The context for this study was an Australian Anglican boys' school. For many years, the school had been developing informal programs and opportunities designed to influence the overall development of each student. The focus of the school was one of holistic education as it strove to develop life skills that equipped each boy for his life's journey. To this end, the school engaged in a range of academic and co-curricular activities in an attempt to meet the needs of its students.

However, in 2006, from meetings and conversations, the leaders of the Anglican school observed that perhaps more could be undertaken to meet the students' emotional and spiritual needs. Thus, consideration was given to the development of a retreat program to assist in the wellbeing and pastoral development of the adolescent boy. It was considered that the retreat would create an explicit means of complementing the link between the school mission, academic ethos, and the boys' involvement in informal educational experiences as the school strove to fulfil its desire to educate the whole child. As a result, a reflective retreat for students in their fifth year of secondary schooling (Year 11) became an additional experience. Essentially, the program for this retreat was influenced by the understanding that an effective retreat experience should be structured and closely aligned to the school mission statement (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

The school's mission statement is a public document, available on the school website for the general public and prospective parents. This binding document informs the reader of the school's purpose and expected educational experiences for the students in its care. The school mission statement (see Appendix B) espouses themes of Christian values, self,

learning, reflection, challenges, resilience, empathy, and growth of character. Although the school mission statement has been modified in the years since the inception of the retreat, it was the 1991 mission statement (see Appendix C) that was relevant at the time of the inception of the retreat. In particular, it was the fourth statement in this school mission – “with a knowledge of themselves, how they should live and how to relate to others” – that prompted the investigation into the development of the retreat and became a vital cornerstone in the formation of the aim and objectives of the retreat. While this particular statement is not present as such in the current version of the school’s mission, reference is made to “authentic and transformative Christian faith, with an emphasis on growth in character”. It is noted that while the statement from the 1991 document (see Appendix C) does not appear in the current school mission statement, it has remained in the stated aim of the retreat staff’s program booklet.

2.2.2 *The Retreat’s Aim and Objectives*

A key focus of the case study school’s retreat experience was the growing awareness in research literature of the importance for schools to address adolescent male wellbeing (Barry et al., 2017). This is founded on the premise that promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of young male adolescents is an important determinant of their positive development, enabling them to achieve positive outcomes in school, work, and in life more generally (Durlak, 2015). Furthermore, the research of Flynn and Mok (2002), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016) note that an important aspect of a retreat experience is to provide the retreatants with additional personal support so as to foster their wellbeing.

Hence, the initial objectives of the retreat for the adolescent boys at the Anglican school in this study were to help build positive self-beliefs including confidence in being himself at all times; a capacity to express thoughts and feelings; an ability to stand up for his own values; and resilience, communication skills, maturity and spirituality. Hence, the themes of character, self, values, spirituality, and maturity are prominent in the aim, objectives, and outcomes of the retreat. Indeed, the reference in the retreat aim is for the boys “to reflect on who they are” (see Appendix D). The staff program cites an objective of the retreat as being for each boy to “be himself, to express his thoughts and feelings and stand up for his own values, to develop individual gifts and talents, and cultivate the habits of successful team membership” (see Appendix D). Thus, one of the key activities of the retreat became the challenge for each retreatant to describe “Who am I?”. Overall, the desired aim of the retreat was for each boy to engage with and understand more about himself, build skills of

resilience and discernment, and make decisions based on sound ethics, values, and morals (see Appendix E).

2.2.3 *The Foundations of the Retreat's Program*

The three traits from the school mission statement of social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing were identified as the foundational elements for the retreat program in the following way:

- social wellbeing through the capacity to create satisfying relationships and interaction with others;
- emotional wellbeing through the capacity to express emotions appropriately and comfortably; and
- spiritual wellbeing through the capacity to apply guiding values towards creating meaning in life.

More explicitly, the composition of the devised retreat program included a strong focus on physical activities along with the sharing of personal journeys through the exchange of personal comments considered to be important from experience in other settings (Rossiter, 2016). To this end, the implemented program became that of a three-day retreat and was closely aligned with an approach to curriculum activities for adolescent boys where the participants engaged in numerous physical and fun activities designed to reflect and complement the objectives. The activities were aimed to challenge the boys to think about what type of person they wished to become as they moved into manhood. Other activities included discussions, reflection, journal writing, and mentoring sessions. Overall, the retreat program focused on personal growth, including growth in understandings associated with values, morals, faith, character, and wellbeing. The retreat was developed as a reflective experience aimed at nurturing and developing each student's spirituality that cannot be easily addressed in a formal classroom environment.

2.2.4 *Retreat Staff Selection and Role*

It is noted that the development of a reflection retreat is required to be carefully planned with well-structured curriculum and activities to achieve the optimum influence (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). A retreat should be staffed and led by experienced, trained staff who have the necessary skills and capacity to assist the retreatants as they discuss and perhaps struggle with deeper issues which might be explored during the retreat experience.

For the first retreat, the staff who were selected to attend and lead parts of the program were either teachers of the student cohort or those who had a pastoral care role, such as a housemaster or tutor, as well as the chaplain or the school counsellor. Members of the school executive attended and assisted in leading some sections of the program during the entirety of the retreat. The professional knowledge and expertise of the chaplain and counsellor were deemed to be particularly advantageous but the other staff in attendance received no special training for their role during the retreat.

2.3 Justification of the Research

Student retreats are commonplace in Australian schools and their establishment has been founded upon significant research. For example, research has explored the long tradition of Catholic schools' engagement in student retreats as a key means of achieving the spiritual development of adolescents (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Similarly, there is considerable research highlighting the importance of retreats in affording the retreatant the opportunity to escape the busyness of school in order to participate in formative reflective, meditative, socialising, and prayerful experiences (Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

While Chapter 3 presents and discusses these and many more research documents describing the nature and potentially positive outcomes to be gained from retreats, it also presents research highlighting the limitations and problems associated with retreats. Such literature highlights how the desired outcomes of a retreat can be easily compromised by such things as the chosen environment (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Mason, 2007), staffing (Freeman, 2011; Tullio, 2009), planning and preparation (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009), retreat programming (Delbecq et al., 2004; Grossman et al., 2012; Lips-Wiersma, 2006), the perceived value of retreats (Flynn & Mok, 2002;), and the depth of the post-retreat evaluation (Rossiter, 2016).

Moreover, from a more general perspective, it is acknowledged that school retreats come at a cost for the school that involves a number of factors including time away from the class by both the students and teachers, concern for loss of curriculum focus and momentum, and the very limited capacity of a three-day retreat to be able to influence the character development of a student. Retreat staff are away from their home and family while also losing valuable preparation and marking time. Student retreatants are also away from their home and family and having to cope with an interruption to the daily learning, studying and friendship routines. In addition, given the seriousness and complexity of character formation processes and the relatively small amount of time that a student attends a reflection retreat, it

may not be realistically possible for the retreat to have any long-term character formation effect on a student. Thus, despite the popularity of school retreats, questions remain as to their ultimately achievable benefit and, thereby, their worthwhileness.

Furthermore, it is also noted also that an examination of the research literature associated with school retreats to date does not show evidence into research of retreats undertaken in Australian Anglican schools. Hence, it is anticipated that this investigation of the perceptions of the Year 11 boys regarding their retreat experience, along with that of the staff accompanying and leading the retreat, will give a greater understanding and insight into the relationship between the perceptions of the student retreatants and the intended aim and objectives of the retreat program. Hence, this proposed study is important as the researcher attempts to understand, through lens of the retreatants themselves and teachers leading the retreat, the nature of the influence the retreat had upon some students in order for the school to judge the relative merit of the reflective retreat experience (Rossiter, 2016).

2.4 Defining the Research Problem

An Australian Anglican boys school identified a perceived dissonance between the stated ethos and mission of the school and the boys' experience within their school life. This perceived dissonance was addressed with the development and implementation of a retreat for Year 11 students in 2007. It has been operating uncontroversially since its inception. However, the question remains unanswered as to whether or not the retreat experience aligns with the intended aim and objectives of the retreat. This is the research problem.

2.5 The Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school from the perspective of documentary expectations and the perceptions of students and staff who attended this retreat.

2.6 The General Research Question

The general research question is:

In what ways do the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?

The following chapter presents a literature review on retreats.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical synthesis of the relevant scholarly literature in order to identify the research issue within the body of literature, to further enlighten the research problem, and to generate and clarify the specific research questions to guide the study. Such a synthesis required an initial review and analysis of a broad field of the research topics associated with male adolescent students, retreats and spirituality and this led to the addition of character education as a key area for analysis. Further reading expanded this literature review to include that associated with values, morals, wellbeing, self-esteem, affirmation, mentoring, discernment, and staffing as these had been identified as core elements within retreat programs. A broad body of research related to adolescent males was synthesised around these core constructs. The realisation of the research problem was not immediately obvious and emerged over time as a result of insights gained from the review of this array of literature.

3.1.1 *The Retreat's Educational Foundations*

The emphasis of the case study school was one of holistic education. The philosophy of holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life. It is concerned with the development of every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual potentials. This premise is reinforced in the Australian Council of Education Ministers' *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration* (Education Council, 2019) that "Education has the power to transform lives. It supports young people to realise their potential by providing skills they need to participate in the economy and in society, and contributing to every aspect of their wellbeing" (p. 3). While not losing sight of the desire to achieve strong academic performance, this declaration (Education Council, 2019) recognises the need for balance:

The senior years of schooling are a critical transition point for young people—emotionally, socially, and educationally....Schools need to support students in their senior years by helping them acquire the cognitive and social skills necessary for life after school and equip students to remain engaged in learning throughout life. (p. 9)

Also, it is noted that, in his lecture, *Anglican Schooling in a Pluralistic Society*, Cameron (2005), posited that the mission of Anglican schools is to foster spirituality and promote the growth of ethical and moral formation, reflection, and leadership skills in its students. The Anglican school in this study identified a perceived dissonance between the

stated ethos and mission of the school and the boys' experience within school life. To this purpose, the school developed informal programs (see Appendix F) and experiential opportunities such as camps, service activities, and community service, all designed to impact upon this dissonance. In recent years, a reflective retreat for students in their fifth year of secondary schooling (Year 11) became an additional experience. Essentially, the program for this retreat, centred largely on character development and student wellbeing, and is influenced by the understanding that an effective retreat experience should be structured and closely aligned to resonate with the aim and expected outcome of the retreat (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Reflection retreats, explored in-depth further into this chapter, are not new to education. For many years Catholic schools have engaged in the intervention of a retreat program to assist in the spiritual development of adolescents (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Retreats enable participants to become (re-)acquainted with self and prioritise deeper values, make conscious choices based on such values, and re-assess the relationship with self and others (Lips-Wiersma, 2006). It is considered that retreats offer the opportunity for students to have dedicated time to reflect on their relationship with their God, their family, their friends and on themselves and their growth in faith (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). The retreat is an opportunity for the students to develop their spirituality, values and beliefs more fully and opportunity for the boys to develop the whole person (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Flynn, 1985; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Fowler, 2004; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

The National Catholic Education Commission refers to this dimension of learning as a Retreat Program (2020, p. 5). However, the efficacy of retreat programs has long been the source of debate. Researchers in Australia, including Engebretson (2003), Flynn (1985), Flynn and Mok (2002), Rossiter (2016), and Tullio (2009) have undertaken significant investigation of this phenomenon. Flynn pioneered longitudinal studies in the form of surveys of Catholic school senior students and teachers (1972, 1982, 1990, 1998) over a period of three decades. Others include the studies of Engebretson in 2004, which involved interviews with 20 adolescent males, and in 2006 with some 965 boys aged between 15 and 18 years from six Australian schools. Also, Tullio (2009) carried out a study of four large Australian archdiocesan Catholic schools investigating the retreat experience through the lens of 23 randomly selected teachers who attended and / or led these school retreats. Rossiter's (2016) views of teachers and senior students about retreats in Australian Catholic secondary schools, based on surveys of 1500 students and 500 teachers from 40 Catholic schools, continued the

research into the efficacy of retreats. The findings of these researchers, which are highlighted throughout this chapter, formed a strong base for this literature review.

In addition, in the Barry et al. (2017) paper on promoting young people's social and emotional wellbeing in schools, the authors' focus on adolescent male wellbeing highlights the need for sustainable approaches that can be embedded in everyday school life of the adolescent. This ideal is founded on the belief that the promotion of the social and emotional wellbeing of the retreatants is an important determinant of their positive development, enabling them to achieve positive outcomes in school and work and in life more generally (Durlak, 2015; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Moreover, much has been written surrounding the issues of boys at risk, including self-harm. This trend is more prevalent in boys in the age bracket 15 to 17 years (Engebretson, 2003). Statistical evidence identifying self-harm in boys is significant and identifies the need to talk up spirituality in adolescents (White, 1997). This is supported by McLaughlin (2005) who posits that adolescents who possess positive beliefs in the future are less likely to engage in self-harming behaviour. Constructs such as spiritual coping and religious decision-making were generally associated positively with wellbeing health outcomes (Cotton et al., 2006). Research from Social Emotional Learning (SEL) identifies similar outcomes. That is, the unexpected and unintended outcomes of learning in a personal and relational sense reach into improvement in formal scholastic outcomes (Bird & Sultmann, 2009).

3.1.2 *The Research Problem Revisited*

This research centres on the engagement of adolescent males in an Australian Anglican school. The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school from the perspective of documentary expectations and the perceptions of students and staff who attended this retreat. The researcher was also interested in exploring what influence, if any, a reflection retreat experience has on the boys' future engagement with themselves, others, their curriculum studies, and their wider community. As indicated above, significant research with a focus on retreats has been undertaken by many including Flynn (1985), Flynn and Mok (2002), Engebretson (2006), Tullio (2009), and Rossiter (2016), and this is discussed in depth later. However, it is important to highlight at this point that the learnings gained from such research were mostly general principles generated via survey reviewing of retreatants and staff who attended and led the retreat program. Hence, this research presents a far more

personalised interpretation of a retreat experience. It is this unique perspective that is the genesis of this study's importance.

Also, it is from this unique perspective that the researcher is able to come to understand what works for the student from the retreat, thereby enhancing its future capacity to assist the development of adolescent boys in the particular Anglican school. The study is expected to facilitate a deeper understanding of the retreat experience for the retreatants and the participating staff.

For educators teaching in a complex world and pluralist society, it is becoming increasingly difficult to prepare students comprehensively as they grow through adolescence and into manhood (McLaughlin, 2005). Hence, there are potential growing demands, social norms, and peer-group pressures placed upon adolescent students that appear to be impacting their decision-making and natural development. Schools have a major role to play in supporting students as they grow and mature and in guiding them in their decision-making so as to bring about a positive change in their lives (Laursen, 2004; van Bockern, 2006), and for religious schools, in the fostering of spirituality (Foster, 2006; Smith, 2004). There is an ongoing expectation that schools will provide the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for students to cope with these pressures (Foster, 2006; McLaughlin, 2005; Smith, 2004). To this end, there is the belief by the case study school leadership that perhaps a suitably focused retreat program might assist the development of adolescent males.

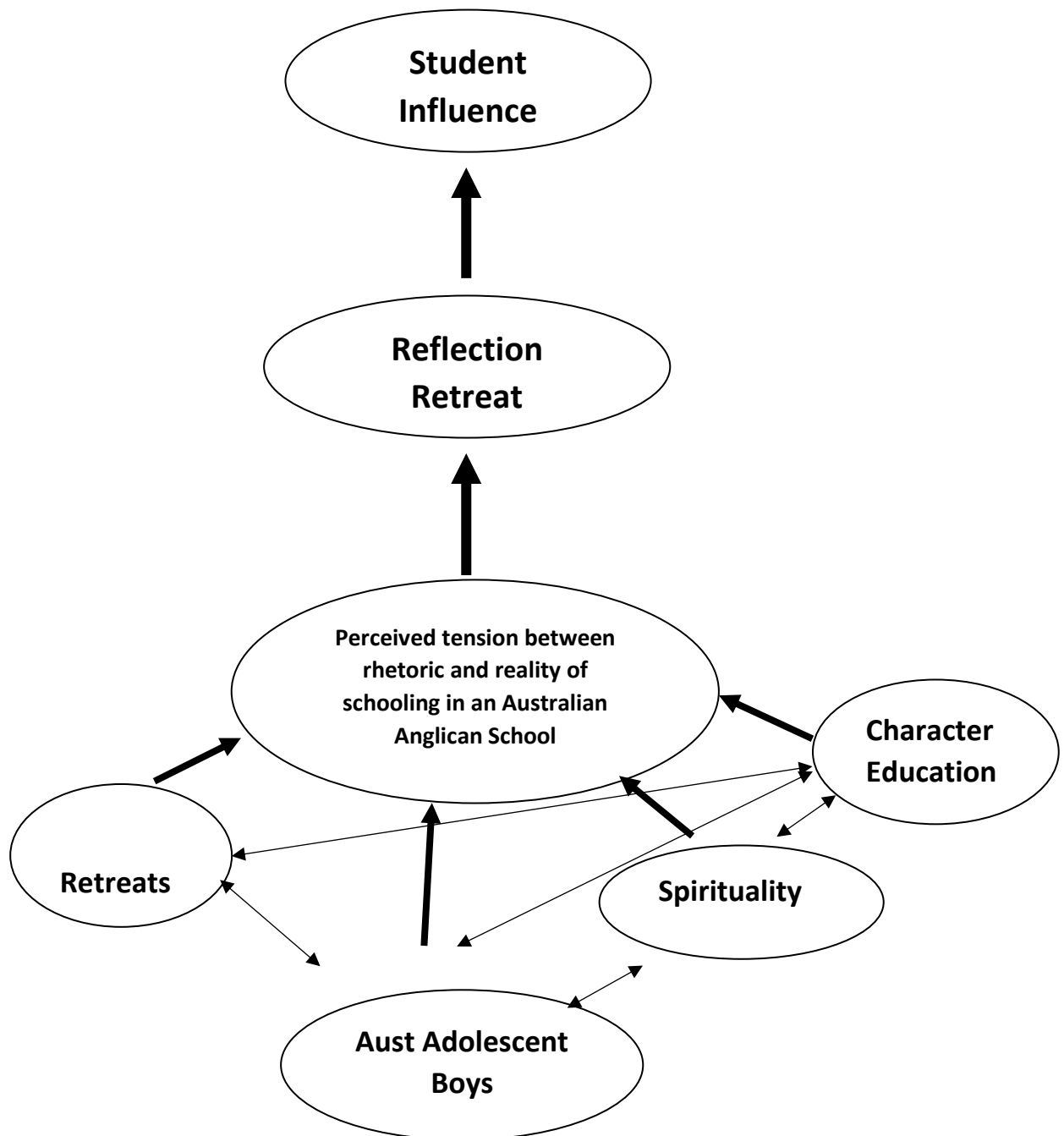
3.1.3 *Methods of Assessing the Literature*

The methods accessing the literature for the literature review involved selective use of keywords deemed significant to the study and employment of a variety of search engines. The search engines included Google Scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest EBook Central, ProQuest Education and ProQuest Psychology data bases. References include a blend of peer-reviewed journals with a high biometric rating, books from reputed experts in their field and selected conference papers. References in relevant quality articles led to other sources. In the first instance, abstracts, the problem, theory employed, discussions and findings of each article were scanned to ascertain relevance. To sharpen the focus of the study and provide a research question or questions (Creswell, 2012), the researcher employed keywords to commence the search process and form the framework for the main sections of the literature review.

Initially quite broad and large in number, the focus areas were refined to: Australian adolescent males, character education, spirituality, and retreats, as shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Context Map Illustrating the Focus Areas of the Proposed Study



Within each of these interactive themes are a number of sub-themes. These include, but are not limited to: wellbeing, mentoring, reflection, discernment, and staff training. This chapter of five separate sections — retreat, character and moral development, adolescent male wellbeing, spirituality, reflection, and journaling — will provide a synthesised analysis of

relevant literature that underpins these key themes to gain a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the research problem. This discussion of the literature includes terms that must be defined to assist the flow of discussion. The table of definitions appears at the beginning of the thesis.

3.2 Retreats

Retreats are not new to education. Catholic schools have for many years employed the concept of a live-in retreat as an important supplement to the teaching of religious education, and the nurturing of faith in students (Delbecq et al., 2004; Flynn, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). However, despite the widespread use of retreat, there are many logistical and procedural aspects that need to be acknowledged and addressed. Past research findings have noted that the live-in retreat is an important time out from the busyness of a student's daily routine to allow them to step back, reflect, meditate, pray, socialise and connect with others (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Furthermore, in the earlier sections of this chapter the elements of character education programs – key features of boys' adolescence – and spirituality linked to the research problem have been explored. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to investigate the broad topic of retreats. The research of previous retreat experiences for adolescents has been drawn on to bring an understanding of the inner components of retreats and the logistical implications for an effective retreat. The key areas considered in this section are the environment, staffing (selection, training and as mentors), preparation, curriculum, value of retreats, debrief and follow up for school retreats.

3.2.1 Retreat Environment

The environment of the retreat, a space set up by the retreat leaders, sets the tone for a retreat. Retreat space is an enabler for an autonomous, self-reflective spiritual quest (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Mason, 2007), an opportunity for physical activities (Rossiter, 2016), and leader intervention (Abbott-Chapman, 2006). Rossiter (2016) discusses the environment from the physical perspective of terrain and being near water to facilitate a relaxed state which promotes a sense of calmness and a change from the busyness of school life. However, the environment of a retreat encompasses much more, including a climate of trust. To encourage open conversations where there is no judgement, students and staff need to feel reassured and comfortable that confidentiality is ensured. Nevertheless, there is a perceived and acknowledged power imbalance (Rossiter, 2016). The concept of *Chatham House Rules* applies a context where participants speak freely but the identity of any participant may not be revealed. Students, particularly those with low self-esteem, may be

vulnerable should their peer(s) or teacher later divulge information. As expected, of the responses to the question surrounding confidentiality and an environment that is safe, “what is said in the group, staying in the group”, 94% of students felt this to be a high priority (Rossiter, 2016, p. 69).

Within the retreat, it is important the retreatants can be themselves and feel safe to engage in conversation openly without the fear of being judged or ridiculed. A component of retreats is the sharing of personal stories and journeys by students and staff (Rossiter, 2016). It is crucial that students and staff feel that they are safe, protected, and not made vulnerable by sharing their personal stories and journey (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). There is the potential concern that comments made during the retreat or post-retreat might be shared beyond the group, out of context, or beyond the retreat. To this end, Rossiter (2016) and Hughes (2016a) both speak of the need to ensure the environment of trust is set up carefully and appropriately by the group leader to both provide a sense of safety for the retreatants regarding the disclosure of information and mitigate the risk of the potential undermining the wellbeing, self-esteem, and self-worth of the retreatants.

3.2.1.1 Social Dimension.

The social dimension of a retreat enables the participants to spend significant time together and provides the opportunity for peers to share deeper experiences and conversations not usually possible or undertaken in the school setting (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010). Time spent together and the opening-up of personal experiences lead to the strengthening of connectedness and bonding with the group (Rossiter, 2016). Engagement and bonding between peers enable them to realise they have more in common than previously understood (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010) and provide a platform for enhancing positive interaction with peers’ post-retreat experience. It is considered that such an experiential engagement may be a *bubble in time* and not extend beyond the retreat (Rossiter, 2016). The research investigated this potential issue.

3.2.1.2 Connectedness.

The research findings of (Flynn, 1985, 1993), Flynn and Mok (2002), Hughes (2007), Lips-Wiersma (2006), Rossiter (2016), and Tullio (2009) observe that retreats have an important impact on the lives of students, are widely accepted and are generally positive. Moreover, Flynn and Mok (2002) provide some typical responses that revealed a connectedness to the social engagement of a retreat:

I love my Year 12 retreat – everyone is extremely close, and we all respected one another. We had the chance to learn more about the people we had gone to school

with. The retreat has also given me a better relationship with my peers and with God. (p. 286)

and

The school retreat was one of the best experiences of my life. It allowed me to experience God in the people and in the environment around me. I feel that it was then that I became close to God. It made me feel better about myself and I grew closer to my friends as well. (p. 286)

Research by Flynn (1993) showed that retreats for senior classes had a significant influence on the lives of students and identified that retreats manifest a desire for the exploration of connectedness, values, beliefs, friendships and spirituality. The research of Abbott-Chapman (2006), Engebretson (2004), Lips-Wiersma (2006), Rossiter (2016), and Tullio (2009) suggests this broad outlook of retreats remains many years later. Flynn (1993) perceived that students' enthusiasm for their retreats points to a deep spiritual hunger in the lives of these late adolescents which is not always nourished by traditional religious practices. This is a view shared by Hughes (2007), Rossiter (2016), and Tullio (2009).

Ongoing research into adolescent boys confirms this position remains true in that they are searching for meaning, self-transcendence and relationship (Engebretson, 2004; Kay, 1996; Rossiter, 2016; Tacey, 2002). However, it is less clear that the young men are searching for God (Engebretson, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Mason, 2007; Rossiter, 2018).

3.2.2 Staffing Retreats

Staff play an important role as facilitators, leaders, and mentors in the retreat program. The presumption is that skilled, experienced leaders and staff have an impact on the successful engagement of students during the retreat (Freeman, 2011; Tullio, 2009). The study of Berkowitz and Bier (2004) into character education identified that the staffing of retreats requires care. They maintain that it is essential for retreat staff to have the right skills set, the right attitude, and the capacity to relate to, and connect with, participants. Staff selection is considered to be an important component that will lead to assist in a successful retreat experience (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010).

3.2.2.1 Staff Selection.

Staff who lead the retreats and group discussions are mostly teachers from within the school. These teachers are usually class teachers of Years 11 and 12. As shown in the case of staff attending retreats that were surveyed by Rossiter where almost all retreat staff taught either Year 11 or 12, or were pastoral care tutors, year advisors, chaplain, housemaster or members of the executive (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2018; Tullio, 2009).

However, this is not always the case. There are examples of early retreats where a team of specifically trained staff were engaged by schools to organise and lead the retreat program (Gowdie, 2017). In such an instance, school staff accompany the students and take on the role of oversight and behavioural management (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). While there were benefits from having a specialised retreat team, Rossiter points out that there are limitations, including but not confined to the difficulty surrounding the availability of the retreat time and the timing to suit the timetable of the school (Rossiter, 2016). Other concerns were that the school staff felt the role of supervising students during retreat program downtime and during the evenings meant their skills as educators were being underutilised at the retreat. They believed that they would be better employed back at school and in the classroom teaching the lessons they were missing (Rossiter, 2016).

The research of Rossiter (2016) noted the selection of staff from each school varied with the general consensus that the pastoral care team and interested teaching staff should attend the retreat. However, only a little over half of staff interviewed agreed the selection of not problematic or the criteria for staff to attend retreat was clear. Selecting appropriately trained staff who relate well pastorally to students should be a priority to support an effective retreat program. It appears that school management has an opportunity to promote the process of staff selection. The selection and training of staff is an area of interest for this thesis research.

3.2.2.2 Staff Training.

The training for teachers is important as the retreat teachers are required to undertake more than the curriculum component of the retreat. They are required to attend to the wellbeing and potential emotional matters that may occur during the retreat. Berkowitz and Bier (2004), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016) identified that professional development and training of staff are fundamental to ensure the successful implementation of the retreat programs. Rossiter observed that, in some instances, schools provided staff with an annual one-day training workshop in readiness for the retreat (Rossiter, 2016).

The research of Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016) identified concern surrounding the retreat sessions that had become emotionally charged and the external operators and staff were not sufficiently trained nor emotionally ready to support students to manage wisely the potential problems and deal with the heightened emotional state that may occur during the group sharing sessions (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Caution is needed around professional boundaries and the teacher / student relationship. Substantively, staff must not place themselves, the students, or the school in an

awkward place and when staff engage in the group discussions where students are sharing their personal journey, comments need to be sensitive regarding the situation (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Dealing with instances of poor choices by school staff in their interaction with students in schools has been impacted by government legislation for child protection like the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* (Babington, 2011) and the implications of the final report of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (McClellan, 2017) regarding inappropriate treatment of children. Professional boundaries must be clearly defined, and schools have a responsibility to ensure all staff are fully aware of the revised guidelines for child protection.

This thesis study investigated these factors through the eyes of the retreatant students and participating staff to gauge the delivery of the retreat program and the connectedness of participants with the retreat leaders and staff. The research investigated the training of staff for the retreat experience.

3.2.2.3 Staff Role as Mentors.

One of the teachers' many roles at a retreat is one of mentor for the adolescents. Together, the mentor and the mentored work through the components of the retreat program, supporting and guiding the development of the retreatant's character and moral development. This might include the discussion on values, decision-making, and resilience, as well as reflection on personal development and growth (Chu, 2014; Daloz, 1986; Rossiter, 2016).

Mentors of the school-based programs, together with other intervention mentoring programs such as *Outward Bound* (Freeman, 2011) and *St HOPE* (Bond, 2016), were trained. They were provided ongoing professional support for their role as mentors (Dolan, 2011; Dubois et al., 2011; Karcher, 2008; Komosa-Hawkins, 2010, 2012; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012). Importantly, apart from giving adolescents a positive social outlet, there are certain program-related factors that predict positive outcomes for mentored adolescents. These include pre-orientation and training, post-training, and ongoing support of mentors to ensure a positive, successful experience for the students (Grossman et al., 2012; Portwood et al., 2005; Rhodes & Dubois, 2006; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012).

Freeman (2011) also noted concerns for the sustainability of the effect of the program, long term, with no follow-up or mentoring of participants. For Freeman (2011), there was a belief that the character education program undertaken was only a starting point. A number of further measures were put in place to ensure sustainability. These included the need to review the curriculum focus and how to further support the participants following the conclusion of the program. It also included the recommendation of a mentoring program to support students

during and post the character education program. Indeed, in the case of the *Outward Bound* movement, an old boys association was established to mentor participants (Freeman, 2011).

3.2.2.4 Preparation for Retreat.

Quality preparation and readiness greatly assist the realisation of the retreat aim, objectives, and experience for the students. This includes attending briefing sessions and handout information for both staff and students.

It is critical that staff are as well-prepared as possible (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). It is important that staff are provided with detailed information of students in their care, knowledge of the retreat site, a complete understanding of the retreat program, the aim of the retreat, and its goals. Data from Rossiter's (2016) survey indicated that while the majority of teachers leading the senior retreats had adequate planning and briefing sessions and that they were familiar with the retreat program, a significant percentage of teachers surveyed felt underprepared. This appeared to be more relevant for those staff new to leading retreats who felt more prepared in their second experience. This supported the observation that many staff gain their training and experience from on-the-job training and observation (Rossiter, 2016).

The question of the amount of preparation that is allocated and required by students for retreats has been long debated. The findings of Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) are that usually the minimum of information is best to avoid potential student bias and the potential limitation of student involvement and engagement in retreat activities. While they noted staff supported this notion of secrecy in the belief it would minimise potential student bias, the study of Rossiter observed retreat staff believe students require more details of the retreat program to assist with the flow of the program. Students who are able to attend pre-retreat preparation sessions, where they are provided with the logistics of what to bring with them on the retreat and general information with minimal detail, find this level of information most beneficial (Rossiter, 2016). While there was minimum preparation for the students of this thesis study, more detailed information on the retreat was provided to their parents. Parents were required to sign declaration and permission forms for their child to attend the retreat (see Appendix G). A component of the retreat is a letter from parents affirming their child's personal qualities, skills and expressing love for their child. The information letter to parents (see Appendix H) provides a guide for writing a letter to their child which they are asked to keep confidential and not to inform their child about it (Rossiter, 2016).

3.2.3 Curriculum

To achieve the optimum impact of a reflection retreat, the research of Delbecq et al. (2004) and Lips-Wiersma (2006) reinforces the need for careful consideration to be given to

the planning of the curriculum and activities of the retreat. The composition of the retreat program has a strong focus on physical activities, along with the sharing of personal journeys through the exchange of successful experiences for the students (Grossman et al., 2012; Portwood et al., 2005; Rhodes & Dubois, 2006; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012).

Personal storytelling by staff and students is posited as a key component of the retreat curriculum and should be undertaken in the context of small groups (Engebretson, 2004; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Staff believe sharing of personal journeys is an important component of the retreat (Rossiter, 2016). However, in her research with four diocesan schools, Tullio (2009) notes staff awareness of and the potential concern for the level of personal disclosure in group discussions which retreatants may later regret. Rossiter (2016) also shares this concern of the level of sharing by staff. While staff felt the sharing of personal information was acceptable, they felt overwhelmingly that it was important that staff were discreet in what and how personal information should be shared.

While staff consider students sharing their personal journey important, there is concern surrounds the level of expectation of sharing the story and the psychological pressure that the retreatants might feel (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Whether it is a self-disclosure or sharing one's personal story, staff share concern (Rossiter, 2016). This level of response does provide an awareness of the sensitivity needed in personal sharing and the need for discretion and sensitivity by the teacher in this component of the retreat program. While the overall finding of Rossiter on disclosure by teachers and students in small group discussions was not seen as a concern, earlier research of Tullio and Rossiter (2010) suggests that it was an issue in earlier retreats and it remains an issue today (Rossiter, 2016).

Students also disclose a positive view towards sharing their personal story. They consider the discussion of personal problems as an important, arguably the most valuable, part of the retreat (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016). Rossiter (2016) notes that students embrace the opportunity to share with their peers and learn from their experiences. Students like staff to share their stories as students find it helpful as a prompt for them to talk about their own life journey. Yet despite these prompts from staff, it appears that students baulk at telling their own personal story.

It has been questioned if such storytelling is too emotionally demanding on the students (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Perhaps students feel obliged, because they are in a group setting and it is part of the program, to share personal journeys that they may not otherwise share. In an attempt to draw students into discussion, there is the potential for the

manipulation of students, and perhaps staff, to share personal and private experiences (Tullio & Rossiter, 2010). In regard to the level of emotional outpouring, some teachers seek to develop an emotional state: “if there are tears then there is a belief that section of the program was a success” (Rossiter, 2016, p. 147). Rossiter’s finding (2016) was that almost half the students felt that there was “too great an expectation that students reveal aspects of their personal lives” (p. 133) and yet a smaller proportion of students believe that this aspect of the program is overdone.

Rossiter (2016) suggests that staff, compared to students, have the advantage in the retreat component of sharing personal stories as they could prepare, rehearse and refine their story. Those staff who regularly lead the retreat can take advantage of the experiences from past retreats to understand the potential response their storytelling may have on their group. By contrast, students have no such opportunity. Their sharing of a personal story will be spontaneous and raw. This may trigger a variety of emotions which they may not know how to respond to. It may have an effect on other group members, and staff should be prepared and equipped for any such responses. In addition, many senior students may not be aware of their personal identity and so, feeling vulnerable, respond with caution to this group retreat activity.

3.2.4 *School Support*

Logistics for effective retreats extend beyond the physical experience, setting or well-structured program. At times, schools that engage in retreats find them difficult and costly to operate. The costs of the retreat involve a number of factors including time away from the class by both the student and teacher, and concern for loss of curriculum focus and momentum. Teachers are required to be away from their home and family and give up their private time. It also means loss of preparation and marking time for the students in the classes they have left behind so they can attend and lead student groups of the retreat. Flynn and Mok (2002) observe that despite the disruption to the student’s studies and the demands on the teachers, the retreats are widely accepted as a positive experience for the students. Rossiter (2016) and Tullio and Rossiter (2010) have identified other difficulties schools face and the demands on staff when they attend the retreat. Nevertheless, the overall value of the retreat is widely recognised, both by staff and students, and perhaps this is enough reason for retreats to be in operation annually for several decades.

3.2.5 *Program Evaluation and Follow-Up*

Despite the busyness of school curriculum, schools allocate time for teachers and students to provide some form of evaluation of the retreat either through surveys or meetings

(Rossiter, 2016). Rossiter also noted some schools provide post-retreat follow-up activities during religion classes and pastoral care periods.

The richness of post-retreat evaluations provides guidance for retreat curriculum planning to ensure maintaining the mission of the school and the aim and objectives of the retreat, while also meeting student needs. The research of Rossiter and Tullio (2010) and Rossiter (2016) provided student and teacher perspectives from the retreat experience which gave impetus for this thesis. Essentially, students view retreats as a social experience, an opportunity to connect and to develop skills of connectedness (Rossiter, 2016). Students consider discussing personal problems as an important part of the retreat, hence the level of commitment to the personal sharing segment. Rossiter (2016) reported that what students gained most from the retreat experience were: accepting other's views, what they experienced from the views of others, being more aware of thinking and valuing others, learning about their own beliefs and values through interactions with others on the retreat, and developing better relationships with staff. Tullio and Rossiter (2010) also noted that while students accept that the retreat has a religious focus, the students are not as engaged in the religious component, thus presenting implications for the curriculum planning of the retreat.

Teachers consider that the retreat made a valuable contribution to young people's personal, social and spiritual development. In the post-retreat evaluation from his research, Rossiter (2016) observed that teachers valued the retreat experience as contributing to the student's overall growth as a person. Teachers consider the religious dimension of the retreat to be of fundamental importance. One teacher said that "in some instances what they got from the retreat has allowed them to have faith in themselves and create an understanding of others to the betterment of all" (Rossiter, 2016, p. 55), while another teacher commented that "if only one student is enriched spiritually and emotionally, then the retreat has been a success" (p. 55).

From Rossiter's research findings, when compared with earlier research such as studies undertaken by (Flynn, 1985, 1993) and (Flynn & Mok, 2002), the focus of the retreat program has shifted. Retreats are not a formal religious experience, rather, a personal development experience that has a religious element within a community or friendship-setting (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Retreats have an important place in the curriculum as they provide personal reflective time and an opportunity for spiritual experience that are not replicated in the classroom (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). The work of Rossiter (2016) identifies that leaders can build a retreat culture, and this is best realised when the executive are active

members of the retreat. The retreat is not considered to be a one-off bubble, rather, it is clearly understood to be integrated into the school's overall religious program and mission.

3.2.6 Summary

Retreats provide a time out of the busyness of the daily school routine for students to reflect, connect with self and others, socialise, meditate, and pray. Live-in retreats have been used by Catholic schools for many years to support the teaching of religious education programs (Delbecq et al., 2004; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

The environment of the retreat sets the tone for a retreat and is usually in a natural terrain or near water to promote a sense of calmness and an opportunity for physical activities (Rossiter, 2016). The environment of a retreat requires a climate of trust and to encourage open conversations where there is no judgement, students and staff need to feel reassured and comfortable that confidentiality is assured. Students, particularly those with low self-esteem, may be vulnerable should their peer(s) or teachers divulge information during the retreat or post-retreat. Their confidence must be assured.

The social bonding and connectedness dimension of a retreat enables the participants to spend significant time together and provides the opportunity for peers to share deeper experiences and conversations not usually possible or undertaken in the school setting (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Staff who lead the retreats and group discussions are mostly Year 11 and 12 class teachers. They play an important role as facilitators, leaders and mentors in the retreat program. The presumption is that they are skilled and experienced leaders (Freeman, 2011; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Literature suggests this may not be the case (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010). Berkowitz and Bier (2004) note care is required in the staffing of retreats. It is essential for retreat staff to have the right skills set, the right attitude, and the capacity to relate to and connect with participants.

There is some concern about the process and transparency of staff selection (Rossiter, 2016). Selecting appropriately trained staff, who relate well pastorally to students, should be a priority to support an effective retreat program.

Berkowitz and Bier (2004), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016) identified that professional development and training of staff are fundamental to ensure the successful implementation of the retreat programs. Rossiter (2016) notes evidence of staff training and professional development occur. The literature raised concerns of staff being sufficiently

trained to manage wisely the potential problems and emotional fallout that may occur during the group sharing sessions (Rossiter, 2016).

The literature brought attention to the personal story segment of the retreat program. Students consider the discussion of personal problems as an important, arguably the most valuable, part of the retreat (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016). It enables further connection with their peers. Some concerns are for the level of expectation for students to share their personal journey. They include the level of sharing by staff of their personal journey, the need for care on the level of sharing, and the potential for emotional manipulation of students. Caution is needed around professional boundaries and the teacher / student relationship and teachers must not place themselves, the students, or the school in an awkward place (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010).

Staff have a significant role to play in the leading, guiding and mentoring of students during the retreat with discussion on values, decision-making and resilience, as well as reflection on personal development and growth (Chu, 2014; Daloz, 1986; Rossiter, 2016). The findings of Freeman (2011) and Bond (2016) recommended the ongoing mentoring of adolescents beyond the completion of the mentoring program.

Effective curriculum programming, planning, preparation, and readiness are required to assist the realisation of the retreat aim, goals, and experience for the students. This includes attending briefing sessions and reading handout information for both staff and students (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Debriefing, post-retreat review and follow up activities with students are important. A significant number of schools undertake these opportunities (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Curriculum components for reflection retreats might include: development of skills for communication and connectedness; decision-making and discernment based on ethics, values and morals; reflection and prayer centredness; and resilience (Lips-Wiersma, 2006).

Retreats come at a cost for the school that involves a number of factors including a loss of curriculum focus and momentum. Teachers are away from their home and family, and loss of preparation and marking time. Despite the disruption to the student's studies and the demands on the teachers, the retreats are widely accepted as a positive experience for the students (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016). The following sections explore the literature associated with some of the key retreat desired outcomes including those of character and moral development, adolescent wellbeing, spirituality, and reflection and journaling.

3.3 Character and Moral Development

It is expected that within the national agenda for education, schools will play a key role in developing students' character (Education Council, 2019). This is character education for personal development through the language of self-discovery, responsibility and citizenship (Freeman, 2011). Character development has been demonstrated as influencing social skills, moral reasoning, self-efficacy, self-esteem, formation of decision-making capacity, and academic motivation and aspiration (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Freeman, 2011).

The research of Fullan (1993, 2005) demonstrates that schools are foundational to the formation of values and moral purpose. This perception may be expressed in terms of character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004) or defined as a purpose-designed training program for personal growth and use of the language of self-discovery, responsibility and citizenship (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Freeman, 2011). This latter view gains support from the research of Flynn and Mok (2002) and Tullio (2009) on reflection retreats in Catholic secondary schools. These studies demonstrate the effectiveness of programs that provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on self and others, develop skills for communication and connectedness, build relationships, and support decision-making and discernment based on ethics, values, and morals.

Students make decisions based on behavioural patterns, values, and morals learnt from childhood (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). These values and morals continue to be honed through adolescence (Kohlberg, 1981). Character education can also include moral education as it is about the development of character traits, values, and morals to prepare adolescents in their decision-making process as they move towards adulthood (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Freeman, 2011; van Bockern, 2006).

Traditionally, the development of emotional competencies, including morals, values, and leadership traits for being good citizens, has been the role of the family. However, this has now become a responsibility more shared with the school (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; van Bockern, 2006). The term, morals, refers to decisions based on moral judgements (Kohlberg (1981). For Kohlberg, morals are a judgement, not a behaviour or an effect. Moral judgements from an ethical standpoint are judgements about what one ought to do or not do, and moral judgements or decisions have a moral content. These values are used to evaluate situations and develop a course of action or a response. Moral values are the basis for the discernment in making a moral judgement. Such judgements may be made on a basis of care and empathy and for the consideration of others.

3.3.1 Character Education

Educational research has shown a decline in adolescent behaviour and identified a need for intervention programs to support the character formation of adolescents (Freeman, 2011). Thus, the establishment of character education programs in a variety of school settings for the fostering of moral judgement and decision-making is recommended. The focus of educational interventions is on character traits such as self-reliance, patience, endurance, resilience, and independent thought and action (Bond, 2016; Freeman, 2011). Physical fitness is also argued to be central to such programs (Freeman, 2011).

It is acknowledged that school-based mentoring programs such as the American mentoring programs *Big Brothers, Big Sisters* (BBBS) and other programs such as offered by *Outward Bound* (Freeman, 2011) and *St HOPE's Making it Real* (Bond, 2016), have been created to assist the development of moral education and character development. These programs are designed to assist with ethical practices and decision-making at work and in life more generally.

In his research on the four-week *Outward Bound* program for young people at risk, Freeman (2011) reported that the program was established to develop self-reliance, patience, and endurance. Moreover, the program promotes independent thought and action as an attempt to reduce incidences of juvenile delinquency. However, suppositions surround the effectiveness of the *Outward Bound* program. Freeman, (2011) argued that the outcomes were not as positive as had been expected because, despite four weeks of intense character development activities, the intended ideals were only partially achieved. Clearly, this raises serious concerns for what can be achieved within a three-day school retreat.

A similar, less than favourable outcome was found with the *St HOPE* character development program. The *St HOPE Making it Real* program for rehabilitating young teenagers and building the blocks for re-entry into the community explored the development of morals to include community service and restorative justice, and the social domain of character programs (Bond, 2016). Bond's study of this three-year program identified that the combination of character education and restorative practices achieved a positive outcome. However, it was argued that this achievement was made possible only with modifications to the program. These modifications included the introduction of a multiplicity of service-learning experiences such as raising money and connecting with the homeless, holding bake sales for breast cancer research, collecting canned food for delivery to the local food bank, developing local gardens, holding topic presentations for engagement with and understanding of HIV and AIDS, slavery and human trafficking, and issues of equality, to name a few. The

review of the *St HOPE* program suggests that its success depended on providing the participants with a complementary array of real-life experiences in which to apply the knowledge and understandings provided during the program.

The evaluation of character education programs highlights the importance of particular changes and developments being implemented to ensure effectiveness and thereby sustainability of the program. In the case of *Outward Bound*, it was a shift in focus from character-building and training to one of personal growth focusing on a language of self-discovery, responsibility, citizenship, and initiative (Freeman, 2011). In the review of the *St HOPE* program, school leaders concluded that there was something missing from the program and introduced community service, restorative justice, and connecting with the homeless to align more closely with the espoused values of that program (Bond, 2016). To ensure sustainability, peer mentoring, follow-up, and evaluation of some form of aligned character programs were recommended (Bond, 2016; Catalano et al., 2004; Freeman, 2011). Hence, it is essential for this thesis research to gather data associated with knowing in what ways the aim and objectives of the retreat experience were supported and complemented by other school-related experiences. In addition, attention can focus on personnel within the experience who contribute significantly to its process and intended outcomes.

3.3.2 Mentors

In a young person's life, the role of mentor is taken on by parents and close family members. Through adolescence, the mentor role may widen to include teachers and other significant adults in young people's lives. The type of mentor may be informal or formal. An informal mentor is usually an adult who comes into the adolescent's life whereas a formal mentor is part of a structured mentoring program such as the *Outward Bound* (Freeman, 2011) and *St HOPE* (Bond, 2016) character-building programs or the school-based mentoring programs of *Big Brothers*, *Big Sisters*. The role of mentor is one function of these character education programs. Through these programs, mentors support, lead, encourage, guide and develop the young person's character and moral development to make healthy decisions (Dubois et al., 2002; Rhodes & Dubois, 2006). In the same way, teachers offer the same guidance at a retreat.

Retreat facilitators and group leaders are teachers of the school (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). They, too, journey the retreat with the adolescents, guiding, supporting and attending to the wellbeing, self-esteem and self-worth of the retreatants. Their role is one of mentor for the adolescents. Together, the mentor and the mentee work through the components of the retreat program. This might include a discussion on values, decision-

making and resilience, as well as reflection on personal development and growth (Daloz, 1986; Rossiter, 2016).

Teachers offer insight and emotional support as the retreatants “come to understand the vision of the potential self” (Parks, 1986, p. 86). Part of the retreat program is the sharing of personal insights by teachers “as a key dynamic to the retreat” (Rossiter, 2016, p. 65). Sharing in this way, providing guidance to the retreatants, is one form of mentoring. Indeed, in her research on secondary school live-in retreats, Tullio (2009) lists the capacity to play the role of mentor among the skills required of the teacher to assist in the successful retreat experience for the students.

Tullio (2009) furthered this position noting that “the desired disposition of teachers on a retreat showed a change of style from that of “teacher in the classroom to one of mentor who interacted on an informal level with students” (p. 153). There is some consideration that a teacher being less formal on a retreat will assist in breaking down the teacher / student barrier. Examples include calling teachers by their first name and the sharing of personal experiences during group discussion sessions. Some teachers project the view that the teacher can be less formal and yet still have the respect of the students. Teacher / student informality can be considered quite a contentious issue. Of the teachers surveyed by Tullio, 35% considered that they should encourage students to relate to their retreat teachers on a first-name basis while 44% disagreed and 21% were undecided. Despite this variance regarding first-name usage, 84% agreed that the usual professional boundaries between teachers and students could be maintained on the retreat with no negative impact on the retreat process. (Rossiter, 2016).

This dilemma can also extend to potential teacher / student relationships post-retreat where the more casual environment of the retreat is transitioned to a more formal classroom setting. It cannot be assumed the adolescent retreatants have the maturity to make the adjustment. Some retreat staff can be concerned about crossing professional boundaries, even with being called by their first name. Potentially, some students may respond differently to this decision by these staff (Rossiter, 2016).

School-based mentoring programs are intervention programs set up to mentor and support students at risk (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012). These programs are usually run weekly. Importantly, such mentors are trained and selected to match with the profile and needs of the mentee. The research of Portwood et al. (2005) and Komosa-Hawkins (2010) noted that a positive mentoring relationship can make an impact on the wellbeing, self-worth and self-esteem of the adolescent. The study of Komosa-Hawkins

(2012), extending this line of thought, found that quality mentoring can increase school engagement, academic potential, social competence, and connectedness. Herrera et al. (2011), supported by Dubois et al. (2011), note that school-based mentoring programs may work in different ways to help young people. For example, adolescents who were mentored performed better academically and had more positive perceptions of their own academic abilities (Herrera et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the studies undertaken by Komosa-Hawkins (2010), Grossman et al. (2012), and Wood and Mayo-Wilson (2012) analysed the program components and the length of mentoring experiences. Results confirmed the valued link with character-building and adolescent wellbeing and identified the benefits gained from a school perspective. The successful school-based programs reviewed possesses a common structure. They are usually run weekly (Dubois et al., 2011; Komosa-Hawkins, 2012) and are allocated a set time (Dolan, 2011; Karcher, 2008). In addition, their success emerged from their operation over a significant period of time (Dubois et al., 2011; Komosa-Hawkins, 2010; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012). The mentors of the successful programs were adults who were not normally teachers at the school (Dolan, 2011). It is relevant to note that the mentors for these programs were purposively selected and matched with the students (Dubois et al., 2002; Dubois et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2012). This is done according to the student's interests and needs (Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012).

Students mentored through these school-based mentoring programs experienced success in their development of social skills including the skills of communication with peers and teachers at school (Herrera et al., 2011). However, Herrera et al. (2011) cautioned that the advantage of mentoring appeared to decay over a period of time following the completion of the mentoring program. This view is supported with earlier studies where Dubois et al. (2002) noted that the importance of mentoring was modest. They also recorded mixed effects on academic performance and behaviour (Dubois et al., 2002). These findings are of interest to the research because they bring into question whether the mentoring and events undertaken during the retreat to assist sustainability of the effects and purpose of the retreat were followed up once the students were back at school.

Also, although this research points to the potential for benefits from school-based mentoring programs in assisting the development and maturation of the mentees (Dubois et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2012; Karcher, 2008) the school-based mentoring programs identified in this literature were not necessarily the form of mentoring being undertaken in the Australian school retreat in focus in this study where the mentor was the student's class

teacher, pastoral care teacher, housemaster or the sporting coach (Dubois et al., 2011). It is these staff who attended the retreat, led discussion groups, and undertook a form of mentoring role during the retreat.

By way of comparison, too, the character-mentoring programs during the retreat program were only three days in length unlike the much longer programs described in the above literature. Thus, the duration of the mentor programs is of significant interest and relevance to this research. Literature reviewed notes that most school-based mentor programs operated for one year or more (Dubois et al., 2011; Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). The longer a mentoring relationship lasts, the greater the positive outcomes and the more lasting the benefits for young people (Grossman et al., 2012). Indeed, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) and Karcher (2005) note limitations in the success of mentoring relationships lasting less than three months. By contrast, the retreat researched is not an extended program, rather, it was three days in length.

However, be that as it may, it would seem that the perceived importance of student mentoring programs is growing. This trend suggests that the value of mentors who are offering active guidance to adolescents are making concerted efforts to ensure that the overall welfare of the adolescent is attended to (Dubois et al., 2007). In their research of school-based mentoring, the findings of Dubois et al. (2011), Komosa-Hawkins (2012) and Wood and Mayo-Wilson (2012) promote the consideration that adolescents should be targeted and selected for purposeful mentoring intervention. It is the view of the researcher, however, that all students may, in some way, benefit from suitable and appropriate mentoring for the reinforcement of character development, values, and morals in their decision-making and judgement.

3.3.3 Mentoring Resilience

Within the mentoring experience, resilience and discernment in judgement are important components of character development. Resilience is an individual's capacity for adapting to change and to stressful events in healthy and flexible ways (Catalano et al., 2004). Komosa-Hawkins (2012), in her article, *The Impact of School-Based Mentoring on Adolescents' Social-Emotional Health*, concludes that resilience in adolescents provides the necessary social support that will empower students to commence adjustments and prepare them for their future. Wood and Mayo-Wilson (2012), in their meta-analysis of school-based mentoring for adolescents, noted that achievement by a caring adult may help build a student's resilience. McGregor et al. (2017), in their work of youth mentoring as a form of support for children and young people at risk, confirm that mentoring can assist with

discernment in decision-making. However, negative peer and external influences had a less than positive impact on the mentoring program (Dubois et al., 2002). This finding would suggest a low level of resilience in students at risk and that without mentors nearby, they were not strong enough to resist the negative external influences (Tolan et al., 2008). The implication here is the need for some form of student mentoring that builds adolescent resilience and judgement skills.

The review of literature suggests there is a relevance and linkage between mentoring and the retreat process that is under examination in this thesis study. Retreats, by definition, are a time out of the busyness of life for reflection (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Rossiter, 2016). It is posited that retreat teachers lead and guide the retreatant through some form of mentoring. Investigation into this retreat considered student mentoring by the teaching staff who are on the retreat. The thesis research investigated the selection of the staff, the training, and the preparation of staff, not only for the retreat experience in general but also for the responsibility of being a mentor.

3.3.4 Summary

Character is composed of the values, morals and ethics of a person. Schools have an important role to play in the development of the student's character (Education Council, 2019). Character development is said to assist influencing students' social skills, moral reasoning, self-efficacy, self-esteem, formation of decision-making capacity, and academic motivation and aspiration (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Freeman, 2011). Character education mentoring programs, including *Big Brothers Big Sisters* (Brady, 2011) and *St HOPE's Making it Real* (Bond, 2016), have been established to assist the development of character education in adolescents.

School-based mentoring programs support wellbeing, self-worth, self-esteem, academic potential, social competence, and connectedness of the adolescent. (Dolan, 2011; Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012). These programs are usually run weekly, for up to a year, to a set program led by trained mentors (Herrera et al., 2011; Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Portwood et al., 2005). Analysis of the logistics of these programs provides a backdrop to the potential requirements for an effective retreat program. To ensure sustainability and noting the goal of attending to the needs of the students, the mentoring component of retreat programs needs to be reviewed, evaluated and, if required, modified (Bond, 2016; Catalano et al., 2004; Freeman, 2011; Rossiter, 2016).

3.4 Adolescent Male Wellbeing

An aim of schools is to prepare students academically, and to offer guidance and counselling to help them come to terms with their own responsibilities in meeting the basic intellectual and social demands of adult life (Education Council, 2019; McLaughlin, 2005). Research into Australian adolescent males revealed statistical evidence identifying a seriously low level of wellbeing (Engebretson, 2003; Laursen, 2004). This trend is more prevalent in boys in the age bracket of 15 to 17 years (Engebretson, 2003; Laursen, 2004). Wellbeing is a key component of this research as wellbeing is considered key to the development – emotionally, socially, and educationally – of adolescent boys and girls in their senior years of schooling (Education Council, 2019). This section of Chapter 3 gives close attention to the extent of the research of wellbeing, self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy, resilience, affirmation and self-integrity. To assist the discussion and for ease of reference, definitions of each wellbeing term are provided in the front pages of the thesis.

The focus on self, and how people value themselves, is key to the wellbeing of a person (Park & Crocker, 2008). The *Wellbeing Framework for School* (Communities, 2018), supports the view that if people feel good about themselves, it is expected that they will function well and flourish to their full potential. The level of confidence and self-esteem in people, be it high or low, is often dependent on the level of need, how they are affirmed by others, and how they affirm themselves (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017; Park & Crocker, 2008; Sherman, 2013). This will have an impact on the functioning of a person and can affect a student's engagement, discernment, and decision-making.

Adolescent students in this thesis research were completing their final years of schooling. They were preparing for their final external examination in readiness for tertiary studies and the workforce. Implications for the development of strong self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy, and resilience are significant during this period of high stakes and transition. The literature on these domains was explored, with the focus being on the impact of a person's wellbeing in relation to goals and objectives of a reflection retreat. It considered the relationship and potential influence on character development with the domains of self and the linkage with academic development, potential risk taking, decision-making and discernment, resilience, virtues and morals.

3.4.1 Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is about how we see ourselves and whether or not we approve of what we see (Branden, 1988; Cooper, 1992). Our self-image, comprising body image, social capacity and personality traits, has a positive or negative effect on how well we like ourselves

(Branden, 1992). Self-esteem is a longstanding concept in interpersonal psychology in dealing with interpersonal relationships and social functioning to assist the reduction of a person's level of stress or distress. The longitudinal research of Harris and Orth (2019) confirms the link between self-esteem and social relationships and the assumptions of the role of social relationships in the development of self-esteem. That is, social relationships have a potential effect on self-esteem.

Harris and Orth (2019) also confirmed the assumption that people's self-esteem and social relationships influence each other. Self-esteem is a psychological need (Leary, 2000; Trzesniewski et al., 2006). If this need remains unmet, pathological characteristics like defensiveness, anxiety, depression, and difficulty in relationships tend to result (Branden, 1992). Branden's (1988) six pillars of self-esteem – living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-awareness, self-assertiveness, and living purposefully – explore this understanding of personal needs and their relationship and development.

In their publications on self-esteem, Branden (1992) and Cooper (1992), along with Harris and Orth (2019), provide a list of characteristics of people with high self-esteem and low self-esteem. Using such a list we can come to understand how people with high self-esteem display characteristics and traits that include being open to criticism, being able to acknowledge mistakes, and being comfortable with giving and receiving compliments. Usually, people with high self-esteem are unafraid to show their curiosity and discuss their ideas calmly. They are authentic and keep to their morals and values and stand by their decisions. People with high self-esteem will usually reject the attempts of others to manipulate them. They value themselves and communicate with others accordingly.

By way of contrast, according to Branden (1992) and Cooper (1992), people with low self-esteem display characteristics and traits that include the need to please people, the feeling that their opinion is not important, and being highly sensitive to other's opinions. They are not as confident with their decision-making, and often procrastinate. They may experience the emotions of sadness and worthlessness that can translate into being unsure of who they are as a person. Many with low self-esteem frequently experience negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, or depression (Branden, 1988, 1992; Karatas & Cakar, 2011).

The level of self-esteem is impacted upon by dependency on the approval of others (Park & Crocker, 2008). It has been long thought that peers have an influence on the development of self-esteem (Hughes, 2007; Leary, 2000). Self-esteem develops as a consequence of social acceptance or rejection from others, in particular, peers (Thomaes et al., 2012). During adolescence, individuals place very strong emphasis on social interactions

and approval from significant others (De Bruyn & Van Den Boom, 2005; Laible et al., 2004). Peers serve to influence self-esteem and thus inform identity formation. The level of peer approval may impart a change of self-esteem in an individual (Gruenenfelder-Steiger et al., 2016).

The implications of self-esteem for interpersonal relations and self-development in the adolescent are significant. The retreat program involved group discussion and the sharing of personal stories (Engebretson, 2006; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). The level of successful engagement for the retreatant in this part of the retreat may depend on their level of self-esteem and acceptance by their peers. An environment where each retreatant can feel safe to express and discuss their views openly, free from the concern of a potential negative influence on self-esteem by adolescent peers, is important (Abbott-Chapman, 2006). The role of the retreat leaders is to set up a safe environment for the retreatants to allay concerns of potential negative impact on self-esteem (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

As adolescents increase their independence from parents there is an increased orientation towards same-age peers (Laible et al., 2004). This transition may generate social difficulties which the adolescent is required to face and respond to. Being equipped with the necessary social skills and an appropriate level of self-esteem will enable adolescents to work through these uncharted waters in learning to understand and value their self-worth.

3.4.2 Self-Worth

How an individual values themselves as a person is the essence of the understanding of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-worth has been found to be closely related to life satisfaction, academic success, social relationship outcomes, and mental and physical health (Donnellan et al., 2005; Erol & Orth, 2013; Orth et al., 2015; Steiger et al., 2015; Trzesniewski et al., 2006). From the studies of Crocker et al. (2003), Niiya et al. (2004) and Park and Crocker (2008), we come to know that the impact on adolescent self-worth and wellbeing will vary according to the level of emphasis that is placed on achieving a goal. It is possible that the response of self-worth is personalised; thus, for example, the failed academic result is linked to the subjective self, “I am a failure”, rather than the objective, “I have failed” (Park et al., 2007, p. 1503). While the research of Engebretson (2006), Hughes (2007), Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009), may not have a specific focus in their surveys on the self-worth of the retreatant during the retreat, their findings do discuss the level of engagement of students. This includes the potential outpouring of emotion in the personal story-sharing portion of the program. It is at this point the retreatant may be at their most

vulnerable, needing skilful, sensitive guidance and support of the group leader, or perhaps a counsellor.

3.4.3 *Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is one's belief in one's capacity and ability in completing a given task. It is the overall value of self as a performer of a desired action. It is the belief in one's ability to succeed at certain tasks (Bandura, 1989). The theory of self-efficacy attributes cognitive learning and other cognitive processes in the individual's interaction and adjustment to social circumstances (Bandura, 2002; Dronnen-Schmidt, 2014). Accomplishments, particularly if they are successful from previous performances, are the most powerful source of self-efficacy as these tend to raise efficiency expectations (Bandura, 1982, 1997) and drawing on these successes has a positive effect on the adolescent's wellbeing (Dronnen-Schmidt, 2014).

The research of Algera and Sink (2002), Catalano et al. (2004), Morton and Montgomery (2013) and Deane et al. (2017) considered whether youth development programs might support young people in their development of positive beliefs of their self-efficacy. While they identified self-efficacy as an important focus for adolescent wellbeing, their findings of the effectiveness of the character education programs to realise positive outcomes were inconsistent. The findings in the results of programs designed to improve adolescents' self-efficacy are mixed. The findings of the study by Morton and Montgomery (2013) of seven-week youth empowerment programs for improving adolescents' self-efficacy and self-esteem – with post-tests at four months, seven months and 12 months – were not encouraging. By contrast, the findings of the study of Deane et al. (2017) – a 14-month-long youth development program with a review at the program's end and a post-review one year following the completion of the program – were positive. Upon analysis, it can be seen that there is a potential skewing of the findings of this study undertaken by Deane et al., as the participants selected to undertake the program were initially identified as having a very low level of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and so any change would be readily identified as a positive change. Indeed, Deane et al. (2017) suggested that further research was needed to be undertaken to understand why the program was considered successful in addressing the concerns of self-esteem and self-efficacy that led to the development of resilience.

3.4.4 *Resilience*

The linkage of self-efficacy and resilience is strong (Sherman, 2013; Werner, 2005). Resilience is how we adapt to adversity, including trauma, threat and stress (Masten, 2014). Coping with adversity is normal for any age group, and family and teachers take on the role and function as role models to reinforce these coping strategies and competencies (Lee et al.,

2013; Werner, 2005). The studies of Lee et al., (2013) and Werner (2005) observed that factors related to resilience such as positive affect, self-efficacy, optimism, social support, self-esteem and life satisfaction, are closely linked with resilience.

An investigative study by Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) in relation to character strengths, resilience, self-efficacy, and self-esteem found that character strengths promote resilience. Adolescents experience trauma of various level and types. These may include a relationship or family break-up, death of a close family member, relocation, loss of friendships, academic failure, and significant sporting injury that prevents them playing that sport again. Students at the school being researched may have experienced some level of personal trauma. A certain level of courage is required to cope with adversity and trauma.

Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) highlight the virtue of courage, with zest highly correlated with resilience as adolescents cope with trauma. The component of zest is said to have the desirable traits of passion and enthusiasm. These components of zest may prove to be important in the character development of adolescents as they equip themselves for the final years of schooling, external examinations, and then the passage into adulthood. The findings from these studies signal caution for the proposed study. These programs were run over an extended period with inconclusive results. This study of a reflection retreat of three days might well be questioned to be counter to this prediction. The type of retreat studied in this thesis has been ongoing for more than a decade. It is important to understand what this retreat achieves in this regard.

3.4.5 Affirmation

Affirmation that is positive, spontaneous and authentic is important as it increases the value of self-worth (Sherman, 2013). When it comes from someone who is well-regarded by the recipient, affirmation is more likely to have a lasting impact. This affirmation may come from an unexpected or surprise source including peers, teachers, and people who may not be closely connected. This unexpected affirmation is particularly significant to the recipient (Sherman, 2013). Adolescent school students might receive affirmations that include public recognition at assembly, the receiving of certificates, or a letter from the school to the parent. This positive affirmation increases academic performance (Walton & Cohen, 2007) and serves to increase a person's wellbeing and self-worth.

Positive affirmation can broaden the perspective on oneself. It provides a more expansive view of the self and is less focused on, and less consumed by, any form of threat (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Affirmations act as a positive force against the threat to self-worth. The affirmation may remind the recipient of people and relationships whom they care

about and so look beyond any feeling of vulnerability, criticism, and potential threat to self-worth (Crocker et al., 2008). Parents and friends who support a person during a major ordeal illustrate the influence of positive affirmations. It is these acts of support that enable people to view a threat in a quite different, usually positive manner, with greater perspective and in the context of the resources of self-integrity that are not contingent on the threatening domain (Sherman, 2013).

3.4.6 *Self-Integrity*

Self-integrity is the very being of who we are, being authentic. It is one's concept of self as a good, moral person, who acts in ways that are in accord with cultural and social norms. Steele (1988) proposed that the concept of self is made up of different domains that include roles, values, and belief systems. Values are aspirations people live in accordance with, including living healthfully and treating others with respect. Gaining an understanding, acceptance and application of values stems from a depth of self-knowledge and this requires discerning and deep self-reflection (Branson, 2007). The challenge is to be true to self in this process.

Self-integrity, defined as the honesty, truth and reliability of a person, can take many forms. When people affirm their self-integrity, or their view of their self as being capable and adaptable, they will have less need to rationalise away threatening information (Cohen et al., 2009). Being reminders of who they are and what is important to them, self-affirmation can reduce stress by putting threats in the context of an overall narrative of self-integrity (Sherman, 2013). Sherman extends this concept of an individual's response to a threat and proposes that individuals possess a flexible self-system in which they can respond to threats in one domain by affirming self-worth in another domain. For Sherman, the effects of self-affirmation are positive towards threats, stress, and identity-threatening situations (2013). The gift of courage enables us to start to reflect on the parts of our self and see where they fit. Courage comes from others around and is an enabler for us to live the truth of ourselves.

A retreat is a space to consider one's life and the many facets of life. Reflection is an important part of this process (Emily & Creswell, 2014; Sherman et al., 2013) and it may be a skill that many adolescents have not yet developed (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). It is anticipated that the retreat in this case study will provide the opportunity to develop reflection skills.

3.4.7 Summary

These complex matters mentioned have implications for the retreat leaders who require the capacity to identify the individual traits of the retreatants in their group and have the skills to work with adolescents during discussion sessions (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). The honest, in-depth focus by students on their self when exploring concepts such as self-efficacy and self-worth can raise both positive and negative emotions. Staff leading the retreat are teachers and while they have a certain level of training in the psychology of adolescence, they are not trained counsellors. During the retreat there may be an outpouring of emotions by the adolescents. Implications for the retreat leaders is the challenge to understand these emotions and to have the skills to attend to the retreatants' needs should the situation require it. The research of Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) pays particular attention to the need for training and ongoing professional development for teachers leading retreats and group sessions of retreats.

3.5 Spirituality

Many factors influence adolescent development. They can be characterised in terms of emotional and cognitive development, and moral interpretations and responses (Fowler, 2004), and spirituality. The research of Conn (2009), Hughes (2007), Mason et al. (2007), Rolheiser (1999), Rossiter (2016), and Tacey (2003) identify the important role of spirituality in the life of the adolescent. However, spirituality for the adolescent may not be in the form experienced by their parents (Conn, 2009; Harris & Moran, 1998; Hughes, 2007; Mason, 2007; Rossiter, 2016, 2018; Tullio, 2009). For many young people, spirituality may be considered more secularised than that experienced by their parents and older generations (Crawford & Rossiter, 1996; Maroney, 2008; Mason, 2007; Rossiter, 2016, 2018; Tullio, 2009). Spirituality for many adolescents is enjoying life and being true to the inner self, and being authentic with the decisions and actions taken based on the values they determine are right for them (Hughes, 2007). Retreats provide the opportunity for the adolescent to reflect and explore their spirituality.

3.5.1 Defining Spirituality

As adolescents enter an ever-increasing secular world, the question might be raised about what adolescents perceive as spirituality and how they define it. Studies undertaken in the area of spirituality of adolescents have provided a variety of definitions. Harris and Moran (1998) posit that spirituality for adolescents might be defined as a way of life for the individual who has a set of values and practices with which to view and engage the world. Cook (2000) and Cook et al. (2012) describe spirituality as the driving force inside us all

which is linked to our soul, our very being and how we respond to situations according to the highs and lows of our life. Wright's (2000) view is that spirituality is the relationship of the individual within the community which is, or is perceived to be, of ultimate concern, ultimate value and ultimate truth, as appropriate through an informed, sensitive and reflective striving for wisdom .

Above, I spoke of spirituality being the driving force inside us all which is linked to our soul, our very being and how we respond to situations according to the highs and lows of our life (Rolheiser, 1999). In his work, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, Rolheiser (1999), explores the spiritual alternatives offered by Sigmund Freud (as cited in Rolheiser, p. 4) who talks about a fire without a focus that burns at the centre of our lives and pushes us out in a relentless and unquenchable pursuit of pleasure. Carl Jung (as cited in Rolheiser, 1999, p. 4) speaks of deep and alterable energies which structure our very soul and demand every attention. Doris Lessing (as cited in Rolheiser, p. 4) advances that there exists a certain voltage within us for love, hatred, art and politics. Rolheiser makes the point that each of these secular thinkers speaks of a fire within us. He claims that inside all of us there is an unquenchable fire, a certain unrest, a relentlessness, a longing, a disquiet, and perhaps a loneliness an "all embracing ache that lies at the centre of human experience and an ultimate force that drives everything else" (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 12) and he links this inner drive to the soul of a person and fire within the soul. For Rolheiser, there is a desire in us all which is affected by moods, desires and longing, and spirituality is ultimately about what we do with that desire. He explains that soul is not something that we have; it is more something that we are; it is the very life pulse within us that makes us alive. To Rolheiser, soul is the principle of oneness. In the heart and the mind, the soul is what keeps us together. To lose one's soul is to mean we are becoming unglued and the inner world is falling apart (pp. 13-14). A healthy soul keeps us energised, vibrant, living with zest and glued together. Rolheiser (1999, p. 11) writes, "Spirituality is what we do about the spirit that is within us and how we channel our desire".

It is important to understand the difference between religion and spirituality, and Fisher (2009) is succinct in his explanation. To Fisher, the focus of religion comprises an ideology and rules of a faith and belief system, while spirituality focuses on experience and relationships which go beyond religion. In her research on spirituality in adolescent boys aged between 15 and 18 years, Engebretson (2006) explains that a person's spirituality is a way of life—a view of the world and set of values and practices—which may be based on a number of factors.

The traditional style of spirituality and religion that was espoused and, in many cases, practised has been replaced by a more private, individualised form of spirituality which has been adopted and developed by adolescents (Conn, 2009; Engebretson, 2006; Hughes, 2007, 2016b). Spirituality, from which the adolescent develops meaning and values practised in daily life, may not come from the once traditional religious base including parents and the church (Engebretson, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Mason, 2007).

In his research into adolescent male spirituality in Catholic schools, Conn (2009) observed that “adolescents seek to establish their personal identity as they attempt to find meaning in their lives” (p. 121). Examining their thoughts and feelings “leads many young people to seek answers to questions of a spiritual nature” (p. 121). Many adolescents do not identify with the spirituality in the traditional avenues of church so “they search for meaning in life’s daily experiences” (p. 121).

3.5.2 *World View*

Studies of adolescent spirituality show a heightened awareness, a discernment of spirituality that is relatively non-religious spirituality (Rossiter, 2018). A significant portion of adolescents have a spirituality that is individualistic, eclectic, self-reliant and relatively secular (Hughes, 2007; Kay, 1996; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Mason, 2007; Rossiter, 2018; Tacey, 2002, 2003). Their eclectic mix of world views, and the cautious relativism of their values, result from facing an uncertain world with only fragile support for their identity, beliefs and values (Mason, 2007). Meditation is one form of alternative spirituality. However, Hughes (2007) provides an alternate view on meditation suggesting that for most who do practise meditation it is to help keep them calm, rather than seeking an alternative religion. Where churches have used ritual and tradition as a way to transmit an identity and way of life, young people were looking for freedom and valued self-expression .

Over the years there has been a gradual shift away from the traditional form of religion and spirituality in Christian churches (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2018; Tacey, 2003). This movement away from the church has become evident with the drop in regular attendance at Mass and church services (Good et al., 2011; Hughes, 2007; Kay, 1996; Mason, 2007; Rossiter, 2018; Tullio, 2009; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), and has been attributed to the fact that religious organisations and churches not meeting the needs of young people (Engebretson, 2003, 2004; Hughes, 2007, 2016b; Kay, 1996; Mason, 2007; Rolheiser, 1999; Rossiter, 2016, 2018). Baby boomers are considered spiritual but not religious nor attached to religious institutions (Foster, 2006). This has had a flow-on effect to Generation

Y who grew up in a world that has changed from the childhood of their parents (Mason, 2007).

The research of Lips-Wiersma's case study, *Lancelot in Retreat* (2006), observed that there is some base role of spirituality in our daily lives. She reports that in retreats, spirituality is conceptualised as the desire, or need, to find meaning and purpose in one's life in order to achieve that life in which values and actions are aligned. This meaning, and the values on which the meaning is based, may not necessarily be based on the values or teachings of Christianity. Young people have a desire for the spiritual as they commence structuring their lives, and as they have found the church not to be relevant to their needs, they commenced searching for an alternative. Dewey (1960), a recognised and legendary educational theorist, espoused from his research on spirituality the concept of shared human ideals of lasting value if the activities involve the whole self. According to Dewey, spirituality is present when we can look imaginatively at the world from other people's perspectives and in such a context it enhances and deepens our ability to communicate with others. To this end, spirituality opens the possibility of inventing more encompassing goals and new strategies to achieve those goals as a result of a change of will (Lips-Wiersma, 2006).

For young people, relationship with friends is central to what life is about. They wish to be with friends they can trust and with whom they share the challenging experiences of life. In the past, church was where people met, socialised, and offered each other support (Hughes, 2007). Technology and the use of social media have changed the way people communicate and express themselves. To young people, church attendance is seen as not very important in building one's social profile or personal reputation (Hughes, 2007) and, consequently, they have sought other avenues whereby they can socialise and meet friends.

Pressures of socialisation into the adult world account for the decline in Christian observance by young people growing up in a world that is characterised by the secular rather than the religious (Engelbreton, 2004, 2006; Kay, 1996). This supports the interrelated studies previously undertaken by Kay (1996) who observed that the increased focus on spirituality – as opposed to religiosity – may be considered a world view of spirituality as a result of adolescents drifting away from organised religion.

Mason et al., (2007) explore the world views and values of those born after 1980 and then, in their teens and early twenties, discuss spirituality, the way of life, and a way of making sense of life grounded in some form of transcendence. Mason et al. explain the transcendent as a reality beyond the individual, in the sense of ethical ideals towards which a

person strives to shape their conduct even when this ideal has no explicit religious foundation. While this form of spirituality may be apparent in adolescents, Mason et al. maintain that it is less so in boys. They furthered their discussion on the world view of spirituality, explaining that spirituality may take the form of a way of life which seeks to follow an ideal that is not religious, supernatural, or other-worldly. For many people, including adolescents, it is simply living a good, virtuous life, doing the right thing according to the values generally accepted by society (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Mason, 2007).

While a number of researchers identify the privatisation of belief as significant and widespread (Crawford, 2006; Kay, 1996), others disagree, seeing a powerful urge for “connectedness” in the spirituality of young people (Engebretson, 2003, p. 274). It is through the experience of relationship and the young person’s deep need for intimacy and belonging that the emerging self comes to understand more deeply what it means to be human, and so a platform for more genuine spirituality is able to be built (Engebretson, 2003). Personal relationships, central to a sense of life that is good and meaningful, and connectedness with family and friends, were highly valued as they give meaning and purpose to life. The findings of Engebretson (2003) emphasise the need to “belong” (p. 274). The judgement of most participants of Engebretson’s research was that risk-taking behaviour was connected to a condition of not belonging. This lack of connectedness was linked with low-self-esteem that required approval from the peer group. As such, the relationship with peers was of crucial importance. The findings of Engebretson (2003) suggest “that lived experiences though a sense of connectedness with self and others were the sites of spirituality for the boys” (p. 274). The development of identity and relationships were the key dimensions through which the participants experienced a sense of meaning that is often referred to as spirituality.

Engebretson’s (2006) study was undertaken among 965 boys aged between 15 and 18 years, in six Australian Catholic schools. The data collected and examined were part of a larger research project on teenage boys and spirituality. In the responses to the question, “What kind of man do you want to be?”, Engebretson argues that the dominance of personal integrity and relationship values in the boys’ responses suggests that a key component of their view of spirituality is a growing tendency to challenge the hegemonic ideal of masculinity. The consideration is to look towards a future where masculinity is defined in more varied and fulfilling ways.

Engebretson (2004) further explains the position of the relationship of spirituality with connectedness, maintaining that juxtaposition of spirituality enhances connectedness. Her findings of the research from interviewing 20 adolescent boys reveal that experience has

an action of unifying, with the self, between the self and others, and between the self and the world. The impact of such connectedness widens to the broader concept of self-esteem. In this component of connectedness within the self, with others, and with the world, Evans (1979) posits the idea that attitudes and virtues provide a framework of what he refers to as spirituality. Engebretson (2004) notes these characteristics of spirituality include humility, the acceptance of self, the rejection of pervasive guilt about oneself; responsibility, self-commitment or honesty within and with oneself, friendliness; concern for others, and accepting who we are as ourselves. This concept of spirituality and connectedness with self is acknowledged in the work of Harris and Moran (1998) who explain that while spirituality is personal, it is inevitably communal. As such, it enhances the connectedness with others and with the non-human world. Two decades have passed and the question may well be posed if this is still the case.

Considering these views, it could be suggested that the many daily life experiences of the adolescent boy are where they might find spirituality. Forms of spirituality are accessible in the rhythmic life of the boys' education and these rhythms are noticeable in classrooms, chapel, assemblies, informal curriculum programs of sport, community service activities, camps, immersion programs, playground, and other moments of individual and corporate connection and wondering. A dilemma found in the education of the adolescent boy relates to the type, level and significance of spirituality in the lives of young males (Smith, 2004).

3.5.3 *Spirituality, Values and Morals*

The research of Hughes (2007) with young people by way of surveys for the *Schools Project* and 'teleconference calls' gives special attention to what spirituality means to young people. To them, according to Hughes, it is a strong sense of peace and happiness. It is being true to the inner self, being authentic with the decisions and actions taken. For young people, spirituality was not necessarily about a world beyond or being in touch with God. It was enjoying life and being true to one's self.

Hughes (2007) notes that young people are well-tuned to the hypocritical, to something that is put on, acting out a game, or filling a role. For some young people, hypocrisy can be seen in the church. Church attendees did not always behave as they profess. Young people are not looking for a rational faith as such; they are seeking to develop a view of the world that is meaningful, coherent, and, most importantly, that "works" for them (p. 173). Hughes furthers the point that churches, schools and families need to give attention to helping young people find positive ways to construct themselves and to encourage self-expression. To this end, some churches have adjusted their form of service in an attempt to

meet the needs of young people. Pentecostal and charismatic churches have attracted younger people partly because they encourage self-expression and have themes that relate to them and music that engages them (Hughes, 2007).

The focus of this case study is on the adolescent males, aged 15 to 17 years, as they enter the senior years of their schooling. It is at this time that adolescent males are at risk both personally and academically (Engebretson, 2004; White, 1997). Research has identified a belief in moral values, religion, and spirituality as among the top key factors to protect and counter self-destructive behaviour of young people (Abbott-Chapman & Denholm, 2001; Engebretson, 2004; Garbarino, 1999; Resnick, 1997; Smith, 2004). Researchers also link spirituality with the fostering of connectedness within self, others and the wider community. While spirituality is personal, it is also inevitably communal, enhancing connectedness with others (Harris & Moran, 1998).

3.5.4 *Schools*

It is natural to expect that a faith-based school and its leaders have a role to play in the development of a boy's spirituality, values and beliefs. The case study school for this thesis research is a Christian school of the Anglican tradition. Christian spirituality grows out of the encounter with Jesus (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2018) and Christian schools have a challenge to combine biblical scholarship with the practical experiences of seeing life and ministry, and living life and ministry (Foster, 2006). The challenge is to have the meta-narrative and the practical experiences of seeing and living faith and ministry in the students. It can be argued that within faith-based schools, our role as leaders and educators is to foster the opportunity for reflection and to identify and feel God is with us in the everydayness of our lives. Such is the view of Sultmann and Brown (2019) who draw out the connection of school mission with teacher identity, and nominate agency, equity and authenticity as significant to the relationship of school purpose with teacher endeavour.

Connell (2000) talks of school as a setting and agent for the construction of a boy's identity and sense of what it is to be a man. Smith (2004) argues that schools play an active role in the development of boys' identity, perhaps at times unconsciously. To the adolescent, the term, spirituality has many meanings and there may be, as Singleton (2004) identified, significant variations in the way young people understand and express this. The task at hand for schools is to come to know their cohort well and to develop programs that will meet the needs of their students (Singleton, 2004).

For a young man growing up through adolescence, a significant other, such as a father or a significant male in his life can provide strong support as a spiritual role model or mentor

(Burgess, 1997; Dollahite, 1998). Smith's (2004) research paper notes the importance of mentors to enhance spiritual wellbeing (Collins, 1999; Cook, 2000). For Collins, this mentoring process is an important part of the school setting. Mentors are an agent for the construction of a boy's identity and sense of what it means to be a man. As Palmer (1999) explains, spiritual questions are embedded in what is taught, and in our lives. As such, schools and teachers cannot abdicate their significant modelling and potentially stabilising role in the developing lives of the adolescents.

While school leaders may have the desire to present a strong religious base to students, as the young people move from primary school into secondary school and into the adolescent phase of their life, they lack attention to, and involvement with religious classes. This has provided a challenge for secondary school teachers and school leaders (Rossiter, 2018). The same cohort of students in primary school classes engaged in class lessons and activities but this positive engagement quickly falls away in the transition to secondary schooling (Rossiter, 2018). While it is not part of this research to investigate the purposes underlying adolescents' shift in attitude towards religion lessons, this concern does have relevance. Knowledge of this shift of engagement in religion, religion lessons and spirituality may have some bearing on the curriculum and program design of the reflection retreat which might be developed to maximise the engagement of the retreatants.

We live in a pluralistic environment and schools often seek to serve students of different backgrounds (McLaughlin, 2005). Some students have religious family backgrounds at home and others have no such background. There are people who are committed to humanistic principles of human self-reliance based on a worldview of doing the right thing (Hughes, 2007) and, for them, faith or religion should not be a focus of school life. However, we are reminded that, by definition, spirituality is the nature of beliefs and Christian spirituality is the belief in God. This provides leaders of Christian schools the necessary confidence to continue with the promotion of the faith espoused in the school mission statement.

However, this general deterioration from adherence to Christianity has become evident in Christian faith-based schools (Engebretson, 2003; Hughes, 2007; Mason, 2007). Rossiter's research (2018) reveals that a considerable proportion of students in Australian Catholic schools attend Mass irregularly or not at all and / or have no Christian faith. As well, many parents do not practise a faith and are less likely to pass on knowledge of biblical stories, faith and rituals. Thus, students may not have an understanding of the topics covered in religion classes and so the religion class becomes less relevant (Rossiter, 2018).

In the *School Project* research undertaken by Hughes (2007), he found that more than half of the student population in the church schools had not attended a youth group or any other church-related group at all, apart from worship. Hughes continues with his findings that church groups play a minor role in the lives of contemporary young people in Australia. He suggests it is not that the church group program is not exciting or attractive, rather it is that young people do not look for relationships primarily in or through organisations.

3.5.5 Spirituality and Retreats

Flynn (1985, 1993) was a pioneer in the study of the retreat experience in Catholic schools. He carried out longitudinal studies in 1972, 1982, 1990 and 1998 and later in 2002 (Flynn & Mok, 2002), covering a period of three decades surveying senior students and staff of Catholic schools who attended live-in retreats. This significant longitudinal research data illuminated the retreat experience by providing the retreatants' views on retreats and their components, including spirituality, and the integration of spirituality during the live-in retreat. Flynn (1985, 1993) observed that retreatants in Catholic schools manifest a desire for spirituality. The study by Flynn (1985) in Catholic schools 1972–1982 concluded that:

Many young people today are looking beyond the consumerism and materialism of their society to spiritual values and an experience of community in their lives...they are searching for meaning, self-transcendence and relationship—in a word, for God (p. 362) .

An integration of faith and life seems to take place at the retreat (Flynn, 1993). The research of Rossiter (2016), some three decades later, resonates a similar response from students' engagement with their retreat where almost all students in their response agreed with the statement, "I learnt personally from what others said about themselves, relationships and prayer and God". A significant percentage of students agreed with the statement that the retreat "helped prompt students towards personal change through 'imagining' possible new directions on my life", while almost all students agreed with the statement, "the retreat provided an opportunity to enhance my relationship with others" (Rossiter, 2016, pp. 110 - 111).

The findings of these studies by Flynn (1985, 1993) acknowledged that retreats in Catholic schools were a positive experience. A section of the longitudinal study by Flynn, invited student response to seven aspects of the retreat experience. Comparison of the findings of the 1990 and 1993 Flynn studies in these seven aspects of the retreat identified a decline in the agreement of four of the seven aspects of retreats, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1*Comparison of Student Attitudes Towards Aspects Four to Seven, Retreats 1990 & 1998*

		1990			1998		
Student attitudes towards		%	%	Mean	%	%	Mean
retreats		Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree	
4	The Retreat has helped me to develop my relationship with God	49	31	3.23	40	32	3.07
5	The Retreat was an important religious experience to me	38	33	2.93	38	33	3.03
6	The Retreat Mass or liturgy made a lasting impression on me	50	29	3.28	37	35	2.99
7	During the Retreat I experienced times when I felt close to God	48	29	3.25	35	34	2.96

Note. Adapted from *Catholic Schools 2000: A Longitudinal Study of Year 12 Students in Catholic Schools 1972-1982-1998*, by M. Flynn & M. Mok, 2002. Sydney, Australia: Catholic Education Commission, NSW, pp. 286 & 287.

Flynn and Mok (2002) do not attempt to draw conclusions about this decline of agreement with the statements of the four aspects of the retreats listed. However, the findings are significant. Several observations might be drawn from these results. There was an eight-year gap between the surveys of 1990 and 1998 during which time world views and attitudes of adolescents changed, particularly those relating to spirituality of the adolescent (Engelbreton, 2003, 2006). This appears to be reflected in the results. In her research, Engelbreton (2003) observed that adolescents became more private in their religious and spiritual beliefs. Crawford and Rossiter (2006) link the privatisation of belief among the young with the decrease of the social prominence of religions in pluralist societies. The more pluralist a society becomes, the more the manner religion may be treated becomes simply a matter of private opinion.

A study by Tullio (2009) of four, large, Australian archdiocesan Catholic schools (one single sex girls' college, one single sex boys' college, and two co-education secondary colleges) investigated the retreat experience through the lens of 23 randomly selected teachers who attended and led these school retreats. In her research, Tullio noted the shift in the spiritual dimension of the retreat curriculum. This shift enabled the curriculum developers of the retreat to take into account the contemporary situation where spirituality is most likely

encountered in the daily life of the adolescent. Tullio argued that the context of spirituality in the live-in retreat can be contextualised to meet the contemporary needs of students. In so doing, spirituality becomes most relevant to the participants. As the study was undertaken through the lens of the teachers, the views of student participants are unseen. However, the study does allow for some comparison for the thesis research, particularly in reference to retreat leaders.

The significant survey undertaken by Rossiter (2016) supported the findings by Engebretson (2003) and Tullio (2009) of connectedness, relational building and spirituality from the retreat experience. That “Retreats can make valuable contribution to young people’s personal, social and spiritual development” was agreed to by almost all teachers (Rossiter, 2016, p. 31) and students agree with the statement that retreats are “An opportunity for reviewing your life, thinking about the beliefs and values that affect personal life” (Rossiter, 2016, p. 31).

Importantly, the research of Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016) identified a move from formal religious elements of a retreat in favour of greater personal development, student engagement and friendship experience – “the fun factor” – while maintaining the element of spirituality. Student responses to social issues can be an opportunity for further exploration of spirituality. The argument Cameron (2005), for instance, advances that retreatants held different views as to what constituted values. His study showed that it cannot be assumed that the values listed have the same meaning for each participant. It is unknown to what extent, if any, the list of values was explored and discussed with the participants. Similarly, it is unknown if the level of any given value will vary for the participants according to the situation. This thesis provides the opportunity to investigate the spirituality component of the retreat curriculum and the importance of the experience to the participants.

The research of Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016) also note the difficulty encountered in the unpacking of spirituality in retreats. An outcome of their research acknowledged the need to change the retreat curriculum so that the spirituality component met student needs. A challenge for the retreat leader and the program undertaken in their research was that the retreats were focused specifically on the Catholic spiritual model that was seen as aligned to and an extension of the religious curriculum presented in the classroom. However, a large number of students were not Catholic, or were not actively involved in the church (Rossiter, 2016). It is perceived that some retreatants may not have understood or perhaps may not have accepted the spirituality that was contextualised as Catholic during retreat activities. This may have provided a challenge to the programmers and leaders of the retreat. The retreat was

compulsory, so all students were expected to attend the retreat. Hughes (2016) posits that it is possible that, due to the compulsory status, participants did not buy in to the aim and goals of the retreat experience.

3.5.6 Summary

Spirituality is important in the life of adolescents who are searching for meaning, for a spirituality that suits their needs as they continue to construct their lives (Rolheiser, 1999; Rossiter, 2018). It may not be in the form experienced by their parents (Harris & Moran, 1998; Hughes, 2007; Mason, 2007; Rossiter, 2016, 2018; Tullio, 2009).

Spirituality is the driving force inside us all which is linked to our soul, our very being and how we respond to situations according to the highs and lows of our life (Hughes, 2016b; Rolheiser, 1999). The traditional style of spirituality and religion has been replaced by a more private, individualised form of spirituality which has been adopted and developed by adolescents (Conn, 2009; Engebretson, 2006; Hughes, 2007). Belief in moral values, religion and spirituality are among the key factors to protect and counter self-destructive behaviour of young people (Abbott-Chapman & Denholm, 2001; Conn, 2009; Engebretson, 2004; Garbarino, 1999; Resnick, 1997; Smith, 2004).

Spirituality for many adolescents is enjoying life and being true to the inner self, being authentic with the decisions and actions taken from which the adolescent develops meaning and values practised in daily life (Engebretson, 2006; Hughes, 2007, 2016b), according to the set of values and practices with which they view and engage the world (Harris & Moran, 1998).

For adolescents, friendship and connectedness are important and are linked with the fostering of connectedness within self, others and the wider community (Hughes, 2007). Adolescents' need for connectedness and belonging is strong and the relationship with peers is of crucial importance (Engebretson, 2003). Lack of connectedness is linked with low-self-esteem and required approval from the peer group (Engebretson, 2003).

Traditional churches and religious organisations are not meeting the needs of young people (Engebretson, 2003, 2004, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Kay, 1996; Mason, 2007; Rolheiser, 1999; Rossiter, 2016, 2018). Explanations for this shift away from traditional religious are discussed. Some churches have adjusted their form of service in an attempt to engage and meet the needs of young people (Hughes, 2007). It is posited Christian faith-based schools have a role to play in supporting student faith formation and fostering of Christian principles.

School is a setting and agent for the construction of a boy's identity and sense of what it is to be a man (Connell, 2000; Smith, 2004). The role of faith-based schools is important in

the development of the boys' spirituality and face the challenge of incorporating biblical scholarship with the practical experiences of life (Foster, 2002). Rossiter (2018) notes the shift in attitude and engagement of students as they transition from primary to secondary schooling and the impact this has on religion lessons and, potentially, the retreat.

Role models can provide strong support or mentoring to enhance spiritual wellbeing to help construct a boy's identity and sense of what it means to be a man (Burgess, 1997; Collins, 1999; Cook, 2000; Dollahite, 1998).

Retreats provide the opportunity for the adolescents to reflect and explore their spirituality. School retreats were introduced in the 1960s to complement religion lessons in the classroom. Senior retreats are live-in retreats. Flynn was a pioneer in the study of the retreat experience in Catholic schools and he observed that retreatants in Catholic schools manifest a desire for spirituality (Flynn, 1993). The research of Rossiter (2016) reveals a similar response from students' engagement with their retreat. However, the adolescent attitudinal shift from religion required changes to the retreat program to maintain the religious focus and meet the students' focus on connectedness and friendship. In so doing, spirituality becomes most relevant to the participants (Tullio & Rossiter, 2010).

Staff leading the retreat case study retreat are the teachers of the school. Staff selection, training and preparation for the retreat have been highlighted in the literature reviewed as an important component in the delivery of an effective retreat. The role of staff is to lead and mentor adolescents throughout the retreat program. This requires sensitive and skilful leading during sessions where there may be an outpouring of emotions by the adolescents. The research of Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) give particular attention to the need for training and ongoing professional development for teachers leading retreats and group sessions of retreats.

Students who attended the Anglican school of this thesis research may not engage in the Anglican faith or attend church. The level of engagement of faith may have implications for the retreat being researched for the planning of the spiritual component of the case study retreat specifically. While it is not possible to measure fully any long-term changes in retreatants' spirituality as a result of a retreat experience, it is appropriate to evaluate the quality of retreats by identifying the spiritual directions that are embedded in the retreat's aim and practices (Tullio, 2009).

3.6 Reflection and Journaling

Retreats are universally recognised as a space and time within which to consider the many facets of life (Engebretson, 2003; Flynn, 1998; Rossiter, 2016). Reflection and the

journaling of reflections are an important part of this process (Emily & Creswell, 2014; Sherman et al., 2013), however, it cannot be assumed students know how to reflect or journal and these may not be skills that many adolescents have developed (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). While the skills of reflection and journaling can be taught (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Kolb, 2015; Spalding & Wilson, 2002), this process may take time (Epp, 2008).

To assist the development of these skills, Spalding and Wilson (2002) conclude that students require some form of intervention to model and scaffold their reflections.

3.6.1 Reflection

Drawing on the work of Valli (1997) and Kember et al. (2008) brings to the fore two levels of reflection – understanding through reflection and critical reflection. Kember et al. (2008) describe understanding through reflection as being engaged at the empathetic or perhaps the sympathetic level. This level of reflection does not go beyond the recognition stage of a situation. Rather, it is making use of existing knowledge without an attempt to evaluate the knowledge.

Critical reflection, the why of reflection, involves the application of ethical considerations (Kember et al., 2008). Kember et al. (2008) argue that “a possible outcome of critical reflection is the potential change from the way of doing things” (p. 140). It is desirable that students engage with this level of deep reflection during retreat experiences.

3.6.2 Journaling

Journaling of reflections is a skill. It is more than recording a diary of events. Through the work of Hubbs and Brand (2005), we are reminded us that “the reflective journal holds potential for serving as a mirror to reflect the student’s heart and mind” (p. 61). A journal captures impressions of events unfolding and, in turn, helps students to reflect (Hiemstra, 2001; Moon, 2006). It enables students to examine their own situation as a reference point for future understanding (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). Journaling “helps thinking about thinking” (Cornish & Carter, 2008, p. 27). It provides students with an opportunity to self-express. This may be through an instinctive response to an experience as well as through a deeper reflective observation.

O'Connell and Dymont (2013) hold the view that journaling has the potential to assist students to reflect critically on their experiences and integrate what they have learnt with what they already know. Journaling may be undertaken in many forms including graphics, mud-maps, and prose (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). However, boys are less inclined to

journal (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013), preferring discussion and sharing voiced reflections (Kember et al., 2008; Kolb, 1984).

As with reflection, developing skills to journal requires scaffolding and training (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). O'Connell and Dymont (2013) present the view that “journaling has the potential to assist students in critically reflecting on their experiences” (p. 71). However, the lack of training, together with lack of clarity about expectations and ongoing practice of journaling may inhibit the quality and effectiveness of journal writing, and perhaps reflection (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). To ensure quality writing in the journal there is the need for students to have a clear understanding of the purpose of journal writing (Moon, 2006; O'Connell & Dymont, 2013).

A common practice for retreats is for reflection and journaling following an activity (Boud, 2001). This practice, known as reflection-on-action (Schön, 2016), provides a retrospective view and enables students to return to the activity experience. O'Connell and Dymont (2013) provide guidelines for a positive outcome of the journaling process of retreatants, so that it becomes a routine and that there is time allotted to reflect and then journal. The case study retreat required students to reflect and journal at the completion of each activity. The quality of student responses will be dependent on the student's skill and capacity to reflect and journal critically.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature in relation to retreats for adolescent male students engaging the themes of character and moral development, wellbeing, spirituality and the logistics for effective retreats as a focus for this study.

Reflection retreats provide the opportunity for students to take time away from their busy school life to pause and reflect on who they are as they continue to construct their lives through adolescence and into adulthood (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Traditionally, the retreat program had a significant focus on religion (Flynn, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009), rather than spirituality (Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Teachers and the school view retreats offering a religious experience as an extension to the religion lessons. Students, while accepting religion is part of the retreat, view their attendance at retreats as an opportunity for socialising, connecting and relational building. The sharing of personal stories and journeys assist them in this process.

The literature reviewed indicates that, while maintaining the religious aim and goals of the retreat, there is a need to adjust retreat programs to ensure the engagement of students

(Delbecq et al., 2004; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). To achieve the optimum impact of a retreat, the research of Delbecq (2004) and Lips-Wiersma (2006) reinforces the need for careful consideration to be given to the planning of the curriculum and activities of the retreat. The retreat program should be evaluated, reviewed against the program's aim and objectives, and where necessary, adjusted.

Adolescents are searching for meaning, for a spirituality that suits their needs as they continue to construct their lives (Hughes, 2007, 2016b; Rolheiser, 1999; Rossiter, 2016). Spirituality for many adolescents is enjoying life and being true to the inner self, being authentic with their decisions and actions (Hughes, 2007). Retreats provide the opportunity for the adolescents to reflect on and explore their spirituality.

Adolescents' need for connectedness and belonging is strong and the relationship with peers is of crucial importance (Engebretson, 2003). A review of the literature leads to the understanding that lack of connectedness is linked with low self-esteem and requires approval from the peer group. This has implications for the retreat as the development of identity and relationships are the key dimensions through which the participants experience a sense of meaning that is often referred to as spirituality (Engebretson, 2003).

Wellbeing of the adolescent is at the fore of education practice: it is considered key to development of the adolescent boys in their senior years of schooling (Education Council, 2019), and is a key component of this retreat. The literature explored has identified the value of wellbeing and its components of self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy and resilience, to support adolescent development (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017; Park & Crocker, 2008; Sherman, 2013).

Mentoring of students has proven successful in the retreatants' development of social skills including the skills of communication with peers and teachers at school. However, to be effective, mentoring needs to be ongoing and maintained (Dubois et al., 2007; Dubois et al., 2002; Herrera et al., 2011).

Staff leading the case study retreat are the teachers of the school. Staff selection, training and preparation for the retreat have been highlighted in the literature reviewed as important components in the delivery of an effective retreat. The role of staff is to lead and mentor adolescents throughout the retreat program. This requires sensitive and skilful leading during sessions where there may be an outpouring of emotions by the adolescents. The research of Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) pays particular attention to the need for training and ongoing professional development for teachers leading retreats and group sessions of retreats.

3.8 Research Problem Identification

Emerging from this review of the literature are the understanding that:

- Embracing a commitment to character development of each student is an inescapable expectation of education within a contemporary context and in particular for this study, within Anglican boys' schools;
- There are multiple important moral and character formation issues which can, or should, be considered integral to the education of adolescent males in an Anglican school;
- Embracing a commitment to the fostering and development of wellbeing, self-efficacy, discernment, confidence, and the embedding of values in decision-making will enhance the process of spiritual, moral and character formation of students; and
- There is an assumption that retreat experiences provide a way for schools to meet spiritual, character and moral formation expectations.

Along with these understandings however, there are concerns. The seriousness and complexity of these moral formation issues and the relatively small amount of time that a student attends a reflection retreat program lead to questions about what spiritual, moral and moral formation can be appropriately and sufficiently addressed as an outcome of this experience. Does a reflection retreat experience achieve its desired aim? Are the retreat outcomes able to influence the moral life of the student beyond his school years?

3.9 Research Question

Thus, the research question is:

In what ways do the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?

3.9.1 Research Objectives

The following research objectives support this research question:

1. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of Christian principles;
2. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of values, morals, and ethics;
3. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of character-building;
4. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of wellbeing;

5. Investigate if the retreat outcomes informed new understandings and insights into the retreat enabling factors; and
6. Investigate if the intended retreat outcomes informed new insights into the retreat outcomes.

3.9.2 *Research Sub-Questions*

Further sub-questions aimed to more closely examine the retreat experience are:

1. What did the students expect as an outcome of the retreat and did the retreat live up to this expectation?
2. How do student experiences of the retreat relate to the stated goals of the retreat?
3. In what ways has the retreat program influenced the students' outlook on their life?
4. How do teacher experiences of the retreat relate to the stated aim and goals of the retreat?
5. What did the staff expect as an outcome of the retreat and did the retreat live up to expectation?
6. Did staff selection and preparation meet the goals of the retreat program?

The following chapter presents the research design to address the research questions.

Chapter 4

Research Design

4.1 Research Design

The research design uses a qualitative rather than a quantitative research orientation. Qualitative research accepts the researcher's involvement with a lesser number of participants, and the valuing of each participant's context to interpretively understand, and see the reality of the phenomenon through their eyes (Bryman, 2016; Denscombe, 2003). Seeking to investigate the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school from the perspective of documentary expectations and the perceptions of students and staff who attended this retreat is well-served by qualitative research.

This section establishes the empirical research design to inform and guide the investigation. The components of this theoretical framework include the ontological and epistemological perspectives inherent within this particular research, the theoretical perspective, the methodology, and the chosen methods considered best suited for guiding such research (Crotty, 1998). Table 4.1 summarises the theoretical framework underpinning this research.

Table 4.1

Illustration of the Theoretical Framework

Ontology	Relativism
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Interpretivism / Symbolic Interactionism
Methodology	Case Study
Methods	<div>Interview<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students: paired, semi-structured, open-ended• Teachers: one-to-one, semi-structured, open-ended• Second student / teacher interviews to confirm information</div> <div>Document analysis</div>

4.2 Ontology

Ontology is the study of the way of being (Creswell, 2012). Creswell comments that studying a “way of being” entails coming to know oneself in one’s reality, and thereby what is of importance and meaningful in one’s life. The ontological perspective in this study addresses the question of what the nature of reality is for the participants and facilitators of a retreat experience, and how the researcher can come to know this reality. The research embraces a realist / relativist ontological perspective because, in this particular study, it is necessary for the researcher to insert himself into a continual process of meaning construction to understand the perceptions of the students and facilitating staff about the reflective retreats (Briggs et al., 2012). Each student and facilitator is subjectively constructing a personal reality regarding the reflective retreat, and each might not be consciously aware of this subjective construction. Thus students’ and facilitators’ views are relative as they are not only subjective but are also socially and contextually constructed (Creswell, 2012). In adopting the realist / relativist approach, it is essential that the researcher not allow any personal reality to influence the interpretation of the data provided by the students and staff facilitators (Gergen et al., 2015).

4.3 Epistemology: Constructionism

Epistemology concerns what constitutes the nature of knowledge – what we know and how we know it. This study is viewing and constructing understandings, knowledge, and meanings from the standpoint of students’ and facilitating staff’s reflective retreat experience (Neuman, 2014). The study is exploring the students’ perceptions of their reflection retreat experiences and the resultant knowledge they create; more particularly, it is investigating their impressions pertaining to the personal meaning, purposefulness, and applicability they create from these experiences. The epistemological perspective of constructionism is most appropriate for informing this particular study because it supports investigation into the many ways in which individuals describe and explain their social interaction, as constructed in a variety of contexts over a period of time (Crotty, 1998; Gergen et al., 2015). Furthermore, constructionists view this individualised meaning-making as neither objective nor subjective, but rather constructed. From this epistemological perspective, each student draws on his own experience of the reflective retreat relative to his own personal background and constructs knowledge about what it has meant for him and his life.

4.4 Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism / Symbolic Interactionism

The theoretical perspective is informed by the ontological and epistemological perspectives that guide the choice of appropriate research methods and affords a context for

the research process. It is posited that an appropriate theoretical perspective within the constructionist epistemology is interpretivism. The primary goal of interpretivism is to analyse and understand the meaning constructed by an individual in relation to a particular social phenomenon (Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2014; Schwandt, 1997). Interpretivists accept that this understanding or meaning is constructed by the individual through their experience rather than by being readily available to be discovered (Merriam, 1998). This development of meaning may be constructed differently by each person as they make sense of their experiences through social interaction (Crotty, 1998).

A number of assumptions underpin interpretivist research. A foundational assumption is that inquiry is always value-laden and there is acknowledgement of the difficulty in gaining complete objectivity. Interpretivists hold that any single experience is explicable in terms of multiple, interacting factors, reflecting the view that the world is made up of multiple realities (Merriam, 1998). Simply, interpretivist research embraces the likelihood that there will not be a singular common understanding among the students despite the students having experienced the same reflective retreat. Hence, interpretivists support ideographic research in which the focus is on the relatively inconsistent perceptions of a finite number of participants (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002).

4.4.1 *Symbolic Interactionism*

Symbolic interactionism is an appropriate form of interpretivism for this research as the research seeks to investigate how adolescent boys and retreat staff perceive and make meaning from the realities of their world influenced by a reflective retreat experience. The purpose of this research is to advance knowledge, describing and interpreting the phenomena of the world through attempting to develop shared meaning (Blumer, 1986; Charon, 2007). The study is focused on the perspectives of the research participants and their social world (Stake, 1995). The focus of symbolic interactionism is the individual. It is on how the individual, and interactions with self and the world, contribute to making meaning (Creswell, 2012). It is based on the belief that people react to situations as they perceive them and hold meaning for them (Blumer, 1986). Meanings are created by human beings in interaction with one another, rather than as individual agents (Blumer, 1986; Charon, 2007). The world of students is considered a socially interactive process when they engage in thoughtful, self-reflective behaviour, so they can interpret the world with which they are confronted (Schwandt, 1997). As such, symbolic interpretivism is the appropriate theoretical perspective for this study, which aims to understand the constructs students and facilitating staff have of their retreat experience.

4.5 Methodology: Case Study

The methodology for this research – “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3) – is through case study. A case study approach lends itself particularly to this research because it provides a holistic focus, enabling the researcher to gain the fullest of understanding of a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The case study is a way of investigating an empirical phenomenon, seeking an in-depth understanding and meaning of that which is being investigated (Yin, 2013). In this case study, the central phenomenon is the students’ retreat and its capacity to achieve its desired aims and objectives as explored through the impressions and interpretations of those who facilitated it (the staff) and those who experienced it (the students).

A further benefit of a case study approach is that it allows the gathering of multiple sources of data, thereby providing a rich array of information to illuminate the phenomenon under discussion, in this case, the influence of the reflective retreat. Moreover, a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (Creswell, 2012). The phenomenon being studied is the reflective retreat and the boundaries of the case are the male students and teachers from the Australian Anglican school who attended the retreat. Notwithstanding the appropriateness of a case study approach in this research, Creswell (2012) acknowledges that a disadvantage of case study is that the time and volume of data collected can potentially be overwhelming for the researcher. This potential disadvantage can be contained and overcome by limiting the pool of potential participants to only those staff and students who attended the same particular retreat and maintaining guiding questions to ensure more uniformly focused data.

4.6 Research Methods

The research methods are the strategies the researcher adopts to gain data which enabled the researcher to respond to the research questions. This case study drew on multiple sources of data through interview and document analysis to explore the influence of retreat programs on the adolescent boys and the staff facilitators. To enable the data collection process, the five steps for qualitative study, as outlined by Creswell (2012), were applied, namely: identify and select participants; gain permission to access the site and the participants; identify data sources; administer data collection ethically; and collect, record, and analyse data.

An essential component of a case study is successful acceptance and access to the participants. The participants selected to gather the information required for this research

were purposefully selected. Access to the participants and the site required the seeking of permission from different levels including the school principal and teachers, as well as the students and their families. In addition, the researcher perceived that he may have encountered inherent challenges, as the data were to be gathered by face-to-face collection and in the environment of the participants. The researcher maintained careful and sensitive negotiations with the individuals on the campus site where the interviews and the collection of data were undertaken (Creswell, 2012).

The process of seeking approval from the school was undertaken in line with the ethical standards of conduct established by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian Catholic University, which approved the research (see Appendix A). The principal was provided with a description of the research, the reason for the choice of school and site, the intended procedure, the resources required by the researcher while on the site, the projected time spent on the site, the potential disruption the research might cause during the interview process, and the process of the collection of data.

4.6.1 *Participant Selection*

Student participants were intentionally identified and selected for interview. Homogeneous sampling, the strategy of selecting a small homogeneous sample where the participants have similar traits to analyse the phenomenon in-depth, was the preferred option for this case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). In this study, the male student participants were from the same academic year grouping and had attended the same retreat. The staff selected were those who attended and led the retreat program. All students and staff who attended and led the retreat program were invited to be interviewed.

Typically, the participant sample size for qualitative research is not large. Thus, the richness of the data stems from the ability to gather an in-depth understanding from the participants of the central phenomenon being studied through the use of multiple data-gathering methods. However, this raises a practical concern requiring consideration. The depth and breadth of detail gathered by the researcher from the participants in this way entailed a degree of time to source, record, and analyse the data. To this end, the size of the participating sample in this research was kept to a minimum, up to eight student participants and up to five staff participants, unless a saturation point was reached.

The recruitment of the students and staff was on a volunteer basis. Appropriate permissions were sought and obtained. The research outlining the purpose of the study, and

what was involved in gathering the data for this research, was advertised through the school community (see Appendix A).

To address ethical issues associated with participant identification, each participant was identified by a code in the following way:

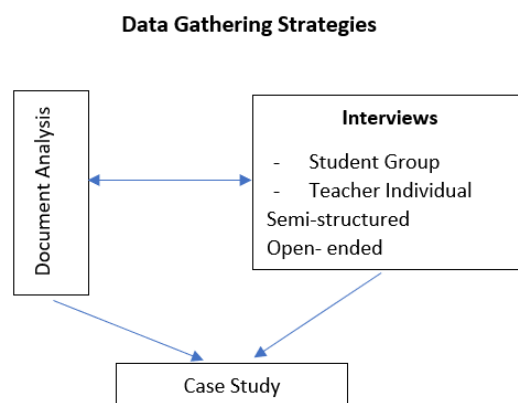
- student participants: students who have undertaken the Year 11 retreat were identified as S. 1, S. 2, S. 3, and so on.
- teacher participants: teachers who attended and facilitated the retreat were identified as T. 1, T. 2, T. 3, and so on.

4.6.2 Data Sources

The sourcing of data to gain an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon included interviews and a review of available documents. The researcher gathered multiple levels of information that informed the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data-gathering strategies for this study were student group interviews, teacher individual interviews, and document analysis. These data-gathering strategies are consistent with the interpretivist research paradigm underpinned by constructionist epistemology and the symbolic interactionist theoretic perspective. Figure 4.1 provides a visual representation of data-gathering strategies employed.

Figure 4.1

Data Gathering Strategy



4.6.3 Interviews

The researcher was mindful of the need to develop an authentic connection with the participants, ensuring emotional safety and putting the participant at ease, so that they would actively engage with the interview process. In preparation for the interview, participants were provided with some background to the purpose of the research, the general outline and

overview of the line of questioning, and an opportunity to receive the feedback from the research findings. They were informed that, in time, the findings would be available to them.

Interviews were undertaken in a relaxed, informal location on the school site with which the participant was already familiar. It was preferable to audio record the interviews. However, the researcher understood that some participants might not feel comfortable or agree to the recording of the interview. But, because it was perceived to be too difficult for the researcher to record responses accurately while conducting an interview, the decision was made that participants who did not wish to have the interview audio recorded would not continue with the interview process. This concern of audio recording did not arise. Written consent of the school, the parents of the student participants, and the staff participants was sought to have the interviews audio recorded. Interviews did not take place without gaining this consent for voluntary involvement.

The interviews were set up in blocks over a period of a few days for each block. This block time for data collection enabled the researcher to have a focused time of collecting and assessing the data. It was perceived that the questions and interview techniques may not be gathering the desired depth of data. In some instances, this prompted a change by the researcher in the questions, the interview technique, and in some instances, both the question and interview technique. To resolve this potential dilemma, Creswell (2012) suggests that small interview blocks will enable the researcher time to make suitable adjustments. Also, initial assessment of interviews might prompt the need for follow-up interviews with certain participants. Following the collection and assembling of initial data a second block of interviews was undertaken to confirm and clarify data gathered. At all times the researcher was cognisant of professional support as he listened to the interviews.

4.6.3.1 Student Interviews.

Student participants were, as a whole, interviewed in pairs in order to provide a level of confidence to engage in the interview process. There were two instances when the student was absent from school. Due to students' time commitments, students who were present for the interview were interviewed at that set time, singularly. In each instance, the researcher enquired if the student was at ease with being individually interviewed. The researcher was cognisant that, should the need arise, there would be the option for a support person to be present. A support person was not required. It is believed this method of small group, rather than individual, interviews addressed the potential power dynamic of student to interviewer and provided a level of confidence for the participants to respond to the questions. Each person is different in their capacity to respond and in the nature of the responses that they

might make. The researcher was aware, also, of the need to enable the participants time and space to consider their responses. Interviews in pairs provided this flexibility and enabled the researcher to carefully probe into the participants' responses in an attempt to gain meaningful data. There was a second phase of interviews with students to clarify responses from the first round of student interviews.

This researcher noted literature commentary on the difficulties that potentially could arise from pair interviews, including the dominance of a member of the pair when the other participant in the pairing is less confident to present their thoughts. It is acknowledged that there may not be a consensus of the response to each question. To this end, the researcher carefully focused on each response. The researcher provided an ice-breaker conversation to encourage the participants to relax and engage in the interview.

The researcher was conscious of the potential issues surrounding the lapse of time between the retreat and the interview of the retreatant students and staff. The retreat was held in May 2019. The first round of interviews was conducted between November 2019 and February 2020. The second round of follow-up interviews to gain further clarification on data gathered was conducted in September 2020. Much would have occurred in their lives during this time and the retreat experience was not at the forefront of their memory (Fox-Turnbull, 2016). This may have impacted on the recall of the retreat experience. To assist with the recall of the retreat experience, activities, and interviewees' personal reflections, Stimulus Recall, a methodology used to assist working memory processes of participants to recall an event, particularly when there was a significant delay between the event and the interviews (Beers et al., 2008), was employed. The use of prompts to assist with the recall of the retreat experience, activities, and their personal reflections was an advantage to assist responses to interview questions.

It was noted that, as the interview session was recorded, it may be difficult to accurately identify each respondent. For confidentiality reasons, names were excluded, however, each interviewee in the paired groups was allocated with an identification number, S. 1, S. 2, etc., to identify the participant. The researcher noted the order of speaker during the interview.

Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended (see Appendix M). This approach enabled the participant(s) to freely converse and engage. In this way, the researcher's questions were guided by the student's descriptions and discussion. It was considered that the approach of inviting, rather than forcing, a participant's response, coupled with attentive listening, was a powerful tool in developing an appropriate interviewee-

interviewer relationship. There was a second phase of interviews with students and teachers to clarify responses from the first round of student interviews.

At the commencement of the interview, the participant was assured of confidentiality and that they could stop the interview at any time. Due to the nature of the questions, which revolved around their life and wellbeing, the researcher was cognisant that the interview may open aspects that were deep and personal and that the participant may require some form of support, referral, and perhaps counselling. However, while offered, this level of support was not required.

Creswell (2012) notes that the potential for a perceived imbalance of power between the interviewer and the participant may exert a distorted influence on the data being collected. The researcher's carefully employed use of body language, vocal tone and interview style, including open questions, appeared to be effective tools to mitigate any perceived, potential power imbalance between the researcher and the participant, while, at the same time, ensuring the integrity and quality of the data that were gathered. Interviews were conducted in a courteous and professional manner.

4.6.3.2 Staff Interviews.

Staff interviews were one-on-one. It was believed this method of individual, rather than group, interviews enabled the participants to respond without the potential influence of their peers. Each person is different in their capacity to respond and in the responses that they might make. The researcher was mindful of the need to enable the participant time and space to consider their responses. Individual interviews provided this flexibility and enabled the researcher to carefully probe into the participant responses in an attempt to gain meaningful data. There was a second phase of interviews with teachers to clarify responses from the first round of teacher interviews. Participation in the one-on-one interviews was on a volunteer basis. The number of individual interviews depended on the number of teachers present at the retreat and who volunteered to be interviewed. In this way, the researcher was able to collect a shared understanding of the group as well as gather views from individuals (Creswell, 2012).

The interview consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions. It was expected that responses from the open-ended questions in regard to the desired retreat aim and objectives, the implemented activities, and experiences through which it was presumed these would be achieved, would provide data that would enable the researcher to identify themes. This question technique allowed the researcher to direct the conversation with the participant(s) and enabled further probing and the asking of specific questions that arose from

the interviewee's open-ended response. During the interview, the researcher followed a prepared semi-structured question framework; however, depending on the participant's responses, this protocol required some flexibility.

During the interview, the researcher noted any observations of facial expressions or body language associated with the responses (Creswell, 2012). It was possible that questions may evoke unexpected emotion from the participant. While the researcher was prepared to respond, this situation did not arise. Interviews were conducted in a courteous and professional manner.

4.6.4 Documents Analysis

Documentation directly related to the retreat experience was useful in gaining further insight into the central phenomenon (see Appendix I). Permission was sought for relevant documents to be sourced. These resources were those used to plan the retreat as well as the retreat manual developed for the retreat leaders and the participants. Documents for analysis included: the current school mission statement; the school mission statement (1991); letters to parents; staff retreat handbook; student retreat handbook and journal. Data from the document analysis helped inform questions asked in interviews and provided priori codes.

A component of the retreat was a letter written from the significant adult in each student's life, usually the parent(s), indicating the positive aspects of the participant as well as their love of their child. The intent was for this letter to be written without the participant's knowledge and given to the participant at a pertinent moment of the retreat program. Another letter-writing activity was that of the participant, who wrote of their hopes and directions for his future. This participant's letter was collected by the retreat leaders and posted to the participant at the end of Year 12 - one year after their retreat. An aspect of the questioning and interview surrounded the impact felt by participant on the receiving of these letters, albeit during the retreat or one year on from the retreat, as well as the impact felt by the writing of the letters. The researcher provided a written guarantee that such data would be treated with the utmost confidence, ensuring the anonymity of participants and the school. The researcher did not gain copies of the letters to, or from, the retreatant.

4.6.4.1 Data Saturation Point.

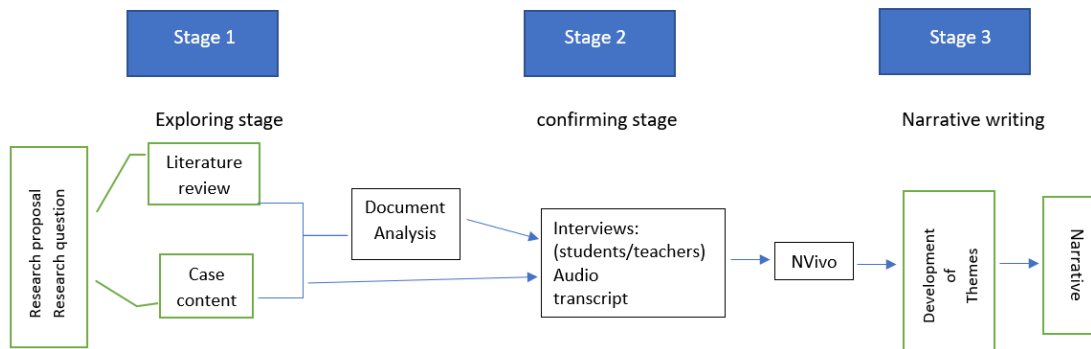
There was a point in the data collection process when the researcher sensed enough data have been gathered. This stage of data collection is known as saturation point. Saturation point for this research study was realised when the data being gathered from the participants became replicated and when further coding was no longer necessary (Creswell, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

4.7 Data Analysis

To form answers to the research questions, the researcher undertook a number of steps identified by Creswell (2012) and Saldaña (2009) as being pivotal in the analysing and interpreting of the data gathered from documents and interviews. These steps were condensed into three stages. The first stage was the exploration of the interviews and documents from which codes, categories and themes emerge. The second stage was the confirmation of the data gathered through deeper analysis and follow-up interviews which allow further themes to be presented (Blumer, 1986). The third stage was the writing of the narrative of the findings. Figure 4.2 outlines the three stages of the data analysis.

Figure 4.2

Stages of Data Analysis

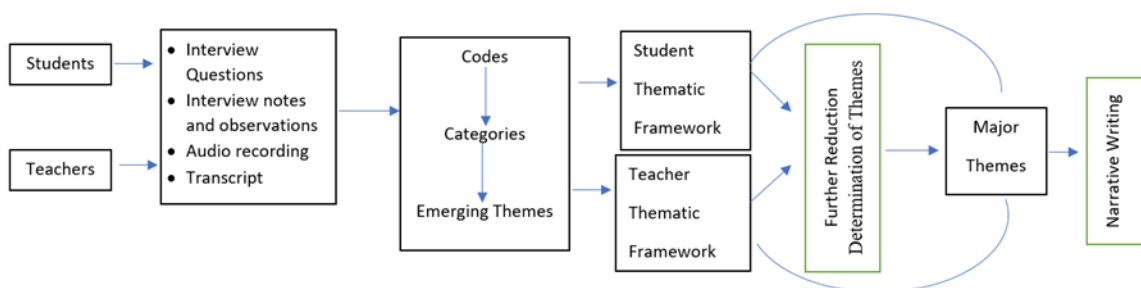


Note: Figure 4.2 visually presents the multi-layering stages of the analysis of data.

These stages were: preparing and organising the data for analysis; exploring and coding the data; coding to build descriptions and themes; presenting the findings; interpreting the findings; and validating the accuracy of the findings.

To gain a deeper understanding of this retreat phenomenon, it was important to understand the data separately through the student lens and the lens of the teachers. The data-gathering and coding process is illustrated in Figure 4.3 and explained in the following sections.

Figure 4.3 *Coding Process of Student and Teacher Responses*



4.7.1 *Preparing and Organising the Data for Analysis*

The researcher developed self-designed protocols that assisted data recording. These protocols enabled the researcher to identify the source and specific responses to each question gathered from participants during interviews (Creswell, 2012).

Completion of permissions to gather data was secured prior to interview processes (Creswell, 2012). Items required included permissions for participation, audio recording, anonymity coding and confidentiality of comments. The data gathered from interviews, notes and audio recordings were transcribed. To facilitate the transcription process, the text document was set up to allow the researcher to make notes during the data analysis, ensured a clear distinction between questions, and used detailed headers that contained information about the interview session. It was important to record and transcribe all words spoken and include any details, including pause [*pause*], laughter, [*laughter*], and so on, that occurred during the interview. It was noted that pauses during interviews may provide useful information about times when the interviewee cannot or would not respond to a question (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2013).

4.7.2 *Exploring and Coding the Data*

Data for this research are defined as that gathered from interview questions, audio text, and documents relevant to the retreat experience, including the retreat program. Coding, in qualitative research “captures an essential element of the research story” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 20). After gathering and transcribing data, the next stage for the researcher was to develop a suitable and manageable process for organising and interpreting the data. Layder (2013) refers to the practice and procedure of pre-coding. The researcher maintained the practice of noting down on the transcript and documents, thoughts, and preliminary words or phrases that became helpful for future coding. In keeping with the recommendation of Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), the researcher kept a copy of the research concern, and a list of questions nearby for continual referral during the coding process.

The next task for the researcher involved allocating codes to the data. Codes were grouped and clustered into categories, and sub-categories. From these categories, themes, and descriptions were developed (see Appendices J, K and L). Placing codes into categories required careful consideration. Rubin and Rubin (1995) recommend the researcher refine the content of each category before commencing the process of comparing them with each other and provide each category with a propositional statement. In the initial stage of coding, many codes were assigned by the researcher to the data. The number of codes used in analysing the data did not matter, though consideration was given to their assembling and organising

(Creswell, 2012). To enable the analysis to be more coherent, the researcher was cognisant of keeping the coding and categories to a manageable minimum.

To this end, Saldaña (2009) and Creswell (2012) posit that there are several stages of coding. These stages are set in two cycles. In the first cycle the data are allocated a breadth of codes. The analysis of data may have established multiple codes. Thus, in the second cycle, the codes become more focused, sorting the patterns of codes so as to develop a pattern of themes, descriptions of themes, or both.

A theme is an outcome created by the researcher from categorised and analytical reflection. Researchers typically identify these themes as major and minor themes. The major and minor themes usually include: ordinary themes that a researcher might expect to find; themes that surface unexpectedly during the research; and hard-to-classify themes that emerge during the study but which may not fit neatly into a particular theme or which might overlap into one or more themes. While examining the themes that emerged, the researcher was mindful that an emerging theme may be expressed by participants from multiple perspectives. In some instances, further investigation was required to explore each aspect of the multiple perspectives to gather a deeper understanding in its expression in the answering of the research questions.

Coding a word or short phrase symbolically assigned a summative, salient, essence-capturing attribute for a pattern of language based on visual data (Saldaña, 2009). Major categories were consolidated into themes in various ways. Comparison of the major categories enabled the researcher to begin to recognise, interpret and progress to conceptual and theoretical understandings (Saldaña, 2009). Data gathered became evidence to support interpretations, propositions, assertions, and even theories (Booth et al., 2009) and served as illustrative examples throughout the research report. This method enabled the researcher to group similar categories, or families of concepts, because they shared the same characteristics and so formed the beginning of a pattern.

During the process of coding and analysing the data gathered, themes of a similar nature emerged. The researcher identified the need to interconnect themes by layering and interconnecting themes if there was the potential to add a depth of rigour to the research and the findings of the research questions.

While it was expected the research would identify one or more major themes and the possibility of several minor themes, the researcher also looked for contrary evidence that might not support the themes. Such evidence is expressed in Chapter 7, Discussion of New Understandings.

The coding process was undertaken with the support of the NVivo software program. NVivo is designed to support qualitative research with a particular strength in organising text-based data. It is known for its efficient management of unstructured data and capacity for indexing, searching, rapid coding, and assistance with the classification, management and analysis. NVivo assisted in discerning trends and identifying emerging themes and patterns. It also assisted in the code and data analysis and the option of mapping potential connections.

NVivo coding was used to assign a label section of data, such as an interview transcript, using a word or short phrase taken from that section of the data. Coding in this way ensured the preservation of the participant's raw statement, metaphors, colloquial terms and phrases, emotion and values of expression (Strauss, 1987). The process of coding undertaken by NVivo software highlighted the importance of analytical opportunities to organise and recognise the codes into major categories or sub-categories. The essence of NVivo enabled the researcher to stay as close as possible to the participant's own words and terms and vernacular.

4.7.3 Descriptions

Description in qualitative research is the detailed interpretation or representation of people or events in a particular setting. By using all sources of data gathered, the researcher developed a detailed description or picture of the participant and the retreat experienced by the participant. This description enabled the reader to visualise the person and the research site.

4.8 Discussion and Findings

Reporting of findings, consistent with qualitative research, is a thorough narrative discussion and summarisation of the findings. The form of the narrative discussed the themes, the developed descriptions as they appeared, and the presence of interconnecting themes. Other forms of findings discussed, based on evidence supplied by the participants, included contradictory evidence and challenging assumptions. As the central phenomenon of the research is centred on the influence of a retreat, the last named form was significant. Such inclusion was particularly so if the evidence from the participants moved from positive to negative, or vice versa, indicating a change in their attitude or involvement because of the retreat.

4.9 Trustworthiness

The quality of the findings must be pivotal to the design process and, given the non-positivistic nature of my study, confidence in its design and findings is paramount (Caelli et al., 2003). Traditionally, the concepts of generalisability, validity and reliability have been

used to provide confidence in the quality of a research project and its outcomes. Such concepts reflect a positivist worldview and the application of a quantitative approach to the research. Hence, these were not appropriate for this research, which is firmly grounded in a qualitative, interpretivist theoretical perspective.

Thus, understandings associated with the concepts of generalisability, validity, and reliability need to be re-grounded in the worldview of qualitative research and linked in with the nature of the phenomenon being investigated and how the data are being gathered (Merriam, 1998). This particular study was informed by the views of Lincoln and Guba (1985) whereby the concept of trustworthiness becomes the source of confidence in the research outcomes. Here, trustworthiness is said to be comprised of the four qualities of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility in qualitative research design relates to the consistency and accuracy of the findings of an investigation or inquiry. Enhancing the credibility of the research implies that the discussion and findings must be believable from the perspective of the research participants. Indeed, it is only the participants who can legitimise the level of a study's credibility (Briggs et al., 2012; Guba, 1981). A number of additional data analysis practices were available for the researcher to be able to enhance credibility (Creswell, 2007). These were a prolonged engagement with the data during the coding phase, persistent observation of the themes with confirmation from participants and key stakeholders as to their meaningfulness, and close peer review of the process by the supervisors.

Transferability relates to the extent to which the outcomes of a particular research apply to other situations, contexts or groupings. Research can only be recognised for its transferability if the findings have depth of data analysis that enables other researchers to make judgements about the potential of the study to be used in another setting, or more globally (Guba, 1989). To this end, Guba (1989) explains the need for the researcher to provide a *thick description* – a detailed account of the contextual setting, the experiences during data collection, the participants, the interview process and any encounters that may have occurred during the process to provide a deeper understanding of the research setting. This depth of information enables other researchers to make their own transferability decision.

Dependability requires showing that the methods used are consistent and could be replicated. The perceived dependability of the study is made manifest in the accounts of the ever-changing context within which the research occurs. Such changes are required to be documented, along with a description of the way by which these changes have influenced the

manner in which the researcher conducted the study and thereby ensured the stability of data over time (Guba, 1989). Merriam (1998) recommends the use of an audit trail to achieve this aim and posits that “in order for an audit trail to take place, the [researcher] must describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 172). All aspects of decision-making processes throughout the study are described explicitly and discussed to maximise the dependability of the research.

Confirmability refers to the level of neutrality or lack of bias in the processing and interpretation of the data. The researcher may have a bias of one form or another towards the research topic and is required to identify explicitly the biases, values and personal interest about their research topic and process (Merriam, 1998). Care was taken by the researcher to be self-reflective and be aware of a bias in the interpretative process of data collection, coding, and findings. The process included the interviewees sighting and confirming the interview information they provided. This process included second interviews to confirm data gathered during the initial interview. In addition, there was cross-collaboration with the researcher and supervisor(s) to confirm the accuracy of collected interview data and the development of the themes. These processes provided the benefit of gathering supporting data from multiple sources as corroborating evidence including documentation of the retreat. This review was done in an interview setting or in writing (Creswell, 2012).

4.10 Techniques for Establishing Dependability and Confirmability

A person outside the case study undertook a thorough, full review of the whole project and reported the evaluation, including the strengths and weaknesses, to the researcher (Schwandt, 1997). Any feedback from the dependability review was fed back into the research and research findings. In qualitative research it is accepted that interpretation of the findings may include an element of the researcher’s personal stance, but this must not distort the accuracy of the report. The researcher drew on another researcher and / or supervisor as an external auditor to review the study to confirm the same conclusions are reached.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

Three essential ethical principles that underpin all research are respect for democracy, respect for truth, and respect for persons (Bassey, 1999). From this ethical stance, the researcher has the responsibility of ensuring that the administration of the data collected, recorded, and reported is carried out in an ethical and sensitive manner. Thus, the researcher was committed to upholding the ethical principles of respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence, as stated in Section 1: Values and principles of ethical conduct in *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* published by

the NHMRC (2007) and in the Research Code of Conduct, as set down by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A).

The researcher acknowledges the potential range of risks and inconvenience to the participants and school associated with the study. A risk assessment table, with actions to minimise any risk associated with the study was developed and provided to the school. This submission confirmed the steps taken to ensure the anonymity and protection of the individual, the school and site. A description of the interview questions was provided to the principal to assist understanding of the depth and sensitivity of the interview questions.

The researcher was cognisant of the need to be respectful of the site and to minimise as much as possible the disturbance to the site and its normal routine. It is the delicate balance between gathering the depth of information necessary to explore the phenomenon and respecting individuals, the school, and the site. Although researchers are always striving for the ultimate level of response, it is essential that protocols are maintained, and the process is respected and strictly adhered to (Creswell, 2012). A potentially rewarding aspect for the principal and school was the opportunity for feedback on the outcome of the study. The findings of this study provided useful data as to the success of the retreat and its implications within the curriculum of the school.

In this case study, as with all case studies, there was a need to seek and obtain permission on many levels from individuals and the research site (Bogdan, 2007; Creswell, 2012). The nature of this research required extensive and in-depth interviews with a number of participants. The case study provided support and provision for any request, including the arrangement of interviews.

The following chapter presents teacher data gathered during teacher interviews.

Chapter 5

Presentation of Teacher Data

The aim of the retreat is for boys to take time out from the busyness of life to reflect on who they are so as to develop personal skills that will equip them for their journey into manhood (see Appendix D). The assumed role of the teacher leaders is that they are the conduit between the ideal and the reality of this aim. This acknowledges that the accomplishment of the retreat's purpose was manifested through the beliefs, commitments, and actions of the teachers towards planning and facilitating the retreat in accordance with, and in support of, the intended aims and objectives. Hence, this chapter presents data gathered during the teacher interviews in response to the research question:

In what ways do the intended aims and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?

Specifically, these important teacher data will be presented through discussion of the emerging themes of teacher beliefs and attitudes, retreat leader preparation, program planning, teacher engagement, teacher reflections, and post-retreat impressions.

5.1 Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes

If the success of the retreat can be influenced significantly by the role of the teacher leaders, then, arguably, how these teachers feel about being involved in the running of the retreat is an important consideration. This is to suggest that positive teacher beliefs and values, not only about being personally involved in the retreat but also about the potential benefits of this experience for the students, are likely to result in producing outcomes more in keeping with those aligned with the intended aims and objectives. Data addressing this view draw upon that gathered from teacher interview questions that focused on the teacher's beliefs about the reputation and acceptance of the retreat among students, parents, and other teachers.

5.1.1 *Reputation and Acceptance*

The retreat is well-regarded among senior students and parents of boys who have attended the retreat from the teacher's view. Indeed, Teacher 3 remarked that "one of their great moments at this school is this camp [retreat]". Another teacher noted students' comments on their exit interview from Year 12 note the retreat "as being one of the most significant experiences I had" (T. 5). Teacher 4 observed that "a number of [the boys] wrote about the retreat and what a powerful experience the retreat camp was".

Similarly, teachers recall parent feedback post-retreat is generally very affirming and positive:

What is interesting is we get feedback from the parents, how appreciative [they are].

The boys come home, and they talk to their parents about it and they see changes in the boys, and so the feedback is that it has a huge impact. (T. 3)

The high level of teacher positivity about the retreats is influenced strongly by the fact that the attendance at the Year 11 retreat is high. The students want to attend the retreat and the parents readily support them to do so. Teacher 3 mentioned that “people value the program, think there is great good that comes from the program and are keen to have their child attend the retreat. Parents will send their kids on this camp with broken arms and broken legs” (T. 3).

Teacher belief and positive attitude toward the retreat experience is seen as being so important that teachers are willing to go to great lengths to facilitate the attendance of boys who might not be able to participate in the physical activities.

The challenge is we have to put them in four-wheel drives while they're doing the bike leg to get to the next point where they're going to have a conversation or sit down so there are changes that are made. (T. 3)

Teacher 5 spoke of the reputation of the retreat as an added value to the quality education the students receive already and an important component in parents' decision to enrol their child in the school:

I would say it's woven into the package here. It is something that I think is...unique. For the boys, I think it's a significant value added to their experience here. In many ways, that's why parents have made the choice [to send their child to the school]. I think parents have made the decision for their boys to be here for that value-add in terms of values, morality, [and] support from staff. (T. 5)

The retreat was valued also by the staff and the school as a whole. Teachers who had been on the retreat and observed first-hand the influence the retreat experience had on the students acknowledge the value of the retreat program. “It's such a worthwhile thing for the boys to do. It has so many elements to it that I think it's just so worthwhile,” said Teacher 1.

Teachers are more than willing to attend and lead retreat student groups. Responses during teacher interviews prompted the question as to whether the retreat was sustainable for the future. Teacher 3 observed, “I think it will because it's so valued in the school, the actual camp. I think it's valued because both boys and the staff feel like there is so much value they get out of it.” This very positive view was supported by the fact that staffing the retreat did

not appear to be problematic for the school. There is a belief and confidence that the retreat has such a reputation among the staff that, if asked, they would join the camp willingly:

I think the experience is fairly prized by staff [so] that if we go to staff and say, 'Would you be willing?', the staff are generally more than willing to do it. And the only reason they wouldn't is if they've got family commitments or other commitments. (T. 5)

Staff who have been on the retreat previously were invited to return:

In many ways, it's self-selection. We have a group of staff who have been willing in the past to be involved...I'd get in touch with I think it's about 20 staff we had last year saying, 'Hoping you'll be able to come again'. (T. 5)

5.1.2 *Staff Selection*

Even though there is widespread appeal amongst the school's staff, retreat staff selection was not an automatic outcome. Staff mentioned they were selected based on student needs rather than teacher wishes. The observation from Teacher 3, that "It's not a free for all," confirmed the point that the school's senior leaders "handpicked the staff" (T. 3) who attended the retreat. It appears staff were selected from housemasters and tutors based on their capacity for pastoral care. As Teacher 5 explains, "We would find staff that we think would be a right match. Particularly for new staff. Often it is staff that have shown a willingness, some pastoral ability, experience as tutors...potential housemasters". Teacher 3 supported this view remarking, "I make sure that I've got staff that I know are mature, able to handle that level of intensity and challenge." However, some staff, particularly in leadership roles, were also asked. Teacher 4 confirmed "I was asked," and accepted the invitation to attend the retreat:

The retreat sounded like a great camp, and being new to the school, I thought that it would be a wonderful thing for me to be involved in, an opportunity for me to meet some of the students but also see how it was done. (T. 4)

5.1.3 *Teacher Training*

It is also notable that this widespread appeal amongst the staff existed despite the absence of any supporting professional learning. The staff were not trained exclusively for the retreat camp and there was no specific professional development for staff. "We're not at a stage where we send staff off to professional development activities," as, in the view of Teacher 5:

We've got knowledge amongst the staff about what does and doesn't work, and also there're some other resources they can fall back on as well. One of the benefits we've

got is we've got some staff now that have been going on the camp now for seven, eight, nine years. So, they're fairly experienced with how it works. (T. 5)

The preparation offered to teachers was considered sufficient for the needs and demands of the retreat. Teacher 5 remarked, "I won't say they've had training, but we talk [it] through, and a lot of them have done it for a number [of] years". Daily briefings occurred during the retreat where experienced leaders were on hand to assist staff, as made clear by Teacher 5 saying: "Every campground has an experienced leader, and they will go through what's happening today. Be aware of this and make sure you do this. Focus on this. So, the briefing process I think is actually pretty good".

Teacher 5 confirmed as "correct" that any training undertaken is centred on knowledge of the program content, rather than training staff on how staff deal with the students. He acknowledged satisfaction in the teaching experience coupled with dealing with students pastorally and in co-curricular activities to support students during the retreat.

We rely on them – that all of the teaching staff we have, in addition to being teachers, as you know, coach sport, [and] typically are tutors as well and we had the staff that we know, frankly, to be capable of doing it, but certainly give them opportunities. (T. 5)

Staff were supported and mentored formally and informally during the retreat. Additional support was present from members of the camp provider, specialists in outdoor education with a Christian focus. Teacher 5 described them as "Christian outdoor educators, and typically, they sit shoulder-to-shoulder conducting those debriefings".

The perception was that, because the teachers were trained to lead discussions based on curriculum content in the classroom setting, they also were then able to lead discussions during a retreat where conversations could be deeply emotional and personal requiring something at another level. The researcher hoped to gain insight and understanding into the acceptability of this perception by exploring how the retreat teachers felt about their preparation for the different retreat situations. This conundrum was presented as "one of those ones where [teachers are] able to lead discussion in the classroom, but the type of discussion and facilitation we have [on the retreat] are quite different" (T. 5). Following a previous retreat, staff requested additional support to facilitate discussions:

A comment...came out, 'Can I, we, have a bit more training in facilitation; I wouldn't mind a few pointers in how to facilitate conversation?' Simon Priest or Priest and Glass is one of the outdoor education books that I was able to pull some resources [from] for them. Then I sent around some fairly straightforward outdoor ed[ucation] notes about

facilitating group discussions. I shared that with staff and that was well-appreciated. So, on a needs basis, we provide that particularly in their first year, we support them. And, also, there are a number of us that around that aren't allocated a group – myself...and some of the other senior staff. But we can help, and often there are questions that come up from staff. We do a bit of on the job mentoring as well. (T. 5)

The data confirm the view that the school staff are not only very supportive of the retreat but also very keen to help facilitate the activities, should they be invited to do so, even though there is no professional learning to help them in this regard. But, for the teacher leaders there is more to ensuring a successful school retreat than merely having positive beliefs and attitudes. These beliefs and attitudes must be reflected in appropriate actions beginning with ample and well-considered preparation.

5.2 Retreat Leader Preparation

A briefing session for those staff selected to lead the retreat was held prior to the retreat. “There’s a general information session with staff, which is about the practicalities. We’re leaving at this time, and this is what you need to bring, and to cover...medical issues, and risk management” (T. 5). Teacher 3 commented:

Staff new to the retreat experience were provided an additional briefing time.

I spent a whole afternoon with new staff. I do a whole lot of talking about the program, the aims, goals, and I work through the program pretty intensively with them; spend some time then talking about confidentiality of what happens. (T. 3)

Staff were provided with advice on dealing with students who may become emotional during reflection sessions and required additional support. “The other thing [the school] was very clear on [was] if you have issues, call a counsellor and the counsellors are there, and they’ll come” (T. 2). Teacher 5 told of the conversation had with staff concerning what to expect:

I warn staff prior, because it is probably the most impactful experience emotionally.

We talk through with boys that we might be aware of where there could be difficult relationships with parents. We talk about keeping an eye on where the boys are. (T. 5)

During the daily briefing prior to each session, staff were reminded of students who may need attention or an increased focus:

That’s something we do particularly talk about in the pre-briefing session with staff.

We typically get the boys to stay within eyesight, we get the staff to wander around and keep an eye on them...I suppose just getting them through what they can expect, so they’re not thrown in the deep end. (T. 5)

Retreat leaders believed that the preparation for new staff attending the retreat was

appropriate and sufficient. Teacher 5 said, “I think as a result, the staff are more comfortable, therefore more able and willing to be fully involved. And also, I think, can therefore give more to the boys in the program.”

Staff received the staff program handbook (see Appendix D), taking time to carefully work through the program prior to the planned briefing and thought they were prepared for the retreat. Teacher 4 recalled:

Two briefings that were pretty comprehensive, just making sure that we were prepped for those intentional conversations that happen throughout the camp. It’s probably just enough information before you go. It gave me the broad-brush strokes to know that there was nothing that was a surprise in terms of what was happening. (T. 4)

Teacher 4 also remarked that while there might be a comprehensive, theoretical understanding of a concept, it was not until it has been experienced for the first time that one can fully appreciate the operation of the retreat:

Like anything I think – intellectually, you can understand things as much as you can, but until you’ve experienced it for the first time, you don’t really have the full gamut of how everything fits in or understanding of what would work. (T. 4)

Ongoing support and guidance were provided daily once on the retreat for staff new to the retreat. This occurred at the commencement of the day and during breaks between sessions:

Here is what the days look like. Here is what to expect in certain sessions. Here’s how to deal with difficult emotional questions. Here’s the support that’s available. There’s also the inevitable informal briefing process for people who are new, where they all go and find someone they know who’s been and say, ‘Hey, what’s going on in this session, what’s happening?’ (T. 2)

However, the view of the leaders that preparation for new staff attending the retreat was appropriate and sufficient was not universally shared by staff new to the retreat.

Teachers, after they completed the retreat, realised they would have benefited from a more comprehensive preparation.

I went through the booklet [and] the program with a fine-toothed comb, but I suppose didn’t realise that it was a great deal of talking with the boys, because it’s a very different camp. It would have been good to get the newbies aside and just to go through a few things. (T. 1)

The teacher’s role on the retreat was significantly different from that of other camps. Teacher 1 drew the comparison that on most camps the teacher’s role was one of supervision,

where the role of the teacher on the retreat was one of leading and engaging in activities, reflection and discussions:

Being on the Year 7 orientation camp, you're there supervising. You don't really play an active role as such in taking charge of the activities, because the camp leaders do all of that. But this camp is very much a team building exercise between the camp leader in charge of your group and also the teacher as well to make sure there's a balance of discussion and reflection. (T. 1)

Though Teacher 1 was aware the teachers would be leading various discussions, the number and depth of discussions encountered were not anticipated. Additional briefings would have been helpful to better prepare new teachers for the retreat.

I knew that there was a lot of leading of discussion and drawing the boys into the discussion. You have the initial meeting before you go, and you get your information about what group, and everything you've got, and everything's all outlined for you, but I think I would have appreciated having a bit of a briefing. I think a[n additional] lunchtime meeting or something [prior to the retreat] just to reiterate some of the important times that you have with your group, and what's expected. (T. 1)

5.3 Program Planning

Given that a key aim of the retreat was for students to reflect on who they are so as to equip them for their journey into manhood, a fundamental planning consideration was around organising just how the boys would “spend time reflecting on where they're at and also reflect on where they're likely to go” (T. 5). Furthermore, consideration during the teacher leader planning and preparation time focused on “how this can be transferred into real-life situations” (T. 1). Interview data confirmed the understanding that considerable planning time was given towards striving to achieve “a really healthy introspective camp, an opportunity for them [students] to reflect on experiences that a lot of them probably haven't [had before]” (T. 2). Teachers noted that reflection for the boys was not easy and for most boys, it would be considered likely to be a skill they need to develop while on the retreat. “It is actually almost a skill they develop during the three days”, said Teacher 5. The planning by the teachers acknowledged the need to create numerous opportunities for the students to reflect and discuss authentically “what it is they're feeling” (T. 5).

5.3.1 Mentoring

The opportunity for mentoring was another key part of the teacher role during the retreat. Teachers discussed the role of mentor both on the retreat and at school. At school, the mentor was seen as the pastoral teacher or the housemaster. Students were not purposefully

allocated to the pastoral teacher, as indicated by Teacher 4 in the observation that “it’s an interesting one with mentors in terms of schools, most of the time, they’re appointed by the school”. This was also the case for students allocated to groups and teachers on the retreat were, according to Teacher 4, “Even with the retreat, it’s a designated leader you’re given.” Questions had arisen during the teacher planning time as to whether or not this was the most effective approach to the mentoring process for students. Teacher 4 echoed this concern when he said: “I’m not sure that that’s the most effective mentoring system in terms of being assigned. ...I think it’s more finding mutual interests and connected purposes”. However, it was accepted by Teacher 4 that the breadth of teachers at the disposal of students for mentoring in a school setting was advantageous and valuable when he said, “I think the wonderful thing about school is that boys have a number of opportunities to be mentored by a range of people, and I think they tend to maintain connection with someone that they latch onto.”

5.3.2 Relationship-Building

The program had an important role to play in the building of relationships. More specifically, Teacher 2 noted the initial activity for students to gather at the retreat site as “one of a number of shared experiences that they have that bring them, I think, quite close together” (T. 2). He found the retreat an extraordinary experience for bonding and likened the energy of the retreat experience to a fire, saying, “I think the retreat’s a fire. I think [it’s] a moment where they sit down and reflect on their bonds to each other as a young group as well” (T. 2). Teachers, however, spoke of the need for consideration when planning their retreat about the potential loss of momentum from the retreat experience once students return to school. “You build this incredibly powerful set of connections between a group of people and then you just completely throw it away at the end of four [*sic*] days” (T. 2).

A final part of the planning process was that phase associated with arranging for members of the alumni being selected and invited to speak to the boys during the retreat. Here, engaging the alumni, along with their common language creating an instant connection, was thought to be an extremely powerful influence to present to the students. As Teacher 4 observed, “I think that is particularly powerful, because the boys immediately identify with these people. I think it’s a part of them understanding who they are.” Teacher 3 explained that the selection of alumni and their natural linkage with the boys were helpful in relaying the struggles and dilemmas faced in their lives and the potential struggles of life the boys may encounter as they search for their identity and understanding of who they are. “I didn’t

want just the superheroes. I wanted people that failed, that struggled, that had depression or different stories so there's a special bond that ends up happening" (T. 3). Teacher 2 observed:

You're looking at what the choices are that this person has made in their life and do we think they're good choices and if we think that they're good choices. Then that's an admirable person who is potentially a role model in some ways, what can we take away from the choices that they've made. (T. 2)

Teacher 2 furthered the point of connection between students and the Alumni in:

It's largely a monocultural environment in terms of where the boys are from, their interests, their backgrounds, the expectations of their families...90 percent of the students are probably coming from similar socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and they immediately had the boys' attention. (T. 2)

The selection of alumni provided another purpose for the retreat organisers. They wanted presenters who could relay stories which may not always be those of instant success, rather, stories of those who have struggled, failed, and fought through adversity. Teacher 3 declared, "I tried to pick [identify those] that had varied stories. I didn't want just the superheroes. I wanted people that failed, that struggled, that had depression or different stories." Here, Teacher 3 identified the methodology of alumni selection to lead presentations. The focus of the retreat program was "building a man of 40. Well, let's bring the 40-year-old and get them to tell their story" (T. 3). The expectation was to have presenters who would present a Christian view when discussing values, morals and ethics:

One of [the presenters] is a devout Christian who had a severely disabled child born and was dealing with that process and talks about [how] that impacts his Christianity. There's another one who runs a charity, who did a bunch of missionary work in Africa and now runs a charity dealing with human trafficking". (T. 3)

The alumni's presentations became a form of mentoring for the students. The connection with the school meant the boys would immediately identify with the presenters. Teacher 4 expressed the view the students may be:

[L]ooking at this person and almost projecting themselves onto that person, saying, 'Could this be me? What [would it be] like if I was to come back at this stage and speak to a bunch of Year 11 [students] in 2029? What would that look like?' (T. 4)

The presentations were focused on choices the presenters had made and the idea was for students to reflect on these choices and consider how they may apply as they commence to make important life choices:

You're looking at what are the choices that this person's made in their life, and do we think they're good choices and if we think that they're good choices...what can we take away from the choices that they've made? (T. 2)

Teachers remarked on the students' overall response to the presenters and the content of each presentation. "From a lot of the boys there's just a sense [that] they're remarkable people and super-impressive" (T. 3). Also, teachers commented on the raw and honest depth of presentations as the presenters spoke of their mistakes in life, and the discussions which followed. As Teacher 1 remarked, "It was just honest, and there was no-over embellishment of anything. It was just a raw, honest discussion about their lives...and going back and reflecting on their life, and where they're at today. And, about crossroads." In this way these alumni take on the role of mentoring and guiding.

The alumni presenters selected were Christian and identified with the Christian faith. Teacher 2 noted that "when they pick four old boys to come and speak to the boys, there will always be a strong Christian element to them, in my experience" (T. 2). Observations were made on the relative effectiveness of the presentations to a large audience of fifty or more boys or within small groups:

I think if you get more old boys, put one of them in a group with the kids and have a conversation rather than a presentation and it's the same with the Christianity stuff and the same with the feminism stuff. (T. 2)

Data support the view that mutual, positive teacher / student relationships emerged from the retreat experience. There was unanimous agreement that the opportunity to step away from school as a cohort provided the vehicle for bonding and the development of relationships. As expressed by Teacher 4, teachers spoke of drawing closer to students during the retreat as "instant bonding," and "all the things you would expect where in a short period of time, you develop camaraderie very quickly" (T. 4).

Also, the success of the development of mutually positive relationships is captured in the array of post-retreat comments to this effect. One teacher suggested the group dynamics and strengthened relationships could be likened to those of a family:

By the time the camp's finished, it's like a little family. I felt like I was in a little family. I had a good rapport with them anyway, but got to know them a whole lot better, because it's a small group. (T. 1)

An outcome of the retreat was a stronger connection between teachers and students. Teacher 4 asserted that during the three days of close engagement of shared personal stories, he gained a deep mutual understanding of the boys in his group:

I feel like those boys I know better than any boy at school whether I've taught them, whether I've coached them in sport. Just that 72 hours that we spent together. I think there is a bond or a mutual respect when you're sharing those types of things because a lot of the reflection is quite personal reflection that you're sharing in a group situation. (T. 4)

This close connection between teachers and students was so strong it continued beyond the retreat experience. "I think there is a depth of respect and understanding that's developed between staff and students that transcends that 72 hours that you're together in a group" (T. 4). Teacher 2, in speaking of the growing closer relationship with teachers and students, quipped:

It becomes actually quite powerful because this is the year where the boys start to get to know teachers in general and the head specifically as a human being rather than as a scary voice on top of a suit. (T. 2)

Moreover, teachers affirmed the level of respect the boys had for each other and for the profound observations they found in their character qualities:

They were really responsive to each other, and they were respectful of each other. There was one boy in the group that was quite a quirky young man – very different to the other boys. And he said some wonderful, profound things. Unique things that he'd noticed in some of the boys. And, it was like, 'Wow!' (T. 1)

5.4 Teacher Engagement

The view underpinning this section exploring the teacher's level of engagement is that actions speak louder than beliefs. Data are provided that seek to examine the manner of the teacher leaders' engagement with the students during the retreat. The presumption is that such data provide an insight into whether or not the teacher leaders showed evidence of facilitating the array of retreat activities and experiences in a way that was commensurate with and supportive of the retreat's overall aims and objectives.

To this end, teacher data highlighted that they teachers established and maintained an environment of trust and respect at the commencement of the program which enabled students to freely express their views without the concern of being judged. This intention was founded on the firm belief that it reinforced the core aim of building men of good character. It was anticipated that such an environment would influence the nurturing of character qualities including being open, honest, trusting, respectful, empathetic, and resilient. An aspect of the teachers' engagement that was widely considered to be a tangible example of

how they sought to provide this environment was their willingness to share stories about their own journey to adulthood. “In terms of the social environment, the boys really valued the willingness of our staff to share some of their story” (T. 5). Indeed, the influential manner of this level of personal openness, vulnerability, and honesty was also exhibited by the school principal when addressing the boys at the commencement of the retreat.

I think it’s particularly powerful that the headmaster is involved. He spoke to all the boys and told a tremendously powerful story from his own life of a time that happened. I think that vulnerability – I think from memory, he had tears in his eyes, and he cried a bit. I think that vulnerability in front of the boys really set the tone for this is part of being a man and this is what it looks like. (T. 2)

It became evident that, through active listening and being responsive to the teachers and each other, students developed a new level of interpersonal respect. “Being able to listen to other people, and not talk over the top of them...they were really responsive to each other, and they were respectful of each other” (T. 1).

Also, due to the active, and at times intense engagement of staff, formal conversations and reflections focused on a range of serious topics including that of women and respect. As Teacher 1 explained, the staff were able to discuss how it is not only what is said to a person, but also the tone in which it was said. “It’s how you speak to women...and it’s maybe not so much what you say. It’s sometimes tone. It’s really important that you treat everyone with respect, regardless [of whether the person is] male or female” (T. 1). The character quality of respect was further discussed in terms of parent expectations, values, morals, and ethics:

Your parents are there for you. They want the best for you and being rude or disrespectful is not the right way to go, and you’ll know that as you get older, and how you navigate yourself through different life experiences. (T. 1)

Teachers noted that the environment established through their willingness to be very engaged, personable and open with the students was mirrored in the unique way that the students were so “emotionally honest and open and they make themselves so vulnerable” (T. 2).

5.5 Teacher Reflections

As previously described in Chapter 2, the aim and objectives of the retreat revolved around the development of each student’s character – building men of good character. Data presented in this section provide an insight into the retreat teacher leaders’ understandings of the retreat’s essential aims and objectives and their views about the success of the retreat in achieving these. This insight will be conveyed through discussion aligned with the topics of

character traits, values and morals, Christian principles, reflection, relationships, and wellbeing.

5.5.1 *Character Traits*

The retreat aim and objectives sought to develop the key character traits of empathy, resilience, maturity, and respect. With respect to the possible development of empathy, Teacher 3 firmly believed that “this is a camp that has really been able to build empathy.” Another character trait that the teachers commented on was the level of respect for each other that the boys developed during the retreat. They listened to and accepted the views of others without judgement. Teacher 1 noted their “being able to listen to other people, and not talk over the top of them.... They were really responsive to each other, and they were respectful of each other.”

The character trait of resilience – with associated words of perseverance, determination, grit, not giving up, dig deeper – was discussed and linked with students’ personal lives, sport and academics:

The approach of the camp is to give the boys those skills for life, but do we talk to them about things like...the idea of resilience, grit, determination. Not giving up. We have this whole range of words for them and also make those linkages both to school and academics, but also more broadly to life. (T. 5)

The initial activity was a whole day activity, where students made their own way from school to the retreat site. Requiring student initiative and ingenuity, it is purposely designed for engagement and bonding. Teacher 4 referred to the initial activity where, crossing the river under poor weather conditions and arriving well away from the designated location, the attitude and resilience to keep going was necessary:

I think building that resilience and having to experience the difficult things in a physical sense together, where you have to negotiate teamwork and all those things.... ‘We’re at the wrong point. We’ve got to go 4 kilometres around that way.’ Again, for the guy to say things aren’t going to go smoothly and they [students] were tired. ‘We need to walk 4 Ks, so let’s go. You’ve just got to do it.’ And I think that was great. (T. 4)

Also, during the retreat the teacher leaders gave examples of their life experiences which required a high level of resilience. “I think that vulnerability in front of the boys really set the tone for this is part of being a man and this is what it looks like” (T. 4). The teacher leaders told of the pitfalls and crossroads they experienced in their life:

You're looking at what are the choices that this person has made in their life, and do we think they're good choices and, if we think that they're good choices...then that's an admirable person who is potentially a role model in some ways, [and] what can we take away from the choices that they've made? (T. 2)

These experiences enabled students to appreciate that there are times in life when things are difficult and the decisions made may not always be the best decisions, however, the important thing is to press on in life and not give up:

Listening to other people's perception to [*sic*] life, and that you're going to make mistakes in life, and you learn from them. The boys that are in my group, they realised that mistakes are necessary to move forward in life. In any direction that you take. Crossroads. Making a decision and not knowing whether it's the right one or not, because you've just got to dive in sometimes. (T. 1)

Teachers observed an increased level of student maturity during the retreat and noted that maturity was an important factor in the students' interaction in activities and discussions and the depth of their engagement in the retreat experience as a whole. "The whole point is we want them to step up into the manhood" (T. 3). However, teachers were unsure if the change which may have occurred in student attitude was attributable to the retreat experience or to boys maturing naturally. When asked if the change was attributable to the retreat experience, Teacher 5 said, "I think so, but then again, it's hard to pinpoint. Is that the impact of a three-day camp, or is it just the boys maturing?" The response of Teacher 2 "on this matter of character growth," regarding whether the change was a factor from the retreat experience or simply a process of maturity, mentioned other factors that have occurred in student life post-retreat which rendered it difficult to distinguish the answer clearly:

I would have thought so [that character development has occurred because of factors post-retreat], if I'm honest. It's so remote from the retreat experience at that point that I think that maybe they'll [look] back and draw on things of the retreat and the thing that causes the change is more about the last year of school, attitude to school changing in terms of realising that this is actually all about me, it's not my teachers imposing stuff on me that I don't want. It's the realisation that it's [school] coming to an end. It's those kinds of things that cause reflection, I think. (T. 2)

Teacher interview data confirmed some level of change in the student's attitude post-retreat. During a follow-up interview, Teacher 2 provided an anecdote of change in a Year 11 student in terms of conversation, thinking process, and ethical decisions. The concern for

Teacher 2 was whether the level of influence of this change was as a result of the retreat or of maturity.

This was a young man and the conversations I had...definitely, the nature and level of those conversations, I saw the nature of the way he was thinking about his actions and right and wrong and ethical frameworks changed in Year 12. Whether that's retreat camp, or whether that's general maturity I can't answer. But certainly, the nature of those conversations changes when the kids hit Year 12, and halfway through Year 11. (T. 2)

Similarly, Teacher 4 commented on the significant positive shift of students' ethical decisions in their academic studies, particularly regarding the submission of work for assessment. "Anecdotally," commented Teacher 4, "there are far less [*sic*] boys being caught for academic malpractice post-retreat than pre-retreat." Teacher 4 posited potential explanations to this change as due to maturation or the possibility of penalties:

It could be that the values and the self-reflection and those things they're talking about at retreat could have an impact as well. But, certainly, boys since the retreat, there's far less academically questionable material that's submitted than previously. (T. 4)

Teacher 2 shared a concern where there appeared to be elements of change in the boys, and yet in other instances not the change that had been declared. Once back, the school routine to which boys had become accustomed had a stronger influence:

I don't know that there's a lot of instant change or overnight change or even that they necessarily go back and think about those. I think they do genuinely reflect and think about stuff but then they come back and the reality for our guys is they live very busy lives. (T. 2)

It is noted here that teachers observed that taking time away from the busyness of school and into a more natural environment was valued by the students. "It's stepping away from school. They really valued that opportunity to step away from school and spend time together" (T. 5). Also, Teacher 4 commented as to whether the activities associated with the retreat enabled bonding and comradeship to occur quickly, "Absolutely, instant bonding. All the things you would expect where in a short period of time, you develop camaraderie very quickly." Added to the mix was that the emotional experiences of the students, particularly during the affirmation and receiving letters sessions, brought the cohort closer together, particularly in Year 12. Teacher 2 describes it thus: "I think it's enormously emotional. Emotionally impactful on some nights. I think it's one of the things that causes the fact that Year 12 groups in particular at the school are incredibly close."

Teachers, like Teacher 4, noted the positive response of the students regarding their character development, saying that “I think there’s a greater appreciation of difference and of others, particularly noticeable in my group.” He considers that a large part of learning is self-reflection and understanding. However, he also questioned the likelihood of a transference of the positive experience during the retreat to life once back at school, commenting, “Whether that translated into identifiable actions where things were different, I couldn’t say for sure” (T. 4).

5.5.2 Values, Morals and Ethics

Values, morals, ethics, discernment, and decision-making are entwined in the aim and objectives of the retreat experience as the students spend time reflecting, understanding, and accepting their values and who they are (see Appendices D and E). The retreat program was designed to align values to an activity such that “a value will be married up with whatever they’re doing, and we’ll just sit down and have a bit of a discussion about how each of us worked as a team, and how we felt” (T. 1). Students were also given a “specific set of values that they have to follow up” (T. 2) and asked to consider how these values and morals might be “transferred into real-life situations” (T. 1). This approach to engaging students in the discussion of values, morals, and ethics was considered by teachers to be appropriate and worthwhile: “I think getting students to think about that is something that the camp does quite well” (T. 2).

It became apparent to teachers that students wanted to abide by a set of values and a moral code as part of their way of life:

What has come across really clearly in all of the discussions that I’ve had with the boys on the retreat is this conception that having a moral code or a set of values or ethics of some kind is really important. (T. 2)

Teacher data showed clearly that the values explored and discussed during the retreat were a blend of accepted values and morals in society as well as values expressed through a Christian lens (see section 5.5.3). As observed by Teacher 3, “The different values that are [mentioned] at the beginning [are] what we talk about. Trust with each other, resilience, communication, maturity, spirituality.” Student engagement with the concepts of values and morals occurred in discussions that were open, frank, and honest. “It was just a raw, honest discussion about their lives” (T. 1). Morals and ethics discussed provided a platform for the students to consider and reflect on who they want to be and the values they consider as very important to them. They were invited to engage in “long-term thinking about who you want to be and what...the values [are] that you espouse, and those things” (T. 2).

The inclusion of all students in the call to engage, to be open, honest, and without judgement about the views of others was seen as an important component of discussion on values and morals. Every effort was undertaken to engage students:

There's [*sic*] the cool guys, and there's [*sic*] the nerdy guys, and there's [*sic*] the boys that want to just blend in. But there's nowhere to hide in a small group. Everyone's responsible just to be open and honest. There is [*sic*] some quieter boys. I think they were brought out of their shell a bit, because of the nature of the group, and what we went through. (T. 1)

Teachers, too, were a key part of this established environment where they engaged in activities and discussions and shared personal stories. Students accepted and appreciated teacher engagement. Teacher 1 was able to say that "they appreciated me being honest about things, and my take on a few things, and I was being honest within reason."

5.5.3 *Christian Principles*

As a faith-based school founded on the Anglican tradition it was to be expected that spirituality, in particular Christian spirituality, would underpin the retreat program. Teacher 5 asserted that "we unashamedly present the Christian moral view as their moral compass...being a faith-based school, I think it's only appropriate to do that," while Teacher 3 said: "I'm very keen for them to reflect on Christianity, so much of the program is undergirded, without them even realising, with Christian values, and reflecting on all [of] that".

As a Christian school, students would engage daily in prayer, chapel, and religious studies. The view was that students would consider the retreat as an extension of this aspect of school life:

I felt faith was integrated throughout [the retreat] if they saw it in there because it's part chapel, Christian Studies, and it's a Christian school, and that's what happens usually. So, I don't think they thought it was any different. It was just part of the camp. (T. 1)

Teacher 2 considered that the school presented the retreat program from a standpoint of evangelical Christianity. This approach underpinned the understanding of the world and morality as an option for students to consider. However, Teacher 2 noted also that the views expressed during the retreat were "not aggressively or unpleasantly" articulated. Retreat leaders were cognisant that students were at different stages and levels of active engagement with Christianity. They tailored their approach to activities and discussions in an attempt to meet the needs of the boys:

We say to boys, ‘You might be at all sorts of different stages in the faith journey.’ There’s [sic] some absolutely, ‘You’re Christian. You’re deeply religious. This will carry forward in life.’ We show the boys in many ways, this is the default that we’re offering. This is something to fall back on. This is your moral compass. These are your values that are shared by the school. And again, that comes through the guest speakers as well. But, typically, we get the boys to carry that flame through into the future as well. (T. 5)

Presenters provided their view on values from a Christian perspective. “I choose very clear speakers who talk about Christianity...how Christianity makes sense and has made sense in the context of their life” (T. 3).

5.5.4 *Reflection and Journaling*

5.5.4.1 Reflection.

Self-reflection, and the expression of reflection through discussion and journal writing, were components of the retreat experience. A consensus amongst the teachers was that authentic character development encompassed far more than simply learning certain behaviours. For these retreat leaders, character development occurs as much in the mind as it does in actions. Thus, guiding each student to think about values, morals, and Christian principles through reflection opportunities and experiences was considered to be essential.

To this end, the consensus from teachers was that the students did engage in self-reflection opportunities and experiences actively and genuinely. The conclusion of Teacher 2 was “I think they do genuinely reflect and think about stuff but then they come back and the reality for our guys is they live very busy lives.” Teacher 4 remarked, “I think [the retreat’s] a time of great self-reflection for them. And so, in my experience, I think that they learn a great deal about themselves as a result of that.”

However, the teachers noted the tentativeness of students to reflect. Teacher 5 reflected that “Boys, I’d say, struggle to reflect...or they find it difficult,” noting also that the test teachers faced was the silence as they waited for boys to contribute to their reflection, saying: “It can be challenging as a group leader that we need to just let them wallow, and we need to cope with that silence”. He remarked, however, that by the end of the retreat, students were better equipped to reflect and discuss their feelings and more confident in doing so. “It is actually almost a skill they develop during the three days – that ability to reflect and discuss...what it is they’re feeling”. Teacher 5 posited that students preferred to share with an

individual rather than in a group setting and referred to this practice as “supportive reflection”.

Teachers commented on students’ need for guidance during the initial stages of reflection. “I think guided reflection is always really important. I don’t know that that’s something that boys naturally do a whole lot” (T. 4). Also, Teacher 4 remarked on the need, particularly in the initial stages, to have the balance right in affirmation and personal story-telling sessions, to be authentic, not too negative, and not superficial:

With those affirmation circles or those opportunities, I think the tone’s often set by the first two or three people that go. I think it’s really up to the group member to be selective in terms of picking people they feel like will set the right tone in those settings. And so, I didn’t know the boys that well, but I remember I was very intentional about the first two or three that I asked to go for first because I wanted to set the right dynamic. I went first as an example because I wanted to show what was expected, I think that was helpful. (T. 4)

Teacher 2 commented on the role of the teacher to mentor, guide students, and if need be, model reflective and discussion skills: “I think that’s something that having group leaders there modelling and talking about helps with.” While Teacher 2 considered the retreat booklet helpful, teacher engagement was a preferred option:

I think the booklet that guides them through that process is very helpful. I don’t think it’s something that they spend a lot of time necessarily doing about themselves. That kind of reflects of, why do I do things that I do, so, I think, yeah, absolutely, it really helps them with...they don’t have time. (T. 2)

Teacher 4 recommended as a follow-up, post-retreat, to provide students with some form of framework or scaffolding to assist their capacity and skill to reflect:

I think there would be further opportunities for identifying significant points for these boys post-[retreat] and putting in some type of scaffolded reflection which was a requirement or at least strongly encouraged because I think naturally that isn’t something that boys particularly do very well. (T. 4)

5.5.4.2 Journaling.

Journaling was an accompaniment to reflection and discussion. A journal to record their thoughts was provided to the students at the commencement of the retreat (see Appendix E). Teachers remarked on the range of students’ engagement in journal writing, with some displaying a preference to speak rather than journal. Teacher 1 noticed that “Some preferred to talk about it a bit more

and do a little bit of writing...[T]hey all wrote something.” Boys were encouraged to keep their journal for future reference to topics covered during the retreat experience “We purposely have put resources into making that a physically robust document. The idea is that we encourage the boys to keep it” (T. 5).

5.4.4.3 Goal Setting.

Towards the conclusion of the retreat, students engaged in an activity of writing a letter to themselves. The letter was collected by group leaders and saved for posting when the students completed Year 12. Teacher 5 revealed that “the process of writing the letter is to help them get their thoughts down on paper, and then also it’s a bit of a boost or shock that they’ll get 12 months later.” Students were provided the opportunity to express their thoughts from the retreat and “to come up with some goals, to have some short-term goals and what that might look like, and some medium-to-long-term goals and what that might look like” (T. 2). The letter was in essence “reflections and advice to themselves” (T. 5), reflecting on themselves, a form of goal setting for the future and what’s expected of them. Teacher 3 encouraged the students to include reflection on their character and the person they wish to be. He advised them to “reflect on their character, on who the people are that influence them, thinking about who they are...and reflection on who they wanted to be” (T. 3).

However, a thought-provoking observation from Teacher 4 indicated the potential lack of ongoing or lasting influence of the letter to self. Teacher 4 posited that where students identify goals to be set for themselves, “letter-writing [to oneself] is often a dose of gratitude or of self-reflection or something like that, but whether that translates into a routine of daily life” (T. 4) is uncertain. The effectiveness of goal-setting letters to self could be grounds for further research.

5.5.5 Relationship-Building

An important assumption within the concept of being a man of good character is the desire and capacity to build mutually beneficial interpersonal relationships. Hence, the retreat provided opportunities for students to bond and develop relationships with the teacher leaders and their peers beyond those that existed back at school. “Yeah,” said Teacher 4, “absolutely, instant bonding. All the things you would expect where in a short period of time, you develop camaraderie very quickly” (T. 4). Teachers developed a strong relationship with students in their group and welcomed the opportunity to engage with the students. Teacher 1 was able to recall, “I thoroughly enjoyed the conversations and the stop and pausing, and reflecting on what we’re doing, and having a chat to them.” An important part of maintaining a good

relationship is respect for each other, as noted by Teacher 1 in “I said it’s really important that you look after each other, and you have respect for each other” (T. 1). However, a concern was raised for the need, once back at school, to continue the fostering of connections and relationships developed during the retreat experience. “You build this incredibly powerful set of connections between a group of people and then you just completely throw it away at the end of four [*sic*] days”, was the observation of Teacher 2.

5.5.6 Wellbeing and Affirmation

An important aim of the retreat experience was to maintain the wellbeing of the adolescent students as they reflect on, understand, and accept who they are and their preparation for manhood (see Appendix D). Thus, the retreat program engaged in several activities to stimulate discussion and reflection on student wellbeing. The affirmation sessions, with positive comments about each person, provided a boost to the wellbeing of students. Moreover, a vital component of these affirmation sessions was the receiving of a letter from the boy’s parents. An overall impression gained from the affirmation sessions is captured by Teacher 1 who reported that “they were really honest and careful with everybody...they were really responsive to each other, and they were respectful of each other. I really enjoyed that experience.”

As previously indicated, to support the affirmation session, the expectation was for each parent to write a letter to their son (see Appendices G and H). For the letter from parents to be affective it was important to establish the correct tone of the letter. Teacher 5 explained the process:

We also get each parent or a parent of the boys to write a letter to their sons, and purposely, short of writing the letter for the parents, sort of say, This is not an opportunity for you to say to your son, ‘You need to work harder.’ It’s more, ‘I love you as a son. I’m proud of you. These are the positive attributes I see in you.’ You almost give parents, ‘Here are some points you might want to think about writing in your letter’. (T. 5)

Considerable liaison with parents was undertaken to have them prepare and send the letter. Teacher 5 revealed that “part of what I do in the lead-up is ring parents to give them a little bit of a prod” (T. 5). It appears some parents took considerable time reflecting on what to write and found the task difficult. “Some have said they found it very hard to do because they’re being asked to reflect, and share, and things like that, which they may not necessarily do [often]” (T. 5). Parents acknowledged and appreciated the opportunity to write and express their feelings. “...Some parents have said they actually really appreciate the

opportunity to spend some time communicating with their sons in a really meaningful way. So, I think it has an impact on parents” (T. 5).

Some boys received a letter from a parent they had not heard from for some years and found the receiving of the letter an emotional, confronting experience. As Teacher 5 recounted, “We’ve had boys that haven’t heard from a parent in a number of years receive a letter from their parent. We’ve had parents, I don’t know what’s in the letter, but clearly are sharing some pretty emotional, heavy stuff.”

There were occurrences where boys received a letter from a parent who was deceased. Teacher 1 related the anecdote of a mother who passed away the previous year. Prior to her passing, aware of the retreat experience for her son the following year, the mother wrote to her son. Teacher 1 spoke of the impact the letter had on the boy. The initial emotional impact for the student was negative: “It was awful” (T. 1). He required support and comfort: “I was keeping a close eye on him” and that, eventually, “he was okay in the end” (T. 1). The letter provided another source of support and memory of his mother’s love and care. “It was just something that he will always remember and keep. And, he said that he’s got other things from his mum” (T. 1).

Teacher 3 presented an anecdote of the experience he encountered where one of the students, five years previous to this retreat, received a letter from his father who passed away two weeks prior to his attending the retreat. The anecdote included the younger brother who attended the retreat a few years later, who also received a letter from his father. The anecdote noted the emotional impact on each boy receiving the letters, and the support mechanism provide to each of the boys by their peers:

There was one Year 11 boy about five years ago whose dad died a week-and-a-half before the camp, but the dad wrote a letter for him and the boy decided he really wanted to go on camp. So, he went on camp so then obviously – it almost brings me to tears now as I think about it. It does. The boy got this letter from his dad at the camp – just a very powerful moment. What was even more extraordinary was he had a younger son whom he wrote a letter for as well and so three years later when the younger son was in Year 11, he then got this letter...from his dad. (T. 3)

Teacher 4 spoke of the emotions expressed by the boys at the time of receiving the letter as something they usually would not display. As the teacher recalled, receiving a letter from your parents expressing their pride, love and hope for the future is rare. He noted the hand-written letter is particularly rare and, that too brought with it an additional layer of emotion:

For a lot of the boys, they're accessing emotions that they often wouldn't talk about. Receiving a letter from a parent isn't something that happens all the time. So, I think those carefully constructed experiences over a 48 to 72-hour period is very powerful. So, it's something that they remember. I think there is something about letter-writing which is nice. I felt like, [for] the boys that received handwritten letters, it was more powerful. I just noticed for the boys that received that, it was especially personal. (T. 4)

Teacher 2 expressed the experience simply. "They all read their parents' letters. They cried. They engaged with their emotions." Moreover, of significance too was the response of peers and their positive display of support and care for each other.

Both of them were very teary but what was extraordinary was to see the other boys rally around them. It was extraordinary, just the love and the care and the mateship and just the tears and – so it was very powerful. (T. 3)

Importantly, the school provided mechanisms to prepare and support teachers for students who may become emotional. Prior to the retreat, teachers are alerted to students who may need additional emotional support during the retreat.

We talk through with [staff of] boys that we might be aware of where there could be difficult relationships with parents. We typically get the boys to stay within eyesight...we get the staff to wander around and keep an eye, and that's something we do particularly talk about in the pre-briefing session with staff. (T. 5)

Throughout the retreat, counselling support was available to support students during this difficult period:

Generally, I think they [the students] do feel that safety net. One thing we [do is] have one of our counselling staff down there full-time. Not attached to a group. And it's known to boys that if at any stage they need time out, because there's a particular moment that does have a significant impact on the boys [then it's available]. (T. 5)

5.6 Post-Retreat Impressions

The focus of the research is to understand if the intended retreat aim and objectives were achieved. A review of the teacher leaders' post-retreat data is presented in order to provide their impression of the outcome of the retreat experience. Data identified eight sub-themes: bubble; influence on academic learning; relationship-building; maturity towards manhood; retreat duration; transition of skills; follow-up on student wellbeing; and retreat evaluation.

5.6.1 *Bubble*

The word, *bubble*, was identified several times in the Teacher interview data. It was used in reference to the retreat as an isolated event and how the boys responded once back in the environment of their busy school life. As noted by Teacher 2,

It's a bubble. A bubble is a really good term for it, yeah. That's the sense that I get from most of the kids that I've had on it. For the most part, my sense is that what happens on the retreat stays on the retreat both in terms of the friendships and relationships that form but also in the sense of the emotional journey that they go on. (T. 2)

Some teachers submitted that the retreat may be an "artificial environment within which you interact" (T. 4). Teacher 4 also acknowledged, "There is a danger in that, that when things go back to the normal world or their normal lives the experience [of the retreat] is somehow separated from the experience of school". Teacher 4 posited that the school has a role to play to "help root those experiences in the everyday of school".

While teachers referred to the retreat as a form of bubble, Teacher 5 observed, "I think it's an important bubble" and explained this position in terms of the opportunity to isolate students away from the busyness of school life to experience something quite different. The general impression in this regard was that this retreat, when compared with the students' previous camp experiences, offered outstanding quality and uniqueness. "I think the experience, it is something they will never forget. It's not like any other camp. That's what they said to me" (T. 1). Also, there was the view the retreat experienced had a positive influence on student attitude towards transition to school and life.

5.6.2 *Influence on Academic Learning*

Teachers acknowledged the change in students, their growth of character and the development of skills as a result of the retreat experience which they employed once back at school. Teacher 5 referred to character traits of resilience and determination with the linkage to their academic studies and life in general:

The approach of the camp is to give the boys those skills for life, but we do talk to them about things like with the idea of resilience. Not giving up. That's something that can be taken into your studies. (T. 5)

Teacher 4 acknowledged the students stated they felt their attitude had changed towards school post-retreat. "Certainly, the boys that I have spoken to say that it changed them significantly in terms of how they thought about things, but whether that translated into identifiable actions where things were different, I couldn't say for sure" (T. 4). Furthermore,

in his response to the interview question about whether the “retreat has had an impact on the student’s wider learning”, Teacher 4 remarked, “I would say so. If you’re talking about formalised academic learning, then yes, change in the students was evident.” For this teacher, there was a synergy with self-reflection and understanding [one’s] strengths and weaknesses. “I think better learners know more about themselves, and I think that essentially, on the retreat, they’re learning more about themselves as a person” (T. 4).

5.6.3 Relationship-Building

Teachers noted stronger relationships and increased interaction between the teacher leaders and the students. “I think what’s interesting is also just staff interactions with the boys. So, there’s a special bond that ends up happening” (T. 3), and for Teacher 1, “When I see them around the school, you know, we have this connection.” Similarly, teachers observed a closer connection between peers:

Having my group, which were all very different and didn’t necessarily spend a lot of time with one another, I noticed around the school over the next few months them chatting and talking with one another and having a greater appreciation for someone else in the year group that they wouldn’t normally talk to. (T. 4)

Achieved too was the goal for student reflection and discussion on deep issues. “I think it’s achieved those goals”, said Teacher 2, while Teacher 5 commented that they [the boys] “genuinely reflected”. Teacher 3 noted the retreat’s capacity “to give them that chance in the midst of busyness just to be able to stop and reflect on life, where they’re at and where they want to go” (T. 3). The retreat offered students the opportunity to express themselves and share their emotions. The engagement of students in this way was noted by teachers as both a positive and beneficial experience for students. “I think there is a real value in the camp in terms of thinking about emotions and dealing with emotions and that type of thing” (T. 3).

Apparent to the teacher leaders post-retreat was student maturity in the level and depth of discussion together with their empathy, understanding, and acceptance of others. In short, “they stepped up well” (T. 3) and this was transitioned back at school and became more evident in the student attitude during the final year of schooling. Teacher 2 attributed this change of attitude to the retreat experience:

I think that maybe they’ll [think] back and draw on things of the retreat and the thing that causes the change is much more about the last year of school, attitude to school changing in terms of realising that this is actually all about me, it’s not my teachers

imposing stuff on me that I don't want. It's the realisation that it's [school] coming to an end. (T. 2)

5.6.4 *Maturity Towards Manhood*

Teacher 4 referred to the elements of growth, maturity and stepping up as short-term and long-term stages of growth. "Short-term, yes, in terms of the boys understanding what stepping up into manhood looks like and them having a multiplicity of perspectives on that" (T. 4). However, regarding long-term growth and maturity, where the full appreciation of the concept of stepping up to manhood is realised long after students have left the school, Teacher 4 presented a level of caution: "I think there's also a long-term element as well, I can't really answer that. But I think part of the longer purpose of the camp is for boys to understand what stepping up into manhood is like" (T. 4). Teacher 4 believed that even six months post-retreat, the boys were still in the process of understanding what it means to step up into manhood. "To be honest, they're not quite there yet. Now that they're only at the end of Year 11, I think there's still an experience in that" (T. 4).

An experienced educator and leader of a range of camps, Teacher 5 was impressed with the way students responded to their retreat experience:

It's a very special experience for our boys, and you can see and you can hear that from the boys in the language they use and way and the way they describe that it's had an impact. I think that's why we have staff who are willing to continue to be involved – because they can see the effect it has on the boys. (T. 5)

Values and ethics were components which would take time to identify and assess:

I think it would be ludicrous to suggest that every student comes back with a clear sense of 'This is the morality or the set of ethics that I've chosen.' It's not measurable. But they're lofty, highfaluting internal goals, which are very subjective for individual students. (T. 5)

5.6.5 *Retreat Duration*

The consensus amongst the teacher leaders was that three days was an appropriate length of time for the retreat. "Any longer, there would then be the issues of boys' willingness to get involved, to be engaged and for their parents to send them away. So, I think over time we've settled on three days" (T. 5). In discussing the duration of the retreat, Teacher 5 drew upon research into retreat programs and remarked that a longer duration for the retreat may produce greater gains, however, due to the busyness of the school calendar, the provision is for the shorter duration. Teacher 4 queried the three-day duration of the retreat in terms of learning undertaken during this limited time. "I do think they [students] see

it [the retreat] as a short, intense period. I do wonder if three days is enough, I think there's a limit to the learning that can take place in 48 or 72 hours" (T. 4), but as Teacher 5 summarised:

There would be greater gains, and there's a lot of research to suggest [and] in many ways I agree, the longer an experience is, the greater the impact. But, for what we have available, I think it's an efficient use of time. (T. 5)

In terms of content and what was expected of the boys during the retreat, teachers considered that while the program is intense because "We purposely jam a lot in" (T. 5), it is not too much for the boys. "I don't think it is too busy because I don't know how much processing they do in their downtime of the stuff that you're looking at...I think it's a little bit too passive in places" (T. 2). Such comments from teachers affirmed the overall retreat program. "I believe very firmly that it's an excellent camp, [a] really good program at getting boys to step back from the lives that they lead and think about who they are and who they want to be" (T. 2). However, Teacher 2 offered a recommendation for more time for discussion and reflection, saying, "I think more time for discussion would be better". (T. 2)

5.6.6 *Transition of Skills*

While teachers noted the development of student skills gained during the retreat experience, some teachers voiced a concern about the effectiveness of transferring the skills gained during the retreat experience to life once back at school. "I think the transferring to everyday life is a hard one. I'm a big believer in routines. I don't know that this camp translates into a routine of daily life, I don't know" (T. 4). But Teacher 4 also shared a personal view that some of the students seemed to be demonstrating an increased level of self-awareness following the retreat:

I think they're more self-aware, I would say, post the retreat than prior to the retreat. Whether you can attribute that entirely to the retreat experience or whether that's just a maturation thing throughout [Years] 11 and 12, but certainly I think there was self-reflection and those things that are there, I think it's evident once they've been on the retreat. (T. 4)

Nevertheless, Teacher 2 was not confident the experiences and skills gained on the retreat were transitioned to school. "I don't know. I think the retreat is extraordinary while it's happening, and then afterwards fades into the background quite quickly. So, my guess would be probably not a huge impact on wider learning, not a lot" (T. 2).

5.6.7 Follow-Up on Student Wellbeing

Some more general concerns about the retreat were raised by the teachers. For example, there was a concern about there being limited follow-up on student personal wellbeing or on aspects of the program and presentations, including values and moral questions, that were explored during the retreat. This concern was voiced by Teacher 2 by suggesting that:

You sit down, and you have a discussion about what's right and what's wrong and how do we figure it out and what would you do in these situations, and they think about it and then we go our separate ways. (T. 2)

Similarly, Teacher 3 suggested that:

We don't do very much follow-up on them. I do follow-up in my Year 11 classes. I teach quite a few of the Year 11 classes and so my follow-up is [that] I just spend half a lesson with them reflecting on the time. They're not in their groups. (T. 3)

Teacher 4 spoke of the concern about the fact that an artificial environment was developed during the retreat. He proposed the school provide some form of support to students once back at school or the experience would be lost. "The experience is somehow separated from the experience of school. So, I think it would probably help root those experiences in the everyday of school" (T. 4). More specifically, Teacher 2 posited the need for teachers to monitor how the retreat students were enacting those values promoted during the retreat especially in their judgement and decision-making:

I don't know, thinking about that regularly is probably healthy for everyone. I don't know what a regular check-up on determining values [would be]. If you ask kids to come and present moral questions or a moral quandary and you talk through them in a group, I think it's something. (T 2)

In response to these concerns, some of the teachers offered views on how to address these concerns while also acknowledging the logistical obstacles in trying to do so. For example, Teacher 2 proposed the strategy of setting up a framework to support the students. Part of this strategy was to bring students back, on a regular basis, in their retreat grouping. Teacher 2 suggested as frequently as fortnightly, linking with the teacher who led each group:

I also think that making or giving an opportunity or bringing those groups back to me at school [could happen] once every two weeks. And, put the staff member and the students back in the room and just talk about where are we up to, what's going on, how do we feel, you could give them some guiding questions. (T. 2)

Teacher 2 was cognisant of timetabling and staffing issues as a potential stumbling block to achieve some form of reunion of each retreat group. The value of the reconnection was of worth and, in the view of Teacher 2, outweighed any potential stumbling block, because though:

It's difficult with staffing because I think it's got to be the same staff member with the same group of kids. It's something that just keeps it relevant and meaningful. You build this incredibly powerful set of connections between a group of people and then you just completely throw it away at the end of four[sic] days. (T. 2)

Acknowledging a process was in place for information about students of concern to be "passed on to housemasters following the camp", Teacher 2 stepped back somewhat from his position to establish an opportunity for students to reconnect, wondering "...if there's much value in it" (T. 2).

5.6.8 *Retreat Evaluation*

Other teacher leaders suggested the need for a more formally organised post-retreat evaluation process. It was apparent from data gathered that staff would have welcomed the opportunity to meet to discuss and evaluate the program. "Not just doing a survey, but getting everyone together, and having a chat about it. It's better to talk about it sometimes" was the comment of Teacher 1 who went on to say, "I think [that] for people where they're just new to the retreat, [they] come with fresh eyes". Also, Teacher 4 welcomed the concept of being engaged in the evaluation of the retreat, saying, "That would have been nice. I wouldn't have been averse to it." He posited the view that all staff involved in the review and evaluation of the retreat "would probably help root that connection" (T. 4) with the retreat experience back into school life. The concern expressed by Teacher 4 was that, because the retreat experience of the boys was quite far removed from their normal daily routine, if it was not fostered and further developed once back at school there would be a likelihood daily life would return for the boys and the experiences of the retreat would be lost. He said that the retreat was a:

[C]reation of an artificial environment within which you interact. I think sometimes there is a danger in that when things go back to the normal world or their normal lives, that experience is somehow separated from the experience of school. So, I think it would probably help root those experiences in the everyday of school. (T. 4)

Teacher 3 also conceded that the school's leadership had not tapped into the merits of gaining the views of teachers and considered a post-retreat review and reflection with the retreat staff had merit. "A post-reflection would be interesting to do sometime later which we haven't

actually really tapped much into” (T. 3), and Teacher 5 commented that “I reflect on how we could do it better. I think building those connections is something we could do.”

The view of teachers was that the executive were content with the retreat program and what it was attempting to achieve and that any changes to the program only related to “logistics” (T. 3). Teacher 2 hinted at the possibility of a potential review of the retreat program where it might be time to undertake a full review of the retreat program and that if there are to be changes to the program, then these changes are likely to be in the form of substantial change:

My perception is they were a product at this point, that they’re very happy with what they think accomplishes the goals that they have...what I think they’re looking for from staff feedback on the ground is tinkering stuff. The perception is that the tinkering stuff is done and this [is] as polished as what it’s going to be and that changes are likely to be in the form of substantial [matters]. If you were going to change it, you’d change it structurally and substantially rather than tinkering with the format. (T. 2)

Another suggestion to further improve the retreat centred on the linkage between camps which students engage in during their early years of schooling. Consideration was given to the proposition to build skills in the boys from each camp so that the pinnacle of camps for the boys would be the retreat.

I would hope that some of the other experiences they’d had through other camps leading up to retreat had elements that were progressively stepping them up towards this Year 11 camp...to me it’s like a continuum of skills and values that should be embedded in each of the camps. Then the retreat is something where they draw upon all of these things and realise that this camp has so many elements and so many things in it that they can pause and reflect on as young men”. (T. 1)

5.7 Conclusion

The retreat’s purpose was manifested through the beliefs, commitments, and actions of the teachers towards preparation, facilitating and evaluating the retreat.

Planning: Retreat organisers were careful with staff selection. Retreat staff were expected to possess a strong pastoral focus and the maturity to attend to emotional and sensitive issues which may arise during the retreat. While not specifically trained for the retreat, retreat leaders and teachers felt the briefing sessions prior to and during the retreat sufficiently prepared, supported, and equipped them to facilitate the program. Some teachers requested additional support in leading in-depth discussions.

Influence: Self-reflection was a focus of the retreat program. This was supported by teacher skills and relationships. Mutual respect, positive teacher–student relationship, trust, and safety in sharing thoughts were considered essential ingredients to discussions, reflection, and mentoring. Teachers established an environment of trust and a safe space for students to express themselves openly and honestly. Relationships were the basis for engagement which promoted a close bond between teachers and students developed during the retreat and continued post-retreat. Teachers attributed the close relationship of the Year 12 cohort to the provision of time and space away together and the depth of shared emotional experiences. The role of alumni in sharing personal stories provided a model for students whereby students were challenged to reflect on these stories and consider how it might apply to them.

Existential Questions: Student reflection on values, morals and Christian principles was considered an essential element to character-building. This was undertaken with discussion and journal writing. Teachers became aware of students' limited skills in these areas and supported the reflection process by sharing personal stories and providing scaffolding for journal writing. Moreover, teachers observed that students preferred to speak rather than journal and share with individuals rather than with their group. Teachers referred to this as supportive reflection. Self-reflection included a letter to themselves expressing thoughts of the retreat, short-term and long-term goals.

Wellbeing: Affirmation sessions with honest, positive comments from student peers and letters from parents provided a boost to the students' wellbeing. The experience was an emotional experience for many with some students expressing themselves emotionally and openly. For some students, letters came from parents who had not been in contact with their son, and from parents who were deceased. Teachers spoke of the mechanism to support students emotionally in these instances.

Duration: While there was commentary on the retreat duration, in the main, teachers considered the retreat length of three days was appropriate and the content as comprehensive.

Post-Retreat: Teachers provided their post-retreat impressions on how they felt the retreat achieved its intended aims and objectives. The retreat was viewed in the form of a bubble, referencing to an artificial experience not replicated once back at school. To them the retreat was valuable, worthwhile, offered outstanding quality and uniqueness, and as such reinforced efforts made by the school to retain the experience within a crowded curriculum. Concerns were expressed as to the lack of post-retreat follow-up on student wellbeing and on aspects of the program. Teachers offered suggestions as to how the school might implement

further support once back at school. Teachers too, suggested the need for the retreat to be evaluated with a more formal process to include all staff.

Outcomes: Teachers viewed the retreat as positive. They noted and acknowledged the character traits of resilience and determination were linked to student academic studies and remarked on stronger relationships between students and teacher interactions. Retreat aims included the advancement of self-reflection and dialogue; communication with others; promotion of empathy, understanding and acceptance of others; and maturity to engage with the retreat program. Some teachers questioned the effectiveness of skills developed on the retreat being transferred to school, citing the need for routine for sustainability.

Overall, teachers confirmed the support of the school executive for the retreat.

The following chapter is the presentation of student data gathered during student interviews.

Chapter 6

Presentation of Student Data

As stated at the beginning of the previous chapter, the aim of the retreat is for boys to take time out from the busyness of life to reflect on who they are so as to develop personal skills that will equip them for their journey into manhood (see Appendix E). Student data reported in this chapter are in response to the research question:

In what ways do the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?

More specifically, data presented in this chapter incorporates the three categories of student perceptions of (1) the retreat program characteristics, (2) the retreat activities, and (3) post-retreat impressions.

6.1 Retreat Program Characteristics

Data gathered from student interviews examine how well the retreat was accepted by the students as an integral aspect of their schooling. Here, the consideration is that the effectiveness of the retreat in being able to achieve its desired aim and objectives is very dependent upon the students having a positive attitude towards its place within their Year 11 studies. To this end, this section will present data associated with the students' perceptions beginning with their views of some of the retreat's general characteristics followed by a discussion of some of their more personal perceptions.

6.1.1 *General Characteristics of the Retreat*

Students accepted that the teacher leaders established an environment of "trust which enabled a safe space for open, honest conversations without fear and judgement" (S. 5). Moreover, the students valued the safe and trusting environment of the retreat: "I definitely felt [safe]. My teacher and my leader were really helpful in first establishing that it was a safe environment—and we weren't going to get judged" (S. 6). This provided a level of trust to discuss matters openly: "I would say there was a sense of trust. Even though some of us had different views and stuff, I think there was definitely trust and respect" (S. 5). Students, including those new to the school, felt free to open up and discuss life's struggles. As Student 1 said, "I felt like I could be completely open with people, get deep. Talk about the struggles and then the good things and everything about my life and then hearing other people talk about their life as well" (S. 1).

The establishment of a safe and open retreat environment provided a platform for students to hold and engage in mature conversations. The expectation “to be mature and so have quality discussions” was commented on by Student 3. He observed that this was something that would not have been possible in a school setting, where he had “always felt that, in a school setting, boys weren’t particularly mature” (S. 3), or at another form of camp. Student 2 confirmed this view:

You could have open discussions about things that you might not discuss on a Year 8 camp. You could be open with everyone...

everyone having their own opinions and not having or not being judged in a certain way, because you mature, you respect other people’s perspective. (S. 2)

The safe environment enabled students to speak freely, share their personal stories, and to engage in deeper and more meaningful discussions surrounding the struggles they, and perhaps their peers, face. The concern about being judged by others was significant. They saw themselves “becoming more respectful...not just realising others’ views but accepting them. Not judging people based on them [the views]” (S. 5).

Developing the capacity to express themselves and engage in self-reflection was a key component of the retreat aim and objectives. Students also acknowledged the mentoring support of the teacher-leaders as being helpful as they guided students in activities, discussions, and journaling. Student 4 commented that a teacher’s contribution to discussions empowered students “to take initiative and do it ourselves” (S. 4). Students viewed the relationship with the teacher in this way as a mentor who “wasn’t necessarily instructing us, [but] was just there as a member of the group. I think that fostered leadership and fostered us being able to step up in the first place” (S. 3).

The student data provide an impression that most enjoyed the retreat. “I’m not a bloke who enjoys camps at all and I still enjoyed every moment of this camp. I thought the camp itself was fantastic” (S. 3). There was a sense the program provided balance between the activities, discussion, reflection, and free time. Similarly, Student 1 claimed that he “wouldn’t really change anything ‘cause I liked how you have your activities and then you’d also have your reflection times and then you have dinner where you could talk and also just having that free time playing basketball.” Student 4 furthered this point of balance and the breakdown of the program and the opportunity to self-reflect: “The way they broke it down was good having speakers and reflection time was good as well. It gave you time to think about what had gone on during the day. It was like your own personal debrief” (S. 4).

6.1.2 Relationships

An expected outcome of the retreat was the fostering and development of social and relationship skills (see Appendix E). The effectiveness of the retreat depended on the establishment of effective relationships not only between the teacher leaders and the retreatants but also amongst the retreatants. The programmed activities provided numerous opportunities for each student to bond with his peers whom he may have had little previous interaction with at school. Some group members shared classes; however, they were not friends. At the same time, the teacher-student relationships served to empower and support students into meaningful dialogue.

Data suggest that the retreat experience appeared to have some form of influence where year group colleagues gradually became friends. Student 6 noted, “For me I think, part of it was fostering connections with guys that I’d never really talked to before” (S. 6). While Student 4, who had established friends, and went into the camp with the view of that “I’ll just hang out with those two”, found he enjoyed the company of other boys in the group. He identified that this was due to school circumstances where “we hadn’t actually had time to get to know each other” (S. 4).

An objective of the retreat experience was to build maturity. Students valued the new level of relational engagement and, during discussions and activities, found unanticipated support from many of their peers, particularly as they opened up to share their personal stories. This was the case for Student 6 who said that “when it led to the serious stuff, you can open up to a group...when I found it hard, just – I felt a lot of our mates were – became really close and helped me and understood where I was” (S. 6). The fostering of friendships, connecting with peers, and maintaining the connection once back at school for Student 4 was apparent:

I reckon the most significant impact would have been the friendships made. The boys that I went on camp with, the ones that I was close with, I’m even closer with, and the ones that I didn’t know, I’m now pretty good friends with. If I need to talk to them, they’re always willing and that sort of thing. (S. 4)

Students who made new friendships on the retreat were eager to “strengthen those relationships outside of the camps and in the classroom” (S. 1).

With regard to the students’ thoughts about their relationship with the teacher leaders, there was a common belief that, at school, there is a hierarchical relationship between students and teachers which is evidenced in teacher’s authority and more directive relationships. However, during the retreat this seemed not to be the case. Students noted that

the retreat experience promoted managing relationship change. This, according to Student 5, was because they were “generally being treated as adults, which I enjoyed. I think it was one of the first times we had seen our teachers and our staff on a level plane” (S. 5).

6.1.3 *Values, Morals, Ethics and Spirituality*

6.1.3.1 Values and Decision-Making.

One of the retreat’s key objectives was to try to enhance the students’ capacity to make value-informed judgements and decisions. This was intended to focus each student’s attention more explicitly on the nature and importance of values-based moral behaviour based on a Christian perspective. For Student 5, the tangible experience of this aim was about “having me face up to what my values were, and sticking to them...and through the activities, I think I gained an insight on who I want to become” (S. 5). Similarly, Student 3 spoke of the significant influence the retreat experience had on his values, his discernment, and decision-making processes.

I think my skills in that area have actually grown quite a lot since [retreat] camp, and certainly partially as a result of the retreat camp in that it generates awareness, in quite an immense way, to be honest. I would argue the retreat actually played a reasonably substantial role in that the nature of the discourse on the camp put me in a position where I was really thinking about what I believed in and what kind of life I wanted to live, and especially what values that I wanted to establish in order to get to where I want to be going, because we were certainly considering the future quite a lot. And so, for me personally since then, in terms of discernment, it’s happened through the academic program itself. So, it’s actually been supported further within the schooling environment since then, with lots of exploration of philosophies and ways of thinking and forming arguments. (S. 3)

6.1.3.2 Enhancing Values Through Personal Stories.

Personal stories were considered by students as an important part of learning about values and morals. They found the array of personal stories provided not only by their peers but also by the teacher leaders to be helpful as they reflected on their own circumstances, values, and what is important to their self. Stories provided students with the opportunity to “empathise...and [be] caring about others” (S. 5). The extent of the difficult circumstances of others was not lost on Student 3. It was during such discussions that he came to “understand that everyone is not always in a perfect place, or in a situation, and understand some families really struggle”. It was something that he had not experienced, “so it was good, from that sense, that I got to understand that myself” (S. 3).

6.1.3.3 Values Reinforced Through Repetition of Activities.

An expected outcome of the retreat experienced is to foster the growth of integrity whereby personal decisions are based on socially responsible values, morals, and ethics. To this end, the element of repetition of activities was noted as being helpful to reinforce the acceptance of such values, morals and ethics. As reported by Student 3, “We were repeating all these skills in terms of group context and activities. I think that was really important. I think that breeds skill. Repetition tends to create habits and cycles that actually are continued beyond that” (S. 3). Student 2 explained that the repetition of activities during the retreat assisted him to “realise that treating everyone equally” and maintaining the basic social morals of “treating people the way you would want to be treated, those basic morals...were portrayed within the camp” (S. 2).

6.1.3.4 Spirituality.

An objective of the retreat experience was to positively engage with the concept of spirituality. Some students acknowledged the subtle influence of Christian perspectives when considering values and morals. Student 4, for example, “didn’t notice it at the time...it just subtly puts it into your brain and it’s actually pretty good” (S. 4). Student 3 stated that while some of the discussion about values and morals was congruent with Christianity, “they weren’t necessarily linked to Christianity until the last day”. He thought “the content and the ideas may be similar, but that directly was not strongly present throughout the camp” (S. 3). Similarly, Student 8, when reflecting on the purpose of the values and morals activities, noted the link with being “Christian-centred, but I honestly don’t know, because I didn’t think there was too much of it”. He acknowledged his group leader “didn’t want to propose it as like a sermon you get in church”, though at the end of conversations the teacher would “transition into ‘this is the Christian approach’” (S. 8). Student 2 proposed that the purpose of a Christian thread being subtly woven through the retreat program was to deter students from disengaging in the activities and discussions and considered this approach as a positive move. He added:

I think doing it the way that we did it, actually, is very positive in some ways, because people who aren’t necessarily Christian aren’t going to just shut off straight away. I think a lot of boys could just hear it under the guise of Christianity and then literally just switch off and go, “No, I’m not discussing this, I’m not connecting with this whatsoever,” and just be disenfranchised at the start of the conversation. I think the fact that we were talking about things that are congruent with Christianity, and are

related to it, and it's the same values and morals, I believe, without necessarily framing it in that manner, made it more accessible to the group as a whole. (S. 2)

Though it is acknowledged that values and morals are learnt from home, it was commented widely that the retreat activities helped students “face up to what my values are” (S. 5), to accept the realisation that “not everything is black and white” (S. 5) and that it is important to “step up, doing what's right and just caring for others” (S. 6). However, as Student 8 explained, “No, I wouldn't say [the retreat] really awoke anything, because most of this stuff is drilled into us from our early years” (S. 8).

6.1.4 *Self-Wellbeing*

One impetus for the establishment and continuation of this retreat experience for the Year 11 students at the case study school was a growing concern, acknowledged in research, for the wellbeing of adolescent male students. To this end, an important component of the retreat program was for the boys to spend time reflecting in order to identify, understand and accept who they are (see Appendix E). Thus, this sub-section provides data on student views of the affirmation sessions, the receiving and writing of letters, and the overall influence on their wellbeing. Key sub-themes of wellbeing described below are: self-revelation; giving appreciation to others; self-perception and perception of others; family affirmation; and promoting reciprocity in parent – son relationships.

It is noted that students observed the retreat experience had a positive influence on their outlook of themselves. Student 2 reported that “it opened different perspectives about what I have on myself” and spoke of being more mature in his view of engaging with people and the view of the world in general:

I suppose it unlocked a level of maturity and how I view the world now – treating people the way you would want to be treated, those basic morals. It helped me realise [about] treating everyone equally and just being open to all possibilities. (S. 2)

In addition, the affirmation session provided an opportunity for each boy in the group to make a positive statement about each other. Given the group members may not have known each other particularly well, it is conceivable that this may have been a challenge for some, and the comments may have been of a superficial nature.

I found it hard as there were a few quiet people in the group who none of the people knew – you can't make something up. ...I guessed we have some different outlooks on ourselves but then our mates and even people that we're not that close with, they had a positive outlook on us, and that's good to know. (S. 6)

Data suggest that the students enjoyed the affirmation session and found them to be illuminating. Student 3 considered that he “did definitely find an accuracy in stuff that I didn’t think that other people would pick up, necessarily”, which seemed to prompt his response that “the biggest thing for me, by far, was it just reshaped my perspectives about the other guys in my year and about how they perceived me” (S. 3). The affirmation session prompted and challenged students regarding deeper understanding of and empathy towards others. For Student 2, “it was more insights into the perspectives that others had of me and...I think in the context of helping me in everyday life, it really challenged my perspectives of the people around me” (S. 2).

Importantly, the receiving of letters from parents was a powerful affirmation moment of the retreat. Student 7 commented that “the letter, it’s your family – those things don’t really happen too often, so it was out of the blue” and an emotional experience for the boys. “[S]ome started tearing up, and it was just a big moment for some people” (S. 7). Letters expressed thoughts and emotions which may not be conveyed in daily life. Student 2 expressed surprise at his parents’ expression of love and pride in their letter to him:

I think it was a real eye-opener, and to see the way that they think of me, I would never have thought that they would have thought of me like that. Just how much they actually support you, how much they love you. I think that was quite a significant moment on the camp, which I really enjoyed. (S. 2)

For Student 3, however, the letter did not have the same dramatic emotional impact as it may have been for other students because it was “about stuff I already know...the dynamic with my parents is very much like that; they’d say all that stuff, many, many times before” (S. 3). The content of the letters was affirming and relayed messages of love. “I realised how loved I am by my parents,” said Student 1. For some students, the letter also relayed thoughts of praise and pride, as reported by Student 4:

One of the main things that mum and dad highlighted was how they’d seen how much I’d struggled with my back and how I’d come out the other side. That just helped me reflect on everything I’d been through. (S. 4)

In some instances, the letter contained expectations for the future, for example, “I guess it was just a letter from your parents telling – them – what, just what they think of you and what they hope for you to do” (S. 8).

An unexpected letter from a parent not part of a student’s daily life was both affirming but difficult for Student 6. The apparent lack of regular connection and interaction

with his father, contrasted with a letter that displayed care and concern, and triggered confusion in understanding the relationship he had with his father.

That was the hardest thing to experience...it's just everything to do with my dad, and then he's not really there...trying to understand my relationship with him...it's – I didn't think he cared about [me] much...so, yeah, and then the letter showed he did, I guess. (S. 6)

Some boys felt so affirmed that they wrote letters of appreciation and gratitude back to their parents. Student 1 explained:

I wrote a letter to both my mum and dad about what I was grateful for, for them. I really liked that because I hadn't really reflected on that much. And then, it was good just to name what I'm grateful for. And, coming home it was good, just thinking about that as I came home. (S. 1)

It was noteworthy that some students continue to refer to the parent letter post-retreat as a form of comfort and support when they are feeling down in spirit:

I still keep it, sometimes I read it. If I'm feeling a bit down, I'll read it and it's like a comfort thing to bring you back to reality. Even though you may be upset by something, there are still people around you that support you, people who love you. That's my main thing. (S. 2)

6.2 The Influence of the Retreat Activities

The inclusion of this category reinforces the retreat activities as being the vehicles of learning and, thereby, the dominant means by which the retreat's aim and objectives were to be realised. The effectiveness of the retreat, as expressed in the retreat aim and objectives (see Appendix E), largely depended on the success of the activities in engaging the students' hearts, minds and bodies. As well, the activities needed to capture the students' interest and be sufficiently stimulating and motivating so that the students would be open to listening to the accompanying messages as well as willing to consider and learn from them.

6.2.1 General Experiences

Students acknowledged the research retreat activities drew out a deeper understanding of themselves, and who they were in terms of self-awareness, confidence and maturity. According to Student 4, the activities “provided time to think about everything that's gone on. In that time, you just think about things that have held you back”. As an outcome, Student 4 came away with “a different attitude [in the way] you looked at things” (S. 4). Student 1 observed that through the team building activities he realised the value of perseverance

during the difficult times and “growing as a person, recognising your strengths and weaknesses and improving yourself from that” (S. 1).

Also, the students identified the team building exercises, which aimed to stimulate communication skills to engage with people they may not know, as important and valuable. Student 2 remarked, “You’re going to need communication, you’re going to need teamwork, you’re going to need being able to rationally make a judgement” (S. 2). This was particularly the case for the initial activity at the retreat site. The student’s role was to navigate and lead others. To achieve the end objective requires the group to bond and function as a team. This required the boys to communicate rationally with each other in the decision-making process for directions and finding solutions to incidents which may have occurred:

People had all forms of different ideas...had differing levels of motivation, and therefore, I think empathy came in as well. But the ability to communication [*sic*], rationalise your perspective, have empathy for the perspectives of others, it’s incredible just how much a simple activity like that was able to bring out. (S. 3)

A by-product of the team building activities was peers encouraging others in their group to ensure group members engaged in the activity:

If boys didn’t want to participate, they were really encouraged by the whole group, because there was a team environment. We didn’t want to let one person miss out, so we tried to encourage everyone to give it a go which we managed to do. (S. 2)

6.2.2 Discussion and Reflection Experiences

As previously mentioned, discussion, reflection, and sharing of personal stories were an important component of the retreat experience. Through open, honest, and mature conversation, students were able to empathise and gain deeper understanding of others, reflect on their situation, and the consideration of life’s values.

Data support the understanding that students enjoyed the discussion and reflection opportunities throughout the retreat experience. “I think we had discussion groups each night for about an hour or so and really had some time to think and talk and hear all [the] other people and it was really good,” said Student 1. To support students to commence contributing to discussions and reflection, at least in the initial stages of the retreat, “the [teacher] would start out with the booklet and then extrapolate off it almost, talking about their own experiences and then other boys would offer up their own experiences” (S. 8).

For Student 8, an important outcome from the retreat was the discussion and hearing what others had to say and experience. He said, “I think just...getting to hear what other people say as well, especially on the last night...the most memorable part of camp” (S. 8).

Students were surprised that others shared similar experiences. The statement of Student 3 that “I never thought [anyone] would have similar experiences to me” led to a greater “capacity for understanding and a maturity”. Throughout the discussions, peers provided a level of support to each other, particularly to students who were experiencing difficult times. “When it led to the serious stuff, you can open up to a group, and when I found it hard, I felt a lot of our mates were really close and helped me and understood where I was” (S. 6). The retreat regularly provided the opportunity to students to explore issues deeply and in so doing realise other students also have significant issues and concerns.

You dug a little bit deeper into it, all the guys, you can get out that you don’t really think about yourself and some of them other things. And, then you understand that a lot of guys actually have a lot of deeper issues...I do acknowledge that it’s probably a little bit harder in some families, their family struggles and then – yeah, it involves some deep things and that’s why they don’t talk about it. (S. 6)

Discussion sessions followed activities, usually with a focus on life values that linked into issues which are not often discussed openly:

We do, for example, kayaking as an activity, but then what they’d get us to think about afterwards would be relationships, or something like that, and then draw that link that wouldn’t immediately seem apparent, but then, upon reflecting on it, you realise some other things; more so, issues and activity...segue into thinking about these deeper issues that don’t usually get brought up. (S. 8)

Open and honest discussions, where there was no judgement, were valued by the students. “There was an air of honesty and I think that had many people respect each other more,” said Student 5. The level of trust established in this environment had a positive effect of a new level of respect towards and between peers. Student 3 remarked, “I think it really increased my respect of other people in the year. There was already respect there but it deepened it greatly” (S. 3).

The discussions were unexpectedly extensive and reflective. They dealt with difficult issues and struggles being experienced by the boys. “I felt like I could be completely open with people, get deep. Talk about the struggles and then the good things and everything about my life and then hearing other people talk about their life as well,” said Student 1. Moreover, the level of maturity of the boys demonstrated both in the approach to and depth of discussion was valued. Student 3 remarked that “boys have developed maturity, so you could

have open discussions. ...I think that expectation of maturity fostered a lot of maturity in the boys” (S. 3). For Student 6, the level of maturity brought a higher level of engagement in the discussions. “I felt when I was discussing things everyone was just listening, interested in what I was saying and not making a judgement” (S. 6).

However, some students were cautious about opening up in group sessions. Student 5 felt a degree of being forced and obligated to mention deeper matters – what they might consider confidential – and was uncomfortable in doing so. To this end some students were less inclined to become fully engaged.

I felt forced in that. I didn’t feel comfortable letting everything out about my life, so I sometimes felt pressured that I should really open up and I think there is a fine line between opening up to your camp members and your classmates and opening up to a medical professional. I think I opened up partially just in discussions and stuff. (S. 5)

The discussion sessions provided a forum where students were able to share insights into their own issues. This provided an avenue of support, empathy, and comfort to those who were facing challenges and difficulties in their life. Student 1 commented on the capacity and value of having open and honest conversations where he “could completely open up with people, get deep...talk about the struggles and then the good things” (S. 1). In his struggle to understand the relationship with his father (see section 6.1.4), Student 6 was comforted by the understanding, empathy, and support he was given from peers in his group, leading to his observation that “when it led to the serious stuff, you can open up to a group. ...I felt a lot of our mates were [sic] became really close and helped me and understood where I was” (S. 6).

The importance of reflection and discussion became more apparent to students as the retreat unfolded, as discussions and presentations touched on issues and topics of a deeper nature, and as the retreatants re-considered their initial responses to a given situation. As Student 1 said, “I think after a while, our reflection was important because just looking back on impulses and things you said in the moment and how if you think, it was more effective, like, something deeper”.

Student reflection and discussion formed a central component of the retreat. Each activity was followed with time to reflect on an aspect of the future. As an example, the activity of kayaking would be linked with relationships. This provided a stimulus for some students to use the retreat to facilitate forward thinking in life. “I guess, it was more...just a

focus on the future for me at the entire camp, just looking forward, what I hope to move into, occupation and stuff like that, that was the main takeaway” (S. 8).

The engagement with personal stories enabled students to gain a deeper understanding of each other. Each evening a significant period of time was set aside for groups to hear stories from each other, discuss and reflect on issues. The discussions were open, honest and far-reaching as students spoke openly of the struggles that were on their mind.

When I was in the discussion groups, I felt like I could be completely open with people, get deep. Talk about the struggles and then the good things and everything about my life and then hearing other people talk about their life as well. (S. 1)

However, some students found it difficult to open up on the things they were experiencing, particularly those who had fallen on hard times and whose parents were struggling. While “they talk about it, I do acknowledge that it’s probably a little bit harder for some families that their family struggles; it involves some deep things and that’s why they don’t talk about it” (S. 7). But, mostly, the students did enjoy hearing each other’s stories, “particularly if it was a life-problem others had experienced which they too were experiencing” (S. 2).

The experience of discussion and reflection was a widely beneficial source of support and inspiration, confidence, and self-esteem for students, particularly those who may have experienced some form of setback in their life.

In that time, you just think about things that have held you back, that sort of stuff, and provided with the mental strength to overcome those if you come across them again. You’ve thought about what’s held you back the first time, and it’s like, “If this happens again, I’ll be able to go through it,” that sort of thing. That was the main thing for me. (S. 4)

6.2.3 *Presentations*

Presentations provided an avenue for the students to reflect on their future, their career path, and issues they might face within society. Hence, the students’ perception of these presents an essential insight into the effectiveness of the retreat towards achieving its aim and objectives.

The general perspective of the presentation activities is echoed in the words of Student 4 who observed that the presentations followed by reflection time were “like your own personal debrief”. Student 8 claimed that the presentations were helpful in “finding what occupation you want to have in life but, in particular, talking about the issues within society...they encourage you to maybe go and consider your path rather than just going...for the usual path” (S. 8).

6.2.3.1 Alumni.

Arguably though, the most noted form of presentation amongst the students was that provided by members of the alumni. As previously described, selected members of well-known and respected alumni provided presentations to the students on a range of topics. Students acknowledged that the presentations were purposeful and, in some instances, pivotal in the process of student engagement with the consideration of their future directions. They found the lived experiences shared by the alumni who had faced challenges, and yet were prepared to pursue directions that may not have been considered the conventional career mode, were valuable and real.

You learnt that if you do well in school or not, you can pursue what you want. We don't have to follow all – everyone's – expectations and although he did really well in school and he was thinking he'll do well in life, he ended up going to the Northern Territory and helping out, and that's just what he wanted to do. Although he wasn't filling, maybe, his family expectations, or society's expectations, he was filling what he wanted to do. [He spoke of] the hardships and downs, but then after the hardships he really enjoys his life and that's what he does. (S. 6)

To some students this connectedness with the thoughts and views of the alumni brought on an immediate level of relevance, attention and focus to the presentation topic.

A famous and well-respected alumnus with a distinguished football career was someone I should pay attention to...what he's done is relevant to me...inspiring me to do my best...and make me realise how far I have come by my perseverance. (S. 4)

The role modelling of the alumni was a form of inspiration for Student 1, who responded that “just seeing where they went after school and their morals...then challenges they experienced working outside your boundaries...that kind of influenced me” (S. 1). Another student noted that, for him, alumni discussion on issues within society “...was pretty relevant...that encouraged you to look into and encourage you to maybe go and consider in your path [of character development]” (S. 8).

6.2.4 *Relationship-Building*

Data from student interviews highlighted the fostering of friendships and the development of strong relationship with peers were important and prominent influences of the retreat experience. Students remarked on the retreat's positive influence on their relationship with others and, in many instances, the friendships developed on the retreat remained once back at school. Regarding outcomes of the retreat, Student 6 attributed the development of stronger relationships between peers in his group to the ongoing “experience

with the boys – we had a lot of sit downs and just talked about our life and hardships and all that, I guess” (S. 6). These were students whom he knew but had classified as those “you don’t necessarily hang out with...at school” (S. 6). Student 2 added simply: “fostering connections with guys that I’d never really talked to before”. He did not offer an explanation as to why he might not have mixed with them at school; however, he did confirm the relationships “still continue, you still mix with people” and “there is still that depth of connection, that depth of discussion” (S. 2).

6.2.4.1 Student Grouping and Relationship-Building.

The formation of designated retreat groups extended the relationship-building opportunities upon the students as the groups were deliberately not friendship-based. While many students in these groups remained friends following the retreat, this was not the case for all students. When asked during the interview if he is still connected with students in his group, Student 5 responded, “Not in the same way – maybe more than before the camp but not as much as on the camp”. This was also acknowledged by some students who spoke about the “forced” connections in the formation of groups and the activities, and a level of “forced” contribution to discussions. In some instances, the discontinuance of the friendships once they returned to school could be attributed to this. Student 5 presented the view that the relationship-building developed during the retreat, while it remained there, once he had returned to school, the situation was not quite the same.

I think...because we were all split up from our friends for the camp...so [that] in that time, because we were forced to be there, it was “make the most of it.” But now that we’re back in regular school it’s not really talked about a lot. (S. 5)

6.2.4.2 Student – Teacher Relationship

The perceived nature of the retreat’s relationship between the students and the teacher leaders is also an important consideration. Data support the view that a strong interpersonal connection between student and teacher leaders was an outcome of the retreat experience. It has been noted in Chapter 5, and reaffirmed here, that the relationship between students and teachers moved from one of perceived power imbalance in the teacher’s favour to a more equitable relationship, more of a mentor and colleague, something students appreciated and valued. Student 5 observed:

The transition between Year 11 and Year 12, including that camp, that social environment has consistently stayed on a level plane where teachers are more colleagues where you can speak openly and your school mates as well. There is less

[sic] of these barriers about what you say and do. It's more about all your thoughts and in the moment and how to respect new ideas for what they are, rather than who's saying it. (S. 5)

Similarly, Student 8 spoke in general terms of a stronger connection with teachers, saying "I guess, the connectability with teachers, I guess potentially may have increased a bit" (S. 8). Student 5 was more specific in his closer connection with his teachers. He spoke of feeling comfortable to speak openly during discussions acknowledging, "I was more comfortable with some of my teachers because I could talk openly to them" (S. 5).

6.2.5 Journaling

The students' retreat handbook included journal pages (see Appendix E) which described ethical life situations, value statements and human feeling words, and were viewed "as a good source of information" where students were able to "learn from it" (S. 6). The journal was seen as a private document, "something that you kept to yourself because it wasn't something you'd share. It was your secrets and your internal thoughts that you don't want anyone knowing, you just write it down and keep it to yourself" (S. 7).

Student responses to the use of the journal were mixed. Some retreatants, including Student 3, valued the journaling experience and found it helpful. Student 3 "did lots of writing" and wanted to do more writing to the point where, when he "found he did not have the opportunity to write", he was able to commit to memory what was important to him, saying the "oral reflection was still really useful and I could still remember the things, even now" (S. 3). However, Student 6, who viewed journaling as feeling "more like homework," responded with the view that "conversations were more important and were more effective [than journaling]". While Student 6 may have preferred not to write in the journal he did view the journal as "a good source of information...which was needed in some sense...it had some questions that were useful in it" (S. 6). Although some students may have viewed journaling as somewhat laborious, others valued the journaling experience and found it helpful.

[Journaling] was good because you could look back on what you'd done during the day as well. Sometimes, by the end of the night, you'd be forgetting specific things of what had happened, but then you could go through and remember just by reading afterwards what you'd written. (S. 4)

Whether the journal was deemed to be useful or not, the boys noted they still had the journal "in my bedroom somewhere" (S. 4), and this is referred to from time to time. Those who do not still have the journal wished they did have it so they could refer to it and go over what notes they may have recorded. As Student 7 remarked, "I wish I had just been able to

find it and look over it, because I'd soon forgotten some of the things with time and just to go over and read it, that'd be interesting".

6.3 Post-Retreat Student Reflections

This final category of student data provides a viewpoint of the lasting impression gained by the students following the retreat. Data associated with these lasting impressions are provided through the six subheadings: general beliefs and attitudes; character building; values, morals and decision-making; relationships and interpersonal skills; life-skills; and overall impressions.

6.3.1 *General Beliefs and Attitudes*

Overall, students identified the environment of the retreat as an opportunity to escape "from school and homework, away from technology...just throw everything out of routine and just go through this really relaxing, calm environment" (S. 8). It was a place to socialise, balanced with fun where "you weren't always thinking about the serious stuff, but then when it led to the serious stuff, [where] you can open up to your group" (S. 7). The environment had a role to play in relaxing the boys, as noted by Student 5 who remarked, "I think isolating in nature was helpful in just relaxing and letting your guard down". "With the tone set by the teachers" (S. 1), the retreat became a "safe environment" (S. 8) where there was "an air of honesty, a sense of trust...even though some of us had different views. Becoming more respectful...not just realising other views but accepting them and not judging people based on them" (S. 5). Student 5 furthered this point, noting his enjoyment of the experience of being able to speak his mind without fear of judgement.

Student 3 commented that the environment provided a unique opportunity to engage in wider learning in ways not encountered in a school setting:

I keep harping on about it, but I think that if you produce an environment like that where there are opportunities to do things that are reasonably far away from what we do on a day-to-day basis, then there is absolutely the opportunity for learning to occur that doesn't normally occur. There was [*sic*] opportunities for broad learning in ways that aren't normally facilitated, especially through a school environment. (S. 3)

The retreat experience was considered by some as a turning point in their attitude towards studies. Student 4 described how, following the retreat, he adopted a far more diligent approach to his schoolwork and that this "change of mentality in general...has probably made me more open-minded to certain things" (S. 4). Student 6, when asked during the interview on the matter of change following the retreat confirmed he had started viewing life differently as a result of the retreat and the change had continued back at school.

However, not all students were of the view the retreat influenced change. Student 8 said, “I didn’t think a whole lot changed for me.” Rather, following the retreat and returning to school it was “back to normal” (S. 8).

6.3.2 Character-Building

Most students presented a positive view of the retreat’s influence on their character qualities as they “try to be a better person” (S. 7). Students referred to the development of character skills including respect, empathy, and understanding developed during the retreat experience. “Just becoming more respectful. Just not just realising others’ views but accepting them. Not judging people based on them” was noted by Student 5. From the retreat experience, Student 2 acknowledged he gained the building of his character to assist the preparation for Year 12 and for the future:

I guess it was building us, helping us develop our character...preparing us for, not only Year 12, but after school, what things we may experience, how to react when we may experience them and just overall preparation for life after school. I think that’s what I got out of it. (S. 2)

Other students, including Student 7, commented that the retreat experience enabled them to gain the understanding of acceptance and to understand the concerns others may be enduring. The capacity for acceptance that “not everyone is perfect” that “everyone is different, and just being careful with people as they manage their struggles [because we don’t know] what the other people are going through” is how Student 7 described it. Furthermore, some students considered acceptance as involving having a deeper understanding of self first so as to be more able to accept the situation of others.

Other more specific data associated with character building qualities influenced by the retreat were provided, inclusive of: respect, perseverance, resilience, and maturity.

6.3.2.1 Respect.

Students identified respect as an important quality in character building. This included respect for confidentiality, active and respectful listening to others without judgement, respectful acceptance that each person is different and that no-one is perfect. Student 2 felt he learnt skills necessary for “being respectful of how they [other students] view things” and was able to draw this into the context of everyday life and, as he said, “it really challenged my perspectives of the people around me”. This view was shared by Student 5 who described how the challenge during the retreat to “become a better person” led to his understanding of “a new kind of respect among people”. Student 5 considered that the level of honesty in the retreat’s discussions “had many people respect each other more.” It was more than hearing

the views of others, rather, it was “realising others’ views but accepting them, and not judging people based on their views” (S. 5).

The level of respect between students, whether they remained friends with group members or not, persisted. “Coming together and bonding over and trying to become a better person...led to creating a new kind of respect among people,” commented Student 5. Students grew to value “working with people who you may not necessarily want to work with, but also just being respectful of how they view things” (S. 2). For Student 2, this became a useful skill and is evident in a practical way in his dealing with people at his part-time work.

6.3.2.2 Perseverance.

Presentations, particularly those of the alumni, provided a form of mentoring and inspiration for students in developing a positive attitude towards their learning and goal-setting. “I believe it helped in that aspect, but I think in the future, driving to a goal, I think the camp reinforced that. You should work hard in order to fulfil your goals in any way you can” (S. 5). The comments from Student 1 reveal that the retreat inspired him, and he found himself:

[J]ust taking it a bit more seriously and really spending time – persevering through the increased workload as I progressed from Year 10 to Year 11. The workload’s heavier...just persevering through and I saw results from hard work. (S. 1)

This sentiment appeared to resonate with other students. Student 4 noted his realisation that drifting through school is not a tangible option. The retreat “has made me realise that this time is pretty important in my life, and I have to buckle down now” (S. 4).

Students spoke of teacher motivation to use the skills and experiences gained on the retreat to better equip them for the final years of school and life beyond. This was described by Student 1, who remarked, “The teachers just talked about how we can use the stuff we learnt in [the retreat] camp in the classroom and also outside the school gates in our wider life”, and Student 5 noted that the camp activities included exercises to develop skills to break down obstacles “into small achievable portions...so you could find [manageable] solutions to overcome in order to reach your goal”. Hence, Student 5 spoke of the emerging skill of perseverance in his response to a situation, or obstacle, breaking the obstacle into smaller, manageable and achievable portions, “rather than just facing it as a massive wall, [turning it into] something you can actually manage” (S. 5).

6.3.2.3 Resilience.

Data from student interviews identified resilience in a variety of forms. Discussions and activities to address obstacles and how to break down those obstacles into small manageable portions were welcomed by students. The point was to see that obstacles are simply problems to be dealt with, as noted by Student 5, by “visualising and condensing them into actual obstacles that you could find solutions to overcome in order to reach your goal. Just to grasp it rather than just facing it as a massive wall, something you can actually manage” (S. 5).

Importantly, students felt the outdoor education school camps they had attended in younger years assisted the development of their resilience; however, this particular retreat experience had added another dimension on resilience. Student 3 observed:

Leading into the retreat, I think personally I had a greater level of resilience, having gone on outdoor educational camps, on many promotional camps. This had developed my resilience. However, after being on the retreat, I think working with other people and maybe not always, you know, getting the objective that you want to achieve, that resilience has definitely changed, which I think will lead into everyday life and in the workplace as well. (S. 3)

Important to Student 2 was the grasping of resilience through discussion, reflection, hearing and sharing of personal stories:

Learning from difficult things and a discussion of difficult things create a sense of empathy and understanding amongst the group, such that we’re tackling major issues and realising how common and universal they are. I think that solidarity creates resilience and a capacity to communicate problems that are occurring. (S. 2)

For Student 2, support for each other promoted resilience for all, in particular, the person who was undergoing difficulties:

So, I think you’re a lot more resilient if you’re going through something difficult, but you know that it’s something that is near universal, or you know that your mates have experienced it before or there are people that experience it on a common basis. So, I think that solidarity certainly provides a very strong element of resilience more than anything else. (S. 2)

Also, Student 2 spoke of stronger channels of communication as a form of enhancement of resilience:

Especially as young men who often receive messages about being quite closed off, I think that enhancing communication provides much better resilience, because there is

an opportunity for people to be supported. You feel a lot more connected to other people when you're going through stuff. When you're more aware of the issues that face all of us. (S. 2)

In contrast, Student 4 realised the need for “mental strength” if he were to continue to embrace the physical challenges, be resilient and maintain perseverance. This mental strength would be an important part of his journey if he was to aspire to and continue with his sporting future. “You’ve thought about what’s held you back the first time, and it’s like, ‘If this happens again, I’ll be able to go through it,’ that sort of thing. That was the main thing for me” (S. 4).

6.3.2.4 Maturity.

Activities and discussions of challenging issues brought to the fore challenges the boys were experiencing in their daily life and prompted their realisation that they were not alone in sharing the experiences. This guided students towards a deeper understanding and empathy with others.

I think it’s emotional maturity, mental maturity. Because we did talk about some tough issues and at the end, we got our letter from our parents about how they wanted us to grow up to be and that was a big shock to everyone and that affected people in different ways obviously, because of the different messages that they were given. I think it came down to maturity and how open you were. If you were closed off and you were hit that hard I think it would just break you rather than if you were open enough to welcome any conflicting ideas to your own, you could take them up. (S. 5)

Moreover, this growth in maturation, the concept of stepping up to a more advanced approach of the students to themselves, towards others, to their studies and attitude of life was identified post-retreat by students to be transferred into action. Student 3 identified that the retreat experience had provided him with a personal sense of increased maturity which had assisted him to “reshape my perspectives about the other guys in my year” (S. 3). For Student 2, the retreat, particularly the presentations and personal stories:

Unlocked a level of maturity and how I view the world now. To hear other people’s stories, we had guest speakers that came in and talked to us about life experiences, and it was just nice to hear if other people have experienced, say, a life problem, how they dealt with it. It felt like you were just in a real supportive environment. It helped me mature myself a little bit more. (S. 2)

Student 2 stated that the enhanced understanding of himself formed by the retreat had

furthered his understanding of the notion of maturity, but he found difficulty in separating the influence of the retreat from the natural maturation process.

I would say it becomes quite difficult to separate out natural progression and maturity versus ‘the retreat camp facilitated X, Y, Z changes within the student base’.

Although, I would certainly argue that there was a noticeable difference after the retreat in the way that I looked at my peers, and I noticed people behaving [in] a different way. I would say the retreat camp’s certainly facilitated a maturation, and that certainly occurred within the student base. It’s very noticeable how different people are now from how they were prior to the retreat camp. (S. 2)

Student 2 expanded on the level of trust and respect experienced during the retreat with the added view that a high level of maturity assisted with the level of respect and growth of maturity “because you could be open with everyone... everyone having their own opinions and not having or not being judged in a certain way, because you mature, you respect other people’s perspective” (S. 2).

6.3.3 Values, Morals and Decision-Making

The retreat experience provided an opportunity to reinforce values, morals and ethics. Student 6, when discussing values and discernment and what it meant to him to be a “better person”, expressed the view it was one of understanding and accepting the need for “doing what’s right and knowing that [when] it’s wrong...doing the right thing by others” (S. 6). Notably, the values identified in the stories of the alumni surrounding life’s challenges, and the ethics, morals and values employed to determine the decisions and future direction of life, appeared to have the most influence. Student 8 said, “Some of the ones [ethics issues] they brought up were obviously immoral or wrong, which would be under the values of society...they would be influenced by your values” (S. 8). Through their stories, the alumni presenters conveyed that these same values were employed by them in their decision-making for their purpose in life:

They did mention that there is [*sic*]some turns along the path, towards finding what occupation and stuff you want to have in life, but in particular, talking about the issues within society, some issues that they encourage you to look into and encourage you to maybe go and consider in your path rather than just going for the usual path. (S. 8)

Students considered they shaped, rather than developed, skills surrounding discernment and decision-making based on the values they held. As Student 5 remarked, “I myself, didn’t get a lot of the morals or the values, because I already believe that I have it

[sic]. It [the retreat] just reinforced them”. While students maintained that the values and morals explored on the retreat were more of an extension of those already developed, the claim was also made that the values expounded during the retreat highlighted the need to be continually reflecting on “the different values and morals that you seek to take on in your own life in your actions” (S. 8). Student 5 indicated, since returning to school that:

I still, in my own personal life, try and treat everyone with the same respect but I treat them the same. [I]f they were in my group or without, they’re in my group. I still try and think about some of these values, and I do definitely want to live up to them. (S. 5)

For some like Student 2, the activities associated with decision-making based on values, moral judgement and ethics continued to be made after the retreat:

Treating people the way you would want to be treated, those basic morals, which were portrayed within the camp. It did still influence me. It helped me realise that treating everyone equally and just being open to all possibilities [is good]. (S. 2)

However, not all students shared the view the retreat experience enhanced their discernment and decision-making skills. “Before I went onto [retreat] camp, I feel like my decision-making skills were already pretty good. I don’t think going on the retreat further greatedened my decision-making skills” (S. 2).

6.3.4 Relationships and Interpersonal Skills

A common thread during the retreat was the development of friendships. Students from a range of backgrounds and experiences attended the retreat. Many were not aware of the situation of the others. The sharing of personal stories was used to assist students to understand and have empathy for other students. Student 6 acknowledged that, as an outcome of the retreat experience, he gained some understanding of the difficulties and challenges experienced by others. He attempted to continue to understand, value and appreciate their challenges once back at school through care in his dealing with others.

Some families really struggle to send them [students] here, and that’s really hard, with all their problems to understand. Just understanding what’s going on, that everyone is different and just being careful and people managing the struggles the other people are going through. (S. 6)

Similarly, Student 3 commented that the activities of the retreat assisted him to develop skills in engaging and working with others: “It helped me build the skill of working with people who I might not always work with...particularly when working with people who might share different opinions” (S. 3). For Student 1 it was the skill of developing new

friends. “It was good to develop friendships – on that camp – ‘cause I didn’t really know anyone too well before the camp, being new to the school” (S. 1).

A key part of the relationship-building aspect of the retreat focused on communication skills:

Whilst on the retreat there were many skills that I developed, but I think the main one was my communication skills. Working with other people who you might not always work with, I think those skills would transfer into everyday life, especially outside of school. (S. 2)

Furthermore, some students reinforced the importance of this focus. Student 4 spoke of his shyness or lack of confidence prior to the retreat in engaging in impromptu conversation with people at a gathering. An outcome of the retreat experience was that he felt he was more confident to engage with people and cited as an example his experience of a student professional development day with another school which occurred post-retreat. “I was like, ‘Well, it’s just a chance to meet more people,’ whereas normally I would have gone, ‘This sucks. I don’t know anyone.’” (S. 4).

Students also commented on the need, in the development of good communication skills, to be open-minded, curious, sensitive in listening to the discussion of others, and to be considerate and understanding of their feelings and circumstances. Sensitive sharing of reactions and feelings about what others are saying and experiencing was noted. Student 2 spoke of skills gained to communicate with peers at school and successfully transfer these skills into the workplace. He explained:

I have a job. I work at a [retail] shop; there’s a lot of mix there, there’s a lot of people who you could say are quite strange at times. The skills that I learnt from them [students on camp], from the retreat, helped me put them into real-life situation, and help me deal with certain things, I guess. (S. 2)

Opportunities throughout the retreat program were provided for students to express themselves and share their concerns with peers and teachers. Student 1 noted, “coming into a new school this year...just being able to express myself and talk to people” was one of the expectations of the retreat. The sharing and expressing of emotions were more evident in the affirmation sessions, discussions and the receiving of letters from parents. Students welcomed the engagement in deep discussion which prompted the comment from Student 3, that:

[H]ey, we don’t necessarily talk about these concerns - very often, we don’t talk about these emotions or these fears or anything like that, but when we did, it was fascinating

how many people shared experiences that they might not necessarily talk about. (S. 3)

6.3.5 Life Skills

Awareness of skills gained from the retreat experience and transferred to school and life post-retreat emerged from the gathered data:

I think [skills practised on the retreat are] preparing us for, not only Year 12, but after school; what things we may experience, how to react when we may experience them and just overall preparation for life after school. I think that's what I got out of it. (S. 2)

Student 2 further explained that these essential life skills of “communication, relationships, rationalising one's perspective and hav[ing] empathy for the perspective of others are fundamental, and need to continue to be developed after the retreat” (S. 2).

The skills transferred from the retreat experience included being organised and more focused at school. As an example, Student 4 stated that as an outcome of the retreat, he decided to give priority to schooling, as referenced in section 6.3.2.2.

Another skill transferred was in gaining of confidence, enabling students to engage in conversation with peers and people they do not know. Student 4 (see section 6.3.4) explained he became more confident to engage with students of another school at a students' professional development day some months following the retreat.

However, the impression that the retreat had provided essential life skills was not universally held. For example, Student 8 claimed that he “didn't really get any personal skills out of it” (S. 8). Similarly, Student 5 held the view that many of the skills had already been developed:

I don't believe I learnt skills on that camp that could be adapted to my everyday life. I'm not sure if that was because of my preconception or I have been taught things before, but no. Not on the camp. (S. 5)

But Student 5 did concede that perhaps the camp assisted in honing rather than developing when he added:

I think the camp was a way to use those skills that I had already established, and I needed to develop them, like the connectedness and the skills of acceptance and stuff like that, but no, I don't think I learnt anything. (S. 5)

6.3.6 Overall Impression

The student data provide varying views on the question surrounding the overall level of influence of the retreat. A generic interview question was asked of the participating students relating any influence and change they may have observed as a result of the retreat

experience. This question prompted a breadth of responses indicating some change and skills the student had gathered during the retreat experience. Responses identified respect, values, connectability, relationships, and discernment in decision-making and personal life. Some students considered whether the influence of the retreat continued past the retreat. Student 6 stated that the retreat experience assisted him not so much at school as in his life outside of school because “[there were] not really changes in the playground at school, [but it] maybe helped me outside school” (S. 6). Student 2 cited respect and connections with others as elements that he maintained post-retreat. “It wasn’t a bubble; it still continues, you still mix with people” (S. 2). Student 3 observed, “I think the effects of the camp continue to be realised in the individual but not as much in a collective experience and as a group experience. I don’t think there’s all that much discussion around it.”

The response from Student 5 indicated a level of influence from the retreat experience when he acknowledged that key areas explored during the retreat remain relevant in his personal life. While he thought the retreat experience “did not influence my life at school...[o]r in everyday life” and that his statement “I don’t think I had a moment of realisation that I was a better man, and I don’t believe it directly made me a better man” is true, elements of these character traits explored during the retreat remained in his thoughts. This became evident when speaking of values and respect for others. Student 5 said that he does “try and treat everyone with the same respect but I[‘d] treat them the same if they were in my group or without, they’re in my group” (S. 5). For Student 8 the only change of note was “the connectability with teachers may have increased a bit, but not necessarily so”.

However, some students referred to the retreat experience as “definitely a three-day bubble” (S. 6) as there was no organised follow-up sessions with students following the retreat. Student 8 voiced the view that once back at school, the lack of process and follow-up may have been a missed opportunity to further strengthen aspects of the retreat experience. He commented:

Well, it was a little bit abrupt in the way that you’d come back to school and then two weeks afterwards, you disappear for three days and then go and do this thing, but then it didn’t necessarily correlate onwards. (S. 8)

Student 5 was direct in his summation of the retreat experience in terms of what he had not gained from the experience. “To be honest, I didn’t get a lot out of the retreat in general. Once the camp was done it was like a memory” (S. 5). He commented that once back at school, the openness and honesty established with groups during the camp were lost with some students drifting from their friends made while on camp:

I think just because we were all split up from our friends for the camp and...because we were forced to be there, it was “make the most of it.” But now that we’re back in regular school it’s not really talked about a lot. (S. 5)

6.4 Conclusion

The presentation of student data drew upon the three categories of student perception: retreat program characteristics; influence of retreat activities; and post-retreat student impressions. Data from these perceptions are summarised in accordance with the criteria identified in retreat documentation as being integral to the overall process. Student data indicated a positive response towards the retreat experience. Central elements of the data were themes of character, values and morals, relationship development, self-wellbeing, discussion and reflection, journaling, resilience, maturity, skills-development, and the overall impression of the retreat experience.

Character: Students acknowledged the retreat had an influence on character which they could apply to everyday life. The retreat provided a deeper understanding of themselves and others; with characteristics of self-awareness, confidence, maturity, respectful listening to others, and respect for confidentiality being developed. In addition, skills of communication, relationships, empathy, respect, acceptance of self and of others were advanced, as were behaviours of perseverance and resilience. Significant to character development was the sharing of personal stories and discussions which promoted a deeper understanding of the needs and issues of others and provided a platform for empathy and accepting the views and situation of others.

Values and morals: Students’ retreat experience was an opportunity to explore and confirm their values. Socially accepted values and the Christian view, linked with discernment and decision-making, were explored through discussion, presentations, and storytelling by peers, teachers, and alumni.

Relationship development: Students noted that friendships fostered between peers, and student–teacher relationships continued for many once back at school. They contended that the building of these relationships assisted with the effectiveness of activities and discussions.

Self-wellbeing: Affirmation sessions and parent letters provided an up-lift to student wellbeing and self-esteem. For many students, receiving letters from parents affirming and relaying messages of love, was an emotional experience.

Discussion and reflection: Opportunities for students to express themselves and to share with peers and teachers were valued. Students came to realise they were not alone, that

their peers also had struggles and similar personal situations and formed a level of support for each other. Opening up and sharing in this way brought a level of honesty and increased respect between peers.

Journaling: For many students, journaling their thoughts did not come naturally, and as such, there was a mixed response by students to the process. Some found it helpful, while other students preferred to discuss their thoughts with peers and teachers.

Resilience: Students grasped the concept of resilience through reflection about personal stories. Students spoke of strong channels of communication as an enhancement to reflection.

Maturity: Students commented on their growth in maturity from deep conversations, discussions and reflection. They spoke of this maturity being transferred to their attitude towards school and to life in general, and how it reshaped their perceptions towards their peers and how they viewed the world.

Skills-development: Students spoke of the essential skills of communication, rationalising one's perspective, relational and interpersonal skills. These skills were integral in both their sharing of and reactions to feelings about what others are saying and experiencing. Contrasts were provided in relation to shyness and lack of confidence prior to the retreat.

Overall impression and outcome: Students observed some change in their character and in their development of skills. However, some students indicated that while the retreat did not make them a better person, the retreat was relevant. Notably, these students saw the retreat as a three-day bubble, particularly with the lack of follow-up sessions post-retreat.

Overall, these student data indicate a positive perception of the retreat experience. There were, however, comments related to post-retreat follow-up which will have implications for a wider discussion in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7

Discussion of New Understandings

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school from the perspective of documentary expectations and the perceptions of students and staff who attended this retreat.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the new understandings generated from the analysis of data and the relationship with relevant literature. Six synthesised themes are identified from the data in terms of their alignment with the purpose of the research and the sources from which they are drawn. They are: Christian principles; values, morals, and ethics; character-building; wellbeing; retreat enablers; and retreat outcomes (see Table 7.1). The main research question guiding this research is:

In what ways do the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?

The following research objectives supported this research question:

1. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of Christian principles.
2. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of values, morals, and ethics.
3. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of character-building.
4. Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives aligned with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of wellbeing.
5. Investigate if the retreat outcomes informed new understandings and insights into the retreat enabling factors.
6. Investigate if the intended retreat outcomes informed new insights into retreat outcomes.

Table 7.1 summarises the specific research objective for each theme providing a link for the sources of each new understanding.

Table 7.1*Alignment of Intended Retreat Aim and Objectives with Experience of Students and Staff*

Specific research objective	Sources of new understandings	Themes for discussion
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of Christian principles	5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 5.5.2-3, 5.6-7, 6.1.3, 6.3.3, 6.4.	Christian principles
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of values, morals, and ethics.	5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.4.4, 5.5.1, 5.5.4-6, 5.6-7, 6.1.1-5, 6.2.1-4, 6.1.3-5, 6.2.1-4, 6.3.2, 6.3.2.3-4, 6.3.4-5, 6.4.	Values, morals, ethics
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of character-building	5.4, 5.5, 5.5.1-2, 5.5.2, 5.5.4-6, 5.6, 5.7, 6.1, 6.1.1-4, 6.2.1-2, 6.2.2, 6.3.1-2, 6.3.2-3, 6.3.2.1, 6.3.3, 6.3.4-5, 6.3.2, 6.3.2.4, 6.4.	Character-building
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of wellbeing	5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.4.4, 5.5.1, 5.5.4-6, 5.6-7, 6.1.1-2, 6.1.3-5, 6.2.1-4, 6.3.2-3, 6.3.4-5, 6.3.2.3-4, 6.3.4-5, 6.4.	Wellbeing
Investigate if the intended retreat outcomes inform new insights into retreat enabling factors.	5.1-4, 5.5.1, 5.5.4, 5.5.6, 5.6-7, 6.1.1, 6.1.3-4, 6.2, 6.2.1-2, 6.2.2-4, 6.3.1, 6.3.2.1, 6.3.2.3, 6.3.4-6, 6.4.	Retreat enablers
Investigate if the intended retreat outcomes inform new insights into retreat outcomes	5.1-4, 5.5.1, 5.5.4, 5.5.6, 5.6-7, 6.1.1, 6.1.3-4, 6.2, 6.2.1-2, 6.2.2-4, 6.3.1, 6.3.2.1, 6.3.2.3, 6.3.4-6, 6.4.	Retreat outcomes

7.2 Christian Principles

The case study school is a faith-based school in the Anglican tradition. The mission of Anglican schools is to foster in each student a commitment to a life guided by Christian principles (Cameron, 2005; Sherman, 2013). This commitment to Christian principles is expressed explicitly in the case study school's mission statement, which includes the desire

that each of its students “lives according to the Christ-like virtues of humility, perseverance, courage and love of others” with an “authentic and transformative Christian faith, with emphasis on growth in character” (see Appendices B and C). In line with these principles, the retreat program expressed the view of promoting a “Christian understanding of the world and society in which we live” (see Appendix D).

Table 7.2

Christian Principles

Specific research objective	Sources of new understandings	Theme for discussion
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants’ and retreat staff’s experience of Christian principles	5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 5.5.2-3, 5.6-7, 6.1.3, 6.3.3, 6.4	Christian principles

The following sub-section will discuss the theme of Christian principles by drawing on literature, including school documentation relevant to the retreat, teacher and student impressions of their commitment to Christian principles and beliefs at the retreat, and analysis of retreat expectations. Two issues emerge from this theme: adjustment of the retreat program to meet variable student commitment to Christian convictions; and teacher preparation to lead the spiritual component of the retreat experience.

7.2.1 *Adjustment of the Retreat Program to Meet Variable Student Commitment to Christian principles*

This issue considers the adjustment of the retreat program to meet the unique religious circumstances of retreatants and the subtle nature of the delivery of the Christian message. Literature identifies that there is a gradual shift away from the traditional form of religion and spirituality, including rituals, experienced by adolescent and parents in Christian churches (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Rossiter, 2018; Tacey, 2003). Despite this shift, people still consider themselves as spiritual and the concept of spirituality rather than religiosity is adopted by many (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Foster, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Mason, 2007; Rolheiser, 1999). This shift in thought and practice is also reflected in the younger generation (Mason, 2007), and is specifically significant in the life of the adolescent (Conn, 2009; Rolheiser, 1999).

Within the context of varying shifts for adults and adolescents from religion to spirituality, and with an appreciation of variable convictions to the practice of a faith, an

objective of the retreat experience was “to build a boy’s spirituality” (see Appendix D). As such, the general assumption that was applied in the retreat was that the experience was to nurture the development of students’ spirituality, something not easily addressed in the classroom environment (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Also, the shift towards a spiritual dimension for the retreat experience was an attempt to cater for the presence amongst the retreatants of multiple faiths and levels of faith experience (Hughes, 2007, 2016a; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009), together with a concern for potential student disengagement from the retreat experience if it were to be seen as being too Christian-focused (Rossiter, 2016).

Addressing the diversity of beliefs and the integration of the beliefs within a spiritual frame of reference among retreatants proved challenging to the retreat leaders as they attempted to develop the retreat curriculum. The retreat leaders were aware that students were at “all sorts of different stages in the faith journey” (T. 5). Teacher 5 explained: “We show the boys in many ways, this is the default that we’re offering. This is something to fall back on. This is your moral compass. These are your values that are shared by the school.” For Teacher 5, it is the school’s way to “get the boys to carry that [spiritual] flame through into the future as well”. In this light, the importance of Christian principles was emphasised.

A common teacher impression in regard to the commitment to Christian principles and beliefs during the retreat was that, while acceptance of the strategy of weaving Christian perspectives into the retreat was evident, there existed contrasting considerations as to its extent and focus. For example, some teachers spoke of delivering the retreat program with an “unashamedly...Christian moral view” (T. 5). Teacher 1 asserted that “faith was integrated throughout [the retreat]...it was just part of the camp.” For Teacher 2, the retreat program was presented and prepared by retreat leaders from an evangelical Christian standpoint. “When you have those values-based discussions...they are espousing a particularly Christian viewpoint and I think they see their role as evangelical”. Teacher 2 suggested that “so much of the program is undergirded with Christian values and reflection without them [the retreatants] even realising”.

Overall, the response by teachers to the Christian emphasis of the retreat indicated a general acceptance of the component and left open the question of the extent to which it is integrated. Teacher 3 stated:

I think most [students were] pretty accepting of it. I think if they had their choice they'd say ‘Well, why do we have to [reflect on Christianity]? Let’s do something

else'. But I think that they understand and try to couch it because we're a Christian school. (T. 3)

This seemingly hesitant approach by the retreat leaders to deal directly with the question of Christianity led to a more practical and subtle engagement with Christianity through a focus on spirituality. While the response may be considered an attempt to ensure engagement in the retreat activities by students with varying levels of faith, concern lies in the potential to dilute the Christian message for those who are Christian. However, teachers believed that students engaged actively in discussions about, and reflection on, their values in a spiritual context, as noted by Teacher 5: "I think you see a level of genuine reflection". By engaging with spirituality in this way, the retreat leadership were assured they had achieved the objectives of the retreat.

While teachers considered the retreat to have had a strong Christian focus, students did not necessarily hold the same view. Students regarded the focus on Christianity as not overtly referencing Christianity, rather, that the reference to Christianity was linked with values regarded as acceptable in society. As Student 1 explained:

I think for the first few days it was more just working on morals and I don't think that was necessarily related to Christianity. But, in the third day, when we talked about Christianity, that was – we got to learn about some of the morals in Christianity which could also just relate to every-day morals. (S. 1).

Indeed, for Student 2, so subtle was the engagement with Christian principles that it was not until the final presentation that there existed any realisation by him that the retreat possessed a faith basis. "I didn't really see it [the retreat] as more of a Christian thing" (S. 2). The response to the question as to whether there was a strong Christian component to the retreat program suggested there was the potential for this, however, ethical deliberations on values could be applied to any social norm. As Student 8 pointed out:

Yes it could be, for example, in the booklet. All the morals were all fairly Christian-centred, but then again, the morals and ethics of society are fairly Christian-centred, so directly it should be an influence to [*sic*] Christianity, I honestly don't know, because I didn't think there was too much of it (S. 8).

However, some students held a contrasting view. These students expressed an appreciation of the significance of the Christian principles during the retreat. Student 4 acknowledged the subtle focus of the values and Christianity throughout the retreat and shared his appreciation of the care with which teachers and retreat leaders had dealt with the sensitive issue of Christianity:

It wasn't evident, but it was always kind of there. You'd sit down, our leaders and stuff wouldn't force it upon us, but they'd drop it in every now and then, different verses and relevance to the bible and that sort of thing. You don't really notice it at the time, but it's just looking back on it you do. (S. 4)

Student 8 also added that the teacher leading his group provided some direction with the Christian perspective in the discussion of values and ethical dilemmas. The approach by the teacher, however, was more sotto voce:

[The teacher would] not propose it as like a sermon you get in church – [the teacher] wanted it more as like a blank page – you can say what you want, and then towards the end, transition into, this is the Christian approach. (S. 8)

Considering the range of student responses, the approach taken by the retreat leaders to embed Christianity and associated values subtly into each activity was successful and appreciated. As Student 4 remarked, the “super-subtle the way they did it on camp – it was pretty good, I found”. Mindful that the retreat experience is part of a larger, whole and integrated curriculum, there is the potential for this approach towards Christianity to be viewed as both too subtle and a missed opportunity to deal directly with issues of faith.

The issue in question surrounds the emphasis in the retreat's spiritual and Christian dimension where Christian principles of spirituality are unsighted by the retreatant. Christian education would be considered to be an integral part of the school curriculum and not be considered as an add-on experience in the life of a school. In this light, consideration might be given to the relationship between spirituality and Christianity, potentially favouring a more holistic approach specifically relating to values and morals. Moreover, consideration, too, may be given to the integration of the retreat's content into the school's broader spiritual curriculum, to the preparation of students leading into the retreat, and the process of ongoing post-retreat follow-up.

7.2.2 Teacher Preparation to Lead the Spiritual Component of the Retreat Experience

What is evident in the student data as to the students' experiences of, and engagement with, Christian principles is the significant role of the retreat teachers and leaders. As seen in the data above, the students often judged the quality of their experiences in terms of how these teachers and leaders presented these experiences. This raises the question as to how well-prepared these teachers and leaders were to fulfil this pivotal role.

Although, historically, retreats were led by staff, mostly from a Religious congregation and trained to lead and deliver the retreat curriculum (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016), this is rarely evident in contemporary times. In her study of Catholic

communities, (Gowdie, 2017) noted the decline of religious membership and, consequently, most retreats are now being led by teachers who voluntarily offer their service or who are deemed suitable by school administrators and subsequently allocated the responsibility. With either form of appointment, the challenge exists for school leaders to ensure that the retreat teacher leaders are sufficiently prepared to maintain the identity and integrity of the Christian message as expected within the goals and parameters of the retreat.

The responsibilities of retreat teachers include acting as mentors (Collins, 1999) and agents for students for exploring deeper spiritual aspects of the Christian faith and biblical scholarship (Palmer, 1999, 2018), and are likely to require practical faith experiences (Sultmann & Brown, 2019). It is noted that the teachers leading the researched retreat were mainly the senior students' housemasters and pastoral care staff. Selection and appointment were based on "staff who we think would be the right match" (T. 5). They were not purposely trained to lead the retreat: As Teacher 5 remarked, "We're not at a stage where we send staff off to professional development activities....we've got knowledge amongst the staff about what does and doesn't work". That is, while the teachers leading the retreat were committed to the philosophy of the Christian school, they were not trained in ethical or spiritual direction.

A challenge for the retreat leadership is the nomination and engagement of personnel with skills and resources to provide a response which is in keeping with the mission of the school. Sultmann and Brown (2019) draw attention to the connection of school mission and teacher activity, and the significance of the relationship of school purpose with teacher endeavour. The case is made that the achievement of mission is dependent upon teacher practice and that in the instance of the retreat, formation for those who conducted it was more centred on good will than appropriate formation.

7.2.3 Summary

Christian principles were a central theme of the retreat program. Acknowledging the varying level of Christian conviction of the retreatants, adjustment was made to the Christian nature of the program. Teachers considered the Christian and spiritual element of the program included Christian principles, thus meeting the aim and objects of the retreat. Students, however, considered the Christian content as subtle and not explicit to the point where some students were not cognisant that themes of Christianity were being discussed. The diminished level of explicit engagement with Christianity may have been a missed opportunity to deal with faith issues more directly. A challenge for the retreat leadership is the nomination and engagement of personnel with skills and resources to respond to student

questions that invite a religious or spiritual response in keeping with the aspirations of the school's mission.

Emerging from the discussion was the acknowledgement that teacher preparation and training are pivotal to ensuring the identity and integrity of the Christian message as students explore deeper spiritual aspects of the Christian faith and / or are drawn into discussion as to religion and spirituality more generally. Within this diverse context are the values and morals which guide discernment, judgement, and decision-making. To nurture a Christian-influenced outlook for these young men places an onus on the school to support and inform them in values and morals based on Christian values. The following section explores this aspect of the retreat's program.

7.3 Values, Morals and Ethics

An important aim of the retreat was to work with students as they reflect on the integrity of their values, morals and ethics (see Appendices D and E), coupled with the decisions they make based on their values and morals (Kohlberg, 1981). Schools have the opportunity to affect the formation of values and morals (Education Council, 2019; Fullan, 2005) which influence students' discernment, judgement and decision-making capacity (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Freeman, 2011). The significance of these characteristics is reinforced in the national goals of education as set out in the *Mparntwe* Declaration (Education Council, 2019) which advances the notion that "education plays a vital role in promoting...morals, spiritual development and well-being of young Australians" (p. 3). This Declaration, articulated within Goal 2, establishes the priority for adolescents to "act with moral and ethical integrity" (p. 5). These expectations are reflected in the mission statement of the school within which the retreat program took place and are discussed in the sections of Chapters 5 and 6 shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3

Values, Morals and Ethics: Audit of Origins of New Understandings from Chapters 5 and 6

Specific research objective	Sources of new understandings	Theme for discussion
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of values, morals, and ethics	5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.4.4, 5.5.1, 5.5.4-6, 5.6-7, 6.1.1-5, 6.2.1-4, 6.1.3-5, 6.2.1-4, 6.3.2, 6.3.2.3-4, 6.3.4-5, 6.4	Values, morals, ethics

The discussion with students of values, morals and ethics is closely linked to the Christian principles that underpin the purpose of the school that conducted the retreat. Typically, schools operating from a faith-based perspective have applied a retreat experience to encourage student exploration of values, morals and ethics, as well as spirituality within a faith tradition (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016). During the retreat in question, the students used core Christian and human values identified in the program booklet to link their personal values and the values reflected on after each retreat activity. As noted by Student 1, “We would sit down and reflect on that and what core values we’d been exploring during the day[’s] activities and that was good”. Personal reflection as to one’s values and morals requires an understanding of self (Branson, 2007) and depth in such self-knowledge leads to understanding, acceptance and application of preferred values which, in turn, is reflected in one’s character (Branson, 2007). In short, the deliberate application of preferred values manifests relevant thoughts, actions, judgements and, ultimately, ethical outcomes (Avolio et al., 2004). Ethical outcomes emerge from decisions based on moral judgement (Kohlberg, 1981). From a Christian school’s perspective, the ethical standpoint and enacted values are based on Christian principles enunciated in the mission statement (see Appendix B) and espoused in the retreat program handbook (see Appendices D and E) and during the retreat experience.

Gaining depth of self-knowledge requires discernment and self-reflection. The retreat experience provided the opportunity for students to explore, reflect, and self-evaluate (Bandura, 1997). From a Christian perspective, the retreat program provided the stimulus of the Psalmist text “search me to know my heart” (see Appendices D and E) for students to reflect on their personal values and integrity. The challenge is to be true to self by making the choice that leads to self-fulfilment and self-realisation (Branson, 2007).

A desired outcome of the retreat was to help each student have the capacity to see the essential action, as Student 6 did, of “just, stepping up first of all, doing what’s right and just caring about others”. In this light, the retreat experience provided the necessary environment to foster ethical discernment and the decision-making processes of the retreatants. The boys “realised that mistakes are necessary to move forward in life...crossroads...making a decision and not knowing whether it’s the right one or not” (T. 1).

7.3.1 *Reinforcement of Values, Morals and Ethics Developed at Home*

This issue addresses the interface of the home and the values explored within the retreat. Although the retreat discussions explored a blend of accepted values and morals through a Christian lens (see section 5.5.3), it is accepted that values and morals are

traditionally developed at an early age and in the parental home (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Harris & Moran, 1998; van Bockern, 2006). Moreover, as values and morals continue to be developed during adolescence (Catalano et al., 2004; Kohlberg, 1981; Komosa-Hawkins, 2012), schools become more relevant in this process (Education Council, 2019; Fullan, 2005). Values and morals were, as Student 2 explained, “things we learnt on [the retreat, which] I had already learnt from parents, from my family”. To this end, for students, the retreat experience did not develop their values and morals, rather “just broadening them, strengthening the morals that I hold” (S. 2), and for some students, the retreat functioned as a reminder, provided an avenue for them and “just reinforced them [values]” (S. 5) which they had learnt previously.

Teachers noted the responsiveness of students in the discussions of values and morals as open, honest and frank. “It was just a raw, honest discussion about their lives” (T. 1). The engagement of students in this way, without judgement about the views of others, was considered an important component of the discussion of values and morals. Such discussions assisted in building the platform for students to further reflect on “who they want to be” (T. 2). Student 5 commented, “Through the activities I think I gained an insight on who I want to become.” Noted in Chapter 5, this approach to engage students in the discussion of values, morals and ethics “is something the camp does quite well” (T. 2).

While it is difficult to assess the long-term success of the influence on values and ethics from the retreat experience, Teacher 4 noted the positive shift following the retreat of students’ ethical decisions surrounding the submission of work for assessment in their academic studies as “there are far less [*sic*] boys being caught for academic malpractice post-retreat than pre-retreat” (see section 5.1.1). Notwithstanding, Teacher 4 offered potential explanations to this change as being due to maturation or the possibility of penalties. However, it could be argued that this example of adjustment to student ethics underlines the possibility that the Christian principles explored during the retreat had been accepted and acted upon and the intended retreat outcome of character-building was supported.

7.3.2 Summary

Discussions about values, morals and ethics were linked with Christian principles. At the completion of each program activity, students were encouraged to reflect on certain values pertaining to that activity so as to discern appropriate and ethical decisions more deeply. Retreatants considered their morals and values were taught in the parental home and the retreat provided an opportunity to hone, expand and explore their values. Teachers observed that students held a core set of values which they applied in their decision-making.

Teachers noted a positive shift following the retreat in students' ethical responses to decision-making, including presentation of school assignments.

Arguably, an additional benefit from the retreat's focus on values, morals and ethics was its presumed essential contribution to the character development of each retreatant. Articles presented on the school website with a focus on character education speak of building good men and note the theme of the journey to building a man, including the characteristics of resilience, values, respect, and integrity (see Appendix F). Thus, further exploration of this character-building component of the retreat follows.

7.4 Character-Building

The concept of character-building, "growing the man or building the man" (see Appendices D and E), was integral to the retreat program. Themes of character-building are formally explored in the earlier years of schooling, thereby providing a grounding for the retreat experience as a significant pastoral extension of established educational initiatives. Furthermore, these essential elements align closely with the school mission statement and the retreat aim, objectives, and outcomes (see Appendix D). The mission of the school is to "build and strengthen character...to influence how they [the students] think and act when faced with challenging situations that will confront them as they moved into manhood" (see Appendix B). Importantly, this aspect of the school mission also embraces the Christian principles to "live according to the Christ-like virtues of humility, perseverance, courage and love of others" (see Appendices B and C).

Within the structural confines of this chapter, only those character-building qualities identified by students and teachers: maturity, resilience, empathy, and respect will be discussed along with a number of issues identified within each characteristic trait. The audited data gained through interviews address new understandings, summary of which are placed at the commencement of the discussion of each character trait. The first of these summaries, which is aligned with character building, is Table 7.4.

Table 7.4*Character: Audit of Origins of New Understandings from Chapters 5 and 6*

Specific research objective	New understandings from Chapters 5 and 6	Issues for discussion	Theme
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants' and retreat staff experience of Character-building	5.4, 5.5.1-2, 5.5.4, 5.6 6.1.1-2, 6.1.4, 6.2.1-2, 6.3.1-2, 6.3.2, 6.3.2.4, 6.4	Maturity	Character-building
	5.4, 5.5.1, 5.5.2, 5.6, 6.3.2.2, 6.3.2.3, 6.3.3, 6.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience • Coping mechanism • Emotional strategic support • Mentoring 	
	5.4, 5.5.1, 5.5.4, 5.6, 6.2.2, 6.3.4-5, 6.3.5, 6.4	Empathy	
	5.4, 5.5.6, 5.7, 6.3.2.1, 6.4	Respect	

7.4.1 Promotion of Character-Building

The promotion of character-building in educational institutions has been the source of extensive scholarship. The studies of Berkowitz and Bier (2004), and Freeman (2011) observed that the construction of human character was closely linked with values, morals and ethics. In addition, Flynn and Mok (2002), Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) suggest that a focus on the qualities of resilience, determination, perseverance, and inclusiveness encourage a desire to be a better person and a better citizen. Brought together, the qualities of character and maturity are regarded by Berkowitz and Bier (2004) and Freeman (2011) as influencing social skills, moral reasoning, self-efficacy, self-esteem, formation of decision-making capacity, and academic motivation and aspiration.

Within the time-limited constraints of this retreat experience, the retreat teachers drew on discussion, sharing of personal stories, and other retreat activities and experiences (see Appendix D) to enable the retreatants to advance character-building. Through anecdotes, the sharing of personal stories and directed discussions, students expressed their concerns, angst, adversity, and the personal dilemmas they were experiencing in their life. Such exploration invited a level of maturity to appreciate, value, and even accept and engage with such open, honest discussion. In this regard, the retreat provided opportunities for students to build or advance attitudes and skills underpinning character.

7.4.2 Maturity

The studies of Berkowitz and Bier (2004), Bond (2016), (Freeman, 2011) and Kohlberg (1981) demonstrated the development and significance of student maturity, evidenced in outlook on life and decision making, as central components to the building of character. This principle of supporting student growth of character, including maturity, is acknowledged by school leaders as a responsibility of the school (Laursen, 2004; van Bockern, 2006). As a response to this principle, schools explore and employ a variety of ways to support the growth of the whole person. The retreat experience is an example of one educational initiative in this regard. The discussion of new understandings of maturity and the character growth of students engaged in the retreat experience involves four issues: school commitment to the development of character and maturity; scaffolding and mentoring maturity; trajectories of maturation, short-term and long-term influences; and self-reflection on maturity.

7.4.2.1 School Commitment to the Development of Character and Maturity.

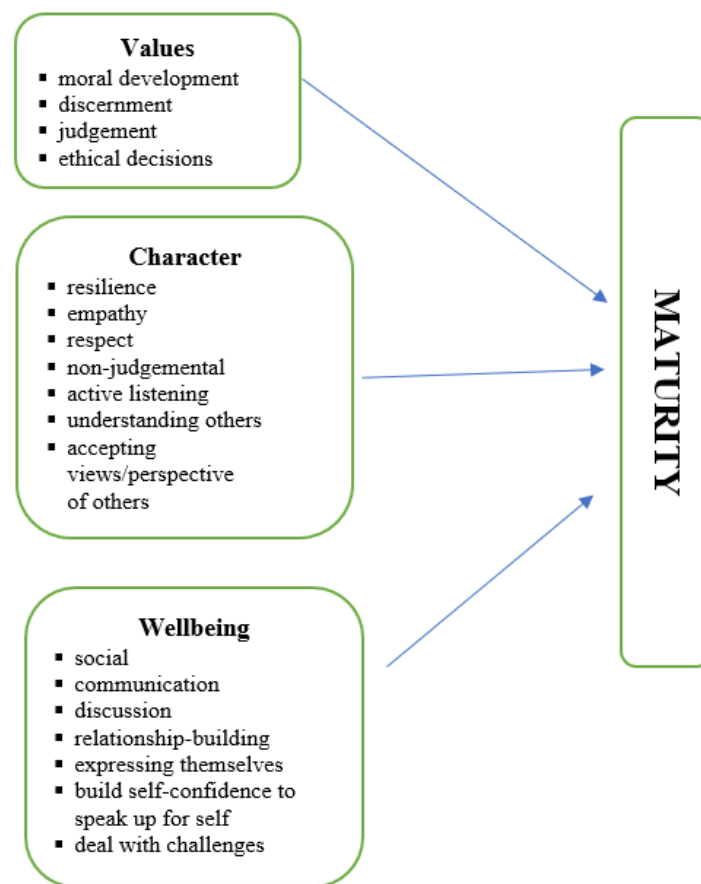
In line with the school mission statement (see Appendix B), the development of maturity was a key objective of the retreat experience (see Appendix D) and a core component identified in research literature (see (Engebretson, 2003; Flynn, 1993; Rossiter, 2016)). The collective view of students and teachers was that this objective was realised. Teachers acknowledged the expectation of the retreat as “we want them to step up into the manhood” (T. 3). Students, too, were also cognisant of this expectation of and engagement in activities “to be mature and so have quality discussions” (S. 3). Indeed, Student 4 attributed his positive impression of the retreat experience to the level of maturity with which he approached and engaged in activities with an open mind. “It showed me if I go into things with a more open mind, the possibilities are endless” (S. 4).

It is acknowledged that, in this research, maturity is a function of the interaction of values, character, and wellbeing, all of which emerged within the data as significant. A graphical display of the multiple facets of maturity which emerged from the data and presented in section 6.3.2 is seen in Figure 7.1. This acknowledgement of maturity articulated by students and teachers is in keeping with the findings of Flynn and Mok (2002), Hughes (2007), Tullio (2009), and Rossiter (2016) all of which highlighted similar attributes for the maturing adolescent. As noted by Student 2, “You could have open discussions...not being judged...because you mature, you respect other people’s perspective”. He discovered that the retreat experience assisted him to “unlock a level of maturity and how I view the world now...to understand that people may not have the same thoughts as you”, and in keeping

“with a Christian perspective of the world in which we live” (see Appendix B). Student 3 supported this view and signalled the value he experienced with the opportunity for students to express their ideas without being judged when he said: “It really challenged my perspectives of the people around me”. The challenge for the school is to continue to build on the experienced growth expressed in Figure 7.1

Figure 7.1

Maturity Elements Emerging From the Retreat Experience



7.4.2.2 Scaffolding and Mentoring Maturity.

This issue surrounds the level of support for student growth in maturity prior to, during, and post-retreat.

Students within the school setting are offered support in the form of mentoring through pastoral care programs. The effort correlates with the research of Dubois et al. (2011) and Grossman et al. (2012) which reinforced a level of scaffolding and mentoring to support maturation during the stage of adolescence. Such scaffolding supports decision-making and moral judgement (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Bond, 2016; Freeman, 2011; Kohlberg, 1981; van

Bockern, 2006). In similar terms, during the retreat experience itself, students were provided with a scaffold of support and mentoring by their teachers, peers, and presenters.

In addition, attention turns to the ongoing pastoral support and mentoring of students on their return to school. It was established in sections 5.1.2 and 5.3.1 that while teachers leading each retreat group might have had a pastoral background, they may not have direct pastoral engagement with students in their group once back at school. While this scenario may or may not impede the maturation experienced during the retreat, the question remains about the level of connectedness between the retreat experience and life back at school. Attention also turns to the pastoral teachers who have not had the opportunity to engage in the retreat experience or do not have a background in the purpose of the retreat. A further question arises as to what measures are undertaken by the school to support such teachers.

7.4.2.3 Trajectories of Maturation—Short-Term and Long-Term Influences.

This issue considers the short-term and long-term influence of the retreat on the maturation of the retreatants.

When teachers were pressed on whether the observed increased level of maturity was a response to the intervention of the retreat experience or from natural aging, Teacher 4 responded, “I can’t answer that”. As growth of maturity is an ongoing process, this level of uncertainty is understandable. The retreat is a three-day experience and while students may have experienced a shift in their approach to activities, discussions, and reflections with a heightened level of maturity, the question remains as to whether there exists short-term or long-term change.

Teacher 4 spoke of the short-term and long-term influences of the retreat in terms of student attitudes of respect, discernment and decision-making, empathy and relationships, and student attitude to studies. With reference to short-term maturational characteristics, Teacher 4 confirmed that “in terms of the boys understanding what stepping up into manhood looks like”, this was met during the retreat experience. However, while teachers noted a growing maturity amongst students, they commented that this characteristic was more evident in the months that followed the experience. In regard to long-term maturity and on the contribution to character-building, Teacher 4 believed that students were still processing the concept of what it means to step up into manhood six months post-retreat, responding, “to be honest they are not there yet”.

Teachers commented on student maturation post-retreat in terms of trajectories and in the context of the busyness of their school life. Teacher 2 presented the view that the retreat is for adolescents who are still “finding their feet” in understanding who they are as “they’re

teenage boys...they're kids" (T. 2). It would be expected there would be different trajectories of growth in maturity. Indeed, Teacher 5, in commenting on the level of maturity and character growth, recognised that post-retreat there "would be some plateau...[and] whilst the trajectories [of maturity and character growth] might be different, I say the universal trend would be upwards". Teacher 2 also noted fluctuations in student maturity where at times students displayed maturity and then reverted, to their old immature mature ways. However, data indicate that, on the whole, an increased level of maturity was evident post-retreat.

7.4.2.4 Self-Reflection on Maturity.

Teachers indicated that student self-reflection played an important part in the retreatants' character-building as it "aids that maturing process [toward] maturity" as noted by Teacher 4, who added that the depth of self-reflection "can't really happen without it [maturity]". As noted in section 6.3.2.4, retreat activities inclusive of self-reflection, discussions of tough issues, and letters from parents evoked an unexpected awakening of emotional and mental maturity. Along with teachers, students were also conscious of the importance of self-reflection as a support for maturation. Student 8 posited that the lack of maturity and a "closed-off mind" would make the discussions "...hard. I think it would just break you", and by way of contrast, a mature approach, with an open mind would enable the student to "take up...any conflicting ideas to your own" (S. 8).

While teachers noted a growing maturity amongst students during the retreat, this characteristic was more evident for students in the months that followed the retreat experience. Teacher 2 attributed this to continuing processes of self-reflection. Teacher 2 observed how students could "[think] back and draw on things of the retreat that cause the change in attitude to school changing in terms of realising that this is all about me". Notwithstanding this capacity, students entered the retreat with limited reflection skills. It is posited that the development of student maturity through self-reflection would have been enhanced with a previously established capacity to reflect soundly. As noted in section 7.3, the school has an opportunity to assist students with ongoing training in engagement with reflection skills.

7.4.3 Resilience

Resilience, perseverance and determination, the capacity to endure pressure and recover quickly from difficulties, are considered important character-building qualities as students navigate their journey into manhood (Laursen, 2004; van Bockern, 2006) with perseverance considered as a Christ-like virtue (see Appendix B). Students are directed to the

Christian response during issues of uncertainty and concern as referenced in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Him who gives me strength” (see Appendices D and E).

The building of retreatants’ resilience skills was one of the desired outcomes of the retreat experience (see Appendix D). Student data confirmed that the retreat experience realised the objective of assisting boys in their development of resilience. The sub-themes emerging from the student and teacher understandings identified in Chapters 5 and 6 for discussion in this section are: understanding the value of resilience; resilience coping mechanisms and skills; shared personal stories providing emotional and strategic support for building resilience; mentoring student resilience; and the links between resilience and wellbeing.

7.4.3.1 Understanding the Value of Strong Resilience.

The work of Foster (2006), McLaughlin (2005), and Smith (2004) identified that the growing social pressure placed on adolescents has the potential to impact their decision-making. Schools have accepted responsibility to respond to this perceived pressure and to guide adolescents in their decision-making to support their maturation into adulthood (Laursen, 2004; van Bockern, 2006). Such a response is considered fundamental to Christian principles of faith-based schools (Cameron, 2005). In support of this general outcome, Masten (2014) argues that many adolescents require help in becoming more resilient as they experience some form of anxiety, pain, stress, and trauma within the day-to-day challenges of life and learning. This may arise from parent separation, sporting injury, concerns with friendship groups, peer dynamics, academic progress, and a death in the family. In this light, the retreat program enabled students to reflect on the potential pressure they were experiencing in their life and the range and nature of resilience skills to support them on their journey.

Boys were provided with a number of experiences which may not be termed as skill-building yet were important outcomes from the retreat for their personal development of resilience. Importantly, the sharing of personal stories was deemed to be a beneficial support to increasing adolescent resilience.

7.4.3.2 Resilience Coping Mechanisms and Skills.

As noted in sections 5.5.1 and 6.3.2.3, skills relating to resilience were developed through practical activities, presentations, reflection, and discussion. They were linked with students’ personal lives, aspirations for sporting achievement, and academic endeavour. Listening to the personal experiences and life journey shared by the alumni, noted in sections 5.3 and 6.2.3, enabled students to reflect on the character quality of resilience and the rewards and positive effects on self-esteem and wellbeing for not giving up. As Student 4 explained:

It was just nice to hear someone's journey who has similar interests and how he started off in Year 7, was in the bottom footy team and was a chubby little fat kid, running around, and turned out to be one of the best rugby players to leave the school. (S. 4)

Teacher 4 referenced the initial activity of crossing the river under poor weather conditions and arriving well away from the designated location as an example of learning how to be resilient. As well, Teacher 4 also raised the likelihood that building resilience was also associated with the development of problem-solving skills as students attempted to break down the macro-issues relating to their personal anxieties. This created positive solutions and collaborative team-building opportunities as they maintained a friendly and positive attitude to working through the problems as both a collective and a cohesive group.

Presentations and discussions conveyed to the students the mechanisms and skills to address problems by breaking seemingly difficult obstacles into smaller, manageable portions "rather than facing a massive wall...something you can actually manage" (S. 5). For Student 5, noted in section 5.5.1, it was "visualising and condensing them [problems] into actual obstacles that you could find solutions to overcome in order to reach your goal". Considering and completing large, seemingly insurmountable obstacles in this way was a positive influence on wellbeing and the building of character.

The personal narratives that emerged from retreat discussions revealed that students had deeply personal concerns associated with academic uncertainty and anxiety, sporting injuries or not being selected in a team, and other far more personal matters. Each student in his own way demonstrated the need for resilience. The retreat provided a forum for students to explore and express their concerns openly, and from this experience they had the opportunity to develop coping mechanisms and resilience skills. As Student 6 explained, the retreat experience enabled all participants to gain an understanding of "the concerns others may be enduring...how they manage their struggles".

7.4.3.3 Shared Personal Stories Providing Emotional and Strategic Support for Building Resilience.

Students found informal methods of sharing and communicating their personal narratives highly beneficial. Sharing in this way became an avenue for them to explore coping mechanisms and resilience skills that would assist them in the short term and into the future. Students gained a deeper understanding of others, and consequently themselves. "It was more insights into the perspectives that others had of me and...I think in the context of helping me in everyday life" (S. 2).

Through sharing personal stories, students became aware that they were not alone with personal concerns. From this realisation, students also benefited by developing and sharing their coping methods and mechanisms (Lee et al., 2013; Werner, 2005) and adaptive skills to address adversity (Lee et al., 2013; Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017). This became important as the sharing of personal stories fostered a deeper bond and engagement through processes of disclosure. In this way, the retreat experience provided a resource and a source for personal empowerment. This outcome highlighted an unintended benefit from enhancing the skill of resilience. “Tackling major issues and realising how common and universal they are...I think that solidarity creates resilience and a capacity to communicate problems that are occurring” commented Student 3. The focus on resilience supported both personal and social development.

Resilience was also a factor that emerged with parent communications. Support and encouragement from the parents of Student 4 assisted his capacity and drive for increased resilience, as referenced in section 6.1.4. This level of encouragement provided the necessary support to empower and prepare him for the future (see also Komosa-Hawkins (2012).

There are other, more personal, experiences which students recounted during the interviews where they drew on mechanisms to cope with their concerns. For instance, the relationship with his father confused Student 7 and he drew on the support of his friends and peers. “[J]ust everything to do with my dad, and then he’s not really there... I don’t think he cared about much....My dad, it does affect me, and I think some boys do understand that”. In a similar way, Student 3 viewed sharing with peers as an opportunity to provide each other with positive support in gaining resilience “if you’re going through something difficult...something that is near universal...or that your mates have experienced it before”. Thus, the realisation for the retreatants was the potential to reduce the level of anxiety when the group own the concern collectively. It is posited that such a process lifts the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the individual and the group as a whole. This goes to the quality of the process in which the activity is developed, and the skill of the teacher displayed. Thus, the subtlety and power of the process on student development is appreciated.

7.4.3.4 Mentoring Student Resilience.

This issue addresses the engagement of teachers to support students in their discussion and reflection on resilience.

The retreat data provided an insight into the ways by which the teachers endeavoured to mentor the development of resilience in the retreatants. This is a phenomenon identified in the literature as retreat teachers taking on the role of mentors by reinforcing coping strategies

and competencies with students as they reflected on and discussed issues pertinent to them (Lee et al., 2013; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

Teacher 5 spoke of the need to provide students with the necessary skills to support them in school and wider life:

We talk about things like resilience - things like grit, determination. We have this whole range of words for them...make those linkages both to school and academics, but also more broadly to life. The approach of the camp is to give the boys those skills for life, but do we talk to them about things like with the idea of resilience. Not giving up. Certainly, we do talk about the skills that we're hoping the boys are considering, how they might be employed in the future. (T. 5)

Teacher 1 reflected on the approach taken where the retreat group was "like I was in a little family. There was a lot of leading of discussion and drawing the boys into the discussion". Teacher 1 also spoke of these discussions as being "just honest, and there was no over-embellishment of anything. It was just a raw, honest discussion about their lives". This level of care assisted in building the degree of resilience as noted by Wood and Mayo-Wilson (2012) and McGregor et al. (2017) who identified the relational aspect of the development of self-reflection and resilience through self-awareness. Building resilience is central to the development of adolescent maturity. As such, the need to maintain support of students post-retreat is understandable and desirable.

7.4.3.5 The Links Between Resilience and Wellbeing.

While student wellbeing is discussed in section 7.5, it is appropriate to reference here the link with resilience, self-efficacy, and wellbeing (Lee et al., 2013; Masten, 2014; Sherman, 2013; Werner, 2005). Student 4 attributed his resilience in working through his issues with a back injury to his positive wellbeing. Other students commented on the benefits of being resilient in their school and everyday life. Student 1 spoke of resilience and its effects on schoolwork "just persevering through and I saw results from hard work" while Student 3 talked about gaining confidence to meet and communicate confidently in social gatherings when commenting that "It helped me build the skill of working with people who I might not always mix with". Student 5 was disappointed he had not received a letter from his father who was separated from his mother and had not been part of his daily routine. To address the disappointment and anxiety, Student 5 drew on the coping mechanism of writing to his father. Student 5 reported "I didn't say anything bad. I just said, 'Dad, I love you. I'm proud of you dad, too'". For Student 5, this was a therapeutic moment where he felt "I just needed to get it out there on paper". Student 5 commented that his action of writing "was

more therapeutic than the letter we received because it was an opportunity to get our thoughts out”. This action was indicative of applying adaptive skills to address emotional adversity (Lee et al., 2013; Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017), and give buoyancy to his personal wellbeing. Overall, the experience of teachers and students confirmed the relevance of processes that focused on student concerns and the value of mentoring in supporting student resilience, which, in turn, facilitated student wellbeing.

7.4.4 Empathy

Empathy, defined as understanding and the acceptance of others, the sense of the ‘other’ (Belzung, 2014; Palmer, 2018) and in keeping with the Christ-like virtue of “love of others” (see Appendix B), was another key character-building focus of the retreat experience (see Appendices D and E). As remarked by Teacher 3, “this is a camp that has really been able to build empathy”. Having a strong sense of empathy is significant in the fostering and building of relationships. Through engaging in discussions and sharing of personal stories, students came to appreciate and understand the circumstances of others, enabling them “to empathise with someone and to really think about where someone’s coming from” (S. 5). In this way, students gained an insight as to why people act as they do, and a deeper understanding of “why they don’t talk about it” (S. 5). While involved in engagement with others, empathy “represents a genuine emotional, individual experience” (Palmer, 2018, p. 36).

Three issues emerged from the understandings of empathy. These are: empathy can be taught; empathising can occur while holding on to one’s own values and not changing one’s identity; and empathy can be linked to the development of character.

7.4.4.1 Can Empathy be Taught?

Student experience in developing an understanding of empathy through curriculum programs or the retreat experience gives rise to the view that the practice of empathy can be taught (Palmer, 2018). It is posited that the development of empathy for others comes from listening to, understanding, and appreciating others. The provision of dedicated focused time in an environment where students have confidence to engage safely in discussion in which trust, and honesty, abide was the platform for student learning of empathy. As Student 3 offered:

In terms of development of empathy, I think a lot of the discussions...[when] people bring up challenges in their own lives...was a realisation of ‘Hey, we don’t necessarily talk about these concerns very often; we don’t talk about these emotions

or these fears or anything like that’. But when we did, it was fascinating how many people shared experiences that they might not necessarily talk about. (S. 3)

It was through discussion and the sharing of personal stories where “people bring up challenges in their own lives” that the realisation came for Student 3 that his peers “have similar experiences” and that he and others are not alone.

7.4.4.2 Empathising and Holding on to Personal Identity.

In terms of empathy, equally important to the development of character is the capacity for students to accept the situation of others and still retain their values. This point is particularly important for students with low self-esteem, who may be easily influenced by peers and yet whose values do not align (Branden, 1992). The retreat experience demonstrated that students came to the realisation that “sticking to your values” (S. 5) and what they consider important, can occur at the same time as being able to “empathise with the people in the situation and make your judgement also based on that – not blocking off one or the other, but taking consideration further” (S. 5).

7.4.4.3 The Linking of Empathy to the Development of Character.

The development of empathy assists with the building of other character traits. These include attentive listening, respect, understanding of others, acceptance of others, maturity, and relationship-building. It is proposed that empathy with others has a positive influence on student wellbeing as defined by these characteristics.

Students came to appreciate that character-building also requires “a capacity for understanding” (S. 3) and a level of maturity to listen actively and so communicate an understanding and acceptance of others. The level of maturity required to consider respectfully the concerns raised by his peers was realised by Student 7. He recognised his peers are “different and just being careful managing the struggles [they] are going through”. To this end, teachers commented positively on the students’ mature approach to this element of character-building. Teacher 4 observed a “greater appreciation of [the] differences of others.” Teacher 3 presented the view that the success of the retreat is “really being able to build empathy”. In short, “They [the students] stepped up well” (T. 3) and the objective of the retreat, in this aspect, was realised.

7.4.5 *Respect*

Respect is foundational to character-building (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Bond, 2016; Freeman, 2011) and is a fundamental Christian principle (Cameron, 2005; Rossiter, 2016; Smith, 2004). Respect is not specifically identified as an aim of the retreat experience for the building of character (see Appendix D). However, the disposition of respect is narrated in the

school mission statement (see Appendix B) which embraces the retreat aim and many of its objectives and is integral to the program of activities, reflection, and discussion in furthering the development of character. Also, respect is an element of the school's pastoral care program (see Appendix F). Hence, it was not surprising that respect was identified by the students as an important outcome of the retreat experience, as an important character quality in both "building the man" and in order "to be a better person" (S. 7). Issues emerging from the sub-theme of respect are: relationship-building; student-teacher relationships; embedding respect to support the building of character; and, the continuity of respect post-retreat.

7.4.5.1 Respectful Relationship-Building.

It is argued that a respectful attitude towards others leads to the fostering of strong and enduring relationships. The retreat program provided students with the opportunity to build on skills integral to respect. Data collected from students and teachers noted the retreat experience led to the acknowledgment and understanding of the importance of respectful relationships and the preservation of dignity (Crocker et al., 2003; Orth et al., 2015). The level of respect and care students displayed towards each other, particularly in affirmation sessions, was noted by teachers and valued by student peers. It became evident that, through active listening and being responsive to the teachers and each other, students developed a heightened level of respect. Teacher 1 observed that in the assessment and observation of others that "they [students] were really honest and careful with everybody – and they were really responsive to each other, and they were respectful of each other". This level of respect and care displayed by students provided a positive link to the wellbeing of retreatants and facilitated the promotion of other skills such as empathy, understanding, relationship-building, emotional patience, co-operation, and social skills.

The importance of linking respect with relationships with women was a significant feature for the adolescent male retreatants. The Christian principle of respect and care for women is referenced in the retreat program activities (see Appendix D) and in terms of school documents referencing relationships such as husbands loving their wives: "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (see Appendix B). Understanding the significance of both the word and the tone when communicating with women was seen as important. As Teacher 1 explained, it is not only what is said to a person, but also the tone in which it was said, in "It's how you speak to women...and it's maybe not so much what you say. It's sometimes tone. It's really important that you treat everyone with respect, regardless [of whether the person is] male or female". The character quality, respect, in how students relate to others was further discussed in terms of parent expectations, values, morals and

ethics: “Your parents are there for you. They want the best for you and being rude or disrespectful is not the right way to go, and you’ll know that as you get older, and how you navigate yourself through different life experiences” (T. 1).

7.4.5.2 Respectful Student – Teacher Relationships.

The retreat experience within a unique environment broke down the traditional teacher–student barriers and enabled a deeper interpersonal understanding and respect by both parties. Student 5 valued this deeper level of engagement with teachers “where teachers are more colleagues where you can speak openly and your school mates as well”. Teacher 4, in his deliberation on the level of respect and close connection with students gained during the retreat, remarked, “I think there is a depth of respect and understanding that’s developed between staff and students that transcends those 72 hours that you’re together in a group”. This level of respect and close connection continued once back at school.

Some caution, however, is expressed on the level of student–teacher relationship post-retreat. One concern is the consideration of the respectful nature and maturity of students to ensure professional boundaries are not crossed (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). The second is the fact that not all teachers had the benefit of the retreat experience with its consequent closer relationships between retreatants and teachers. In summary, enduring and appropriate relationships for some students and teachers arose from the retreat and underlined the need to identify those characteristics of significance within and beyond the retreat experience.

7.4.5.3 Embedding Respect in the Building of Character.

This issue relates to the retreat activities designed to promote the understanding of respect, the value of being respectful, and the influence of respect on the development of a range of character traits. A respectful attitude and behaviour are manifested through being courteous, kind, thoughtful, empathetic, considerate of the feelings for others, and respectful in the way students think about, speak and listen to and act towards others “regardless if they are male or female” (T. 1).

Students spoke of “becoming more respectful” (S. 5) through active and attentive listening to the views of others. Student and teacher data suggest students came to realise the significance of “not just respecting others’ views but accepting them...and not judging people based on them” (S. 5). This level of respect was extended to the parameter of confidentiality and respectful acceptance that “each person is different and that no-one is perfect” (S. 2). It is posited that, aided by a higher level of maturity, the “open and honest” (S. 5) and non-judgemental conversations underscored a level of trust and respect between students. As Student 3 remarked, “I think it really increased my respect for other people in

the year...it deepened it greatly". Students gained a deeper awareness and understanding of the importance and value of maintaining confidentiality and to be respectful in their acceptance of the view of others.

7.4.5.4 Respect Post-Retreat.

This issue refers to advancing the skills and value of respect explored during the retreat and the students' level of ongoing self-commitment to respect towards each other post-retreat.

For Student 5, "I still, in my own personal life, try and treat everyone with the same respect...I treat them the same if they were in my group or without, they're in my group". Student 2 found skills developed during the retreat experience were useful back at school as they "work with people who you may not necessarily want to work with, but also just being respectful of how they view things".

Teachers and students acknowledged that levels of respect were experienced positively during and post the retreat experience, thus realising an unstated yet pertinent retreat objective. However, limited post-retreat follow-up with students on aspects covered during the retreat may have diminished the ongoing process of further embedding the trait of respect once back into school routine.

7.4.6 Summary

A focus of the case study school within which the retreat was conducted is the development of student character in preparation for adulthood. Of the many possible character traits, the new understandings arising from retreat data revealed four traits of significance: maturity, resilience, empathy, and respect. Development of students' maturity influenced their engagement with each retreat activity and discussion on resilience, together with their enhanced depth of understanding and empathy of others. Teachers noted the change in student maturity and attributed this growth to the retreat experience. However, teachers were uncertain of the long-term influence of the retreat on the trajectory of students' growth in maturity. Students confirmed that the retreat experience assisted them in the development of resilience. They found the discussion of coping mechanisms and skills to engage with obstacles, anxieties and issues they face to be helpful. This provided emotional and strategic support to building resilience. Engaging in personal stories, together with being mentored, enabled students to have a deeper understanding of themselves while appreciating and empathising with the situation of others. Developing empathy assisted with the building of other character traits and empathetic dealings with others had a positive influence on student wellbeing.

Students identified respect as an important element in character-building. They acknowledged the benefits of respect in fostering stronger and enduring relationships. A significant feature for students was the discussions on respect and relationships with women. The acquisition of character skills as a result of the retreat experience was integral to the full realisation of growing adolescent character.

Arguably, there is both an external (behaviour) and internal (wellbeing) aspect to character-building. For example, while the development of resilience enables one to maintain practical and mental capacities despite difficult circumstances, its achievement also boosts one's own sense of self-confidence, self-worth and positivity. It is in this way that the development of resilience not only builds character but also enhances wellbeing. Hence, the next section extends this discussion of the retreat's findings by exploring the concept of wellbeing.

7.5 Wellbeing

Wellbeing entails how people perceive themselves. It includes self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy and is argued to influence all aspects of life and living (Branden, 1992). Wellbeing is influenced by how students are affirmed by others and how they self-affirm (Park & Crocker, 2008). Research indicates that young men's wellbeing is an area of growing concern (Engebretson, 2003; McLaughlin, 2005). With respect to adolescent males, the recognition and management of wellbeing is promoted as a central element of a retreat experience (Engebretson, 2003; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016). Hence, a key incentive for the development and implementation of the retreat experience in focus in this study was to support the wellbeing of senior students in the final years of school and their preparation for adulthood (see Appendices D and E).

The journey of self, the *Who am I?* question, is central to the retreat program (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016) and is evidenced in processes of self-reflection which support the development of personal identity. The retreat program documentation references this emphasis in scriptural terms: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts" (see Appendices D and E).

The researcher audited data gained through interviews with retreatants and retreat staff confirmed the concept of wellbeing as central to retreat processes and outcomes. In summary, the identified issues in new understandings of wellbeing as an outcome of this retreat are: value of affirmations for self-esteem; affirmation and acceptance of self; affirmation and acceptance of peers; positive influence and value of affirming session; influence of affirmation letters from parents; self-worth; goal-setting letter to self;

development of skills to foster and build relationships; value of well-designed planning of activities to foster relationships; purposeful student grouping to foster bonding and building relationships; and post-retreat follow-up on student wellbeing. A summary of identified issues is presented in Table 7.5.

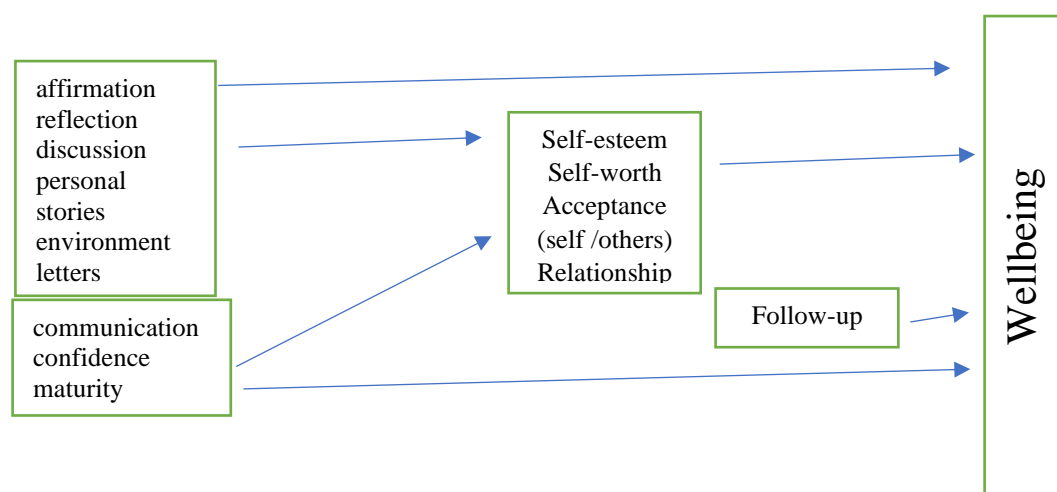
Table 7.5

Wellbeing: Audit of Origins of New Understandings from Chapters 5 and 6

Specific research objective	New understandings from Chapters 5 and 6	Issues for discussion	Theme
Investigate if the intended retreat aim and objectives align with the retreatants' and retreat staff's experience of wellbeing	5.5.6, 5.6, 5.7, 6.1.4, 6.3.4-5, 6.4	Self-esteem	Wellbeing
	5.5.4, 5.5.6, 5.7, 6.1.4	Affirmation	
	5.6, 6.1.4, 6.3.2, 6.3.2.4, 6.3.5	Affirmation: acceptance – self and others	
	5.5.4, 5.5.6, 6.1.4	Parental affirmation letter	
	6.2.1, 6.3.5, 6.4	Self-worth	
	5.3, 5.5.1, 5.5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 6.1.1-2, 6.2.1-4, 6.3.2.3, 6.3.4-5, 6.4	Relationship, communication	
	5.4.4, 5.6-7, 6.3-4	Post-retreat follow-up	

Complementing the process aspects contributing to wellbeing nominated in Table 7.5, the data identified particular underlying factors as significant. These are presented graphically below in Figure 7.2 and are developed within the body of this chapter. Essential to wellbeing is the student's self-esteem (acceptance of self and others), self-worth, and relationships (Branden, 1988, 1992; Cooper, 1992). Through retreat activities, reflection, personal stories and discussions the students were able to explore their relationship with self and peers and, in the process, advance social skills, particularly communication skills. Confidence and improved self-worth, as a result of the social interactions and the sharing of personal narratives, were important factors in the overall success of the retreat experience.

Figure 7.2



7.5.1 Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the extent to which we understand and value ourselves in terms of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and personal aspects of ourselves (Branden, 1988, 1992; Cooper, 1992). In essence, it is what we think, feel, and believe about ourselves (Branden, 1992). Through a series of retreat activities, teachers worked with students as they explored and reflected on themselves and, ultimately and ideally, advanced their understanding and acceptance of who they are in their uniqueness and worth. As a foundational strategy to this objective, Flynn and Mok (2002), Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) emphasise the value of affirmation sessions and noted that letters from parents act as effective retreat components towards fostering the wellbeing of students. This section concentrates its discussion on the topics of affirmation and the use of parental letters towards its achievement.

7.5.1.1 Affirmation.

7.5.1.1.1 Affirmation: Acceptance of Self.

Student understanding and accepting of “Who am I?” (see Appendices D and E) was one of the key foci of the retreat. The level of acceptance of who we are has an influence on the level of our self-esteem (Branden, 1992). Park and Crocker (2008), Sherman (2013), and Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) posit that improving wellbeing influences the functioning of a person, their attitude towards their identity, and engagement with self and others.

The retreat experience enabled the retreatants to “gain an insight on who I want to become” (S. 5). Student 1 came to understand and accept his role in groups and described his insight about himself as, “It was a simple moment, realising that I’m actually pretty good working in group environments”. Student 5 spoke of gaining a deeper insight and

understanding of himself and the realisation of the “values I want to be and I think I gained an insight on who I want to become”.

The reflective component of the retreat experience enabled students to gain a new insight into themselves and, in turn, their perspective of others. This is exemplified in the observation of Student 3 where he considered the retreat provided new insight about himself, yet noting:

I think it was more insights into the perspectives that others had of me...that's important in terms of the way I see myself from that social component, and how did the other guys feel about me. Because I think that really, it did challenge my conceptions about other blokes in the year. (S. 3)

One objective of the retreat was for each retreatant to be a better man (see Appendix D). For Student 6 it was simply being mature, standing up for self-values and “doing what's right and just caring about others”. This level of self-integrity is central to who we are and how we value ourselves (Cohen et al., 2009). It is being true to our beliefs that ultimately shapes who we become (Sherman, 2013). From the data gathered, this retreat objective was realised for many of the study participants. However, not all students felt the retreat met their expectations on this matter. For example, Student 5 said, “I don't think I had a moment of realisation that I was a better man, and I don't believe it directly made me a better man”. Student 3 felt the retreat did not help him personally as he explained, “I knew who I was before going to the camp” but rather, as indicated above, it helped him to get to know and appreciate others better.

7.5.1.1.2 Affirmation: Acceptance of Peers.

The acceptance by others is important to one's level of self-esteem and wellbeing (Park & Crocker, 2008). This is particularly the case during the teenage years where there is an increased orientation and reliance on the opinions of same-age peers (Laible et al., 2004). This has implications for adolescents with low self-esteem where peer commentary can exacerbate existing limited esteem (Park et al., 2007). Moreover, as the formation of student groups during this retreat was not based on friendships, there was the potential for retreatants with low self-esteem to be at a social disadvantage. Similarly, there was the concern for students with less confidence in being able to express their feelings in reflection and discussion sessions and in sharing their personal stories. However, research identifies that well-structured and closely supported affirmation activities address this potential concern (Rossiter, 2016). Thus, to address this concern, the retreat leaders established an environment of trust and safety. This provided the retreatants with the necessary confidence to have open

discussions and to engage in the sharing of ideas and personal stories without fear of judgement (see section 6.1.1). Through the sharing of personal stories, discussion, and reflection, together with affirmation by their peers, students gained awareness of being accepted by others and, thereby, gained confidence to come to know and accept who they are. This was a positive impact on the wellbeing of individuals and the group of retreatants as a whole.

Student accounts of the affirmation sessions provided a source of encouragement in this area of development. They found positive support and, at times, unexpected support from their peers to be valuable. As recalled by Student 6, “I felt a lot of our mates...helped me and understood where I was”. As Student 3 remarked, the affirmation session process enabled change in that “it did challenge my conceptions about other blokes in the year”.

As a support to effective affirmation, retreat group leaders set the engagement level for each retreat session. The remarks of Teacher 4 on the process implemented at the commencement of the affirmation sessions reveal how the tone and standard of affirming each student was established:

With those affirmation circles or those opportunities, I think the tone’s often set by the first two or three people that go...I was very intentional about the first two or three that I asked to go first because I wanted to set the right dynamic. (T. 4)

Also, Teacher 4 commented: “I went first as an example because I wanted to show what was expected” and contributed to the positive outcome of this activity. He said, “I think that was helpful” (T. 4). Notwithstanding the significance of effective planning, the effectiveness of these affirmation sessions relied on the relationships established in each retreat group (see sections 6.1.2 and 6.2.4). In this light, not all sessions went to plan. Student 7 commented: “I found it hard as there were a few quiet people in the group who none of the people knew, so [it was] hard to come back [with] what you like about them, because you don’t know much about them”.

Affirmation sessions provide an avenue to foster self-confidence and build self-esteem (see also Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009)) and these sessions led to the development of stronger relationships within the group. Student 3 commented that “the biggest thing for me, by far, was it [the retreat] just reshaped my perspectives about the other guys in my year”. Student 2 furthered this point, noting the maturity of retreatants in their encouragement of peers and that they understood the purpose behind the encouragement of others in terms of engagement:

I think it's, you've got to give things a go, because you never know whether or not you like it or you don't like it. You can only say you don't like something if you've done it. I think it was really encouraging to see boys who you might not think are mature to really encourage others to give things a go. (S. 2)

The facilitation of relationship-building required an environment of safety and trust without judgement (Hughes, 2016a; Rossiter, 2016). The retreat environment facilitated open and honest conversation. As Teacher 5 explained, "One of the things we encourage the facilitators, teaching staff, and also the youth work staff [to do] is to build that trust, and early discussion points are about the importance of trust".

7.5.1.1.3 Positive Influence and Value of Affirming Sessions.

This issue refers to students' acknowledgement of the positive value of the affirmation sessions towards their wellbeing together with a deeper appreciation of themselves (see section 6.1.4). They were surprised and buoyed by the depth and sincerity of how others viewed them. Indeed, Student 3 commented that he was unaware of how other students perceived him, remarking that "the biggest thing for me, by far, was...how they perceived me". Teacher 1 noted the impact of this phenomenon on the group as a whole. Other students were surprised and pleased that the normally quiet students contributed to the group session with astute, insightful thoughts. This brought a deepening regard and respect towards others, thus uplifting self-esteem of those who may not be deemed to be as popular.

It is acknowledged, however, that parental affirmation makes an important contribution towards a student's sense of self-esteem and, thereby, wellbeing too. The inclusion of parental letters of affirmation to their sons being distributed during this retreat embraced this consideration.

7.5.1.2 Parental Affirmation Letters.

An important segment of the retreat program was the distribution of letters from the boys' parents. Parents had been canvassed to write the letter to express love, support, and encouragement (see Appendices D and E).

The affirmation received through these letters facilitated positive student wellbeing and a revitalisation in self-esteem, findings also reported by Engebretson (2006), Flynn and Mok (2002), and Rossiter (2016). For some students, the content of the letter was a surprise, as noted by Student 7: "It's your family [where] those things don't really happen too often, so it was out of the blue." Teachers recounted incidents of a boy receiving a letter from a parent who had died (see section 5.6.6). Some boys heard from their father with whom they had no contact for several years (see section 6.1.4).

Receiving letters from their parents prompted the students to reflect on their relationship with their parents, the impact of which influenced their wellbeing (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016). However, the response by students did vary. Student 2 knew his parents loved him, however, in the normal run of their lives, these feelings were not openly expressed. “I would never have thought that they would have thought of me like that”, he said.

An objective of the retreat was for students to “express their thoughts and feelings” (see Appendix D). Writing to their parents in response to the reception of letters provided a further avenue to express feelings. For some students, this was cathartic (see also (Kolb, 1984). For Student 2, this experience “was quite a significant moment on the camp”, and impacted his wellbeing positively, reporting “I really enjoyed it”. Some students, so moved by the experience of the contents of their letter, responded by writing to their parents in terms such as gratitude: “so I wrote a letter to both my mum and dad about what I was grateful for, [and] for them” (S. 1). For Student 1, the experience was to be able to write to his parents and “it was good just to name what I’m grateful for”.

For a number of students, views of the influence of parental affirmations continued post-retreat. Student 2 offered that he reads the letter when he is “feeling a bit down”. He considers reading the letter to be a form of “comfort thing” that “even though you may be upset by something, there are still people around that support you, people who love you”. Parental letters, together with peer affirmation “was a very powerful exercise” (T. 3) and positively furthered student wellbeing and contributed to self-worth.

7.5.2 *Self-Worth*

Self-worth is characterised by how individuals value themselves as a person (Rosenberg, 1965). The retreat experience provided the opportunity for students to step back and reflect on how they value themselves and their goals. The value students place on achieving their goals is linked with their level of self-worth (Orth et al., 2015). Within the senior schooling years, goals would typically include academic studies, sporting achievements, social relationships, mental health, and life in general. The level of emphasis that is placed on achieving a goal, and the engagement they undertake as they strive for the goal, are influenced by their wellbeing and level of self-worth (Park & Crocker, 2008; Steiger et al., 2015). A central consideration for students was the capability of establishing a level of self-esteem and self-worth so as to be independent in decision-making regarding the goals they set for themselves in life.

The retreat experience sought to empower students to have confidence, to challenge their boundaries, and consider the life situation that best suited them. Student 4 referenced the value a member of the alumni placed on achieving his goal of realising his ambitions as a rugby player. The alumni member spoke of his rugby development from playing in lower-graded teams to the international level. This encouraged Student 4 to reflect on his worth as a player when “he was playing in the back row in the 13Es to now being outside backs and playing a reasonably high level of footy”. Here, Student 4 personalised his desire to achieve his goal and aspirations (Park & Crocker, 2008). “Only the best of the best in the school did [achieved this standard, and] now, I’m there doing it”. Challenging the boundaries in decision-making in their consideration of future goals, led students to the process of formalising their goals in writing.

7.5.2.1 Goal-Setting Letter to Self.

As part of the retreat program (see Appendix D and section 5.5.4), students were encouraged to write a letter to themselves with “some short-term goals...and some medium-to-long-term goals” (T. 2) for their future indicating “what’s expected of them” (T. 5). Students, including Student 4, viewed the goal-setting letter writing as “a bunch of benchmarks” and if he doesn’t meet the benchmarks “it might just be a wake-up call, telling me that I need to buckle down in certain areas”. Student 8 referred to his goal-setting letter as “just writing a sticky note and putting it up on the door and then just opening the door up 20 years later”. What might be best described as short-term goals achieved by the retreatants during the retreat experience included developing a range of areas: respect, resilience, empathy, and social skills to interact with other students and the general public more confidently, friendships, a deeper understanding of self and others, the capacity to express thoughts and feelings, as well as bonding and functioning as a team.

However, some teachers raised concerns about the potential lack of ongoing or lasting influence of the goals students expressed in the letter to self, and whether the identified goals would “translate into a routine of daily life” (T. 4). It is posited that the potential to realise these goals lay in the value students placed on achieving their goals (Orth et al., 2015) and the capacity to maintain the set goals on their return to school routine. This has implications for retreat and school leaders and the consideration of mechanisms to be put in place for ongoing post-retreat follow-up.

While the retreat experience provided an opportunity for students to explore their self-worth and set goals post-Year 12, it also enabled students to socialise, form friendships, and foster stronger relationship with their peers.

7.5.3 Relationships

7.5.3.1 Value of Retreat in Developing Skills to Foster and Build Relationships.

Students had diverse expectations about relationships within the retreat experience. Some students expected to just socialise by having “just a really fun time” with their peers and having “a good break” (S. 5). While for others, such as Student 1, who was new to the school, it was to make new friends. “It was good to develop friendships on that camp ‘cause I didn’t really know anyone too well before [the retreat] camp, being new to the school”.

Both purposes aligned with the expected outcome of the retreat experience in equipping students with the necessary social-relationship skills in preparation for adulthood (see Appendices D and E). Understanding, appreciating, and accepting the viewpoint of others provided a sound foundation on which to develop strong relationships (Rossiter, 2016). It is argued that discussion and affirmation sessions (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009) provide students with the opportunity to express their thoughts openly and discuss challenging moments in their life (Engebretson, 2004; Flynn, 1993). Processes of sharing experiences and emotions provided the foundation for trust to be developed among participants. From this trust came stronger and closer relationships: “The ones that I was close with, I’m even closer with, and the ones that I didn’t know, I’m now pretty good friends with,” said Student 4. Bonding and the developing relationship with peers not well known to them might be attributed to a number of factors including a well-planned program of activities.

7.5.3.2 Value of Well-Planned Retreat Activities to Foster Bonding and Building of Relationships.

Retreat activities foster bonding and communication (Flynn & Mok, 2002), provide opportunities to prompt some points of reflection and depth of thought (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009), and allow participants to engage with each other in decision-making in order to complete a task (Engebretson, 2006). The initial activity within the retreat experience, a form of a race, was designed for engagement and bonding with respect to these objectives. Teacher 6 referred to the activity as a “buy-in” for “absolutely instant bonding for the retreat” situation where students were forced to connect with each other to complete the activity, and thus “developed camaraderie very quickly”. Teacher 2 commented that the honest engagement in the initial activity provided a positive experience that stimulated interest and fostered a potentially higher degree of engagement of the boys for the remainder of the camp:

From that point onwards I think...the boys engage honestly and openly in everything that is on the camp. So, they give it all a go. They try in the discussions. They listen to whatever sessions there are with an open mind. They take part and it's genuinely been really good. (T. 2)

Teacher 2 also explained that the retreat activities were a catalyst for the realisation of a number of the retreat aims, including personal reflection, and an intensification of the relationship between students. Moreover, there was the suggestion that students who engaged in this way were assisted with the transition process into the final year of schooling.

I think it's one of the things that causes the fact that Year 12 groups, in particular at the school, are incredibly close. I think [the retreat is] a fire...they sit down and reflect on their bonds to each other as a young group as well. It's one of a number of shared experiences that they have that bring them quite close together. It's the starting point of that transition as they move into Years 11 and 12. (T. 2)

It is posited that well-planned retreat activities, along with intentional grouping of students, assisted the building of relationships during the retreat.

7.5.3.3 Grouping Students to Foster Bonding and Building Relationships.

A strategy to develop relationship skills amongst the students was to purposely group them so "they're not in their friendship groups" (T. 4). Retreat leaders considered that while "they all know each other, because they've been in school together for up to five years", being in mixed groups would help each other "in terms of really getting to know the boys" (T. 5). Teacher 5 conveyed that this point, "not necessarily clear to the boys, is that it's to get the boys gelling". During the retreat, group members developed a connection and interaction with each other. Teacher 1 remarked, "I think it was a good chance for all the boys who didn't know each other that well to get to know each other and have that connection".

For some students, this element of difference was an uncomfortable risk that prompted concern. Student 5 said that the anxiety of being in a forced group was more evident for the boys in sessions where there was sharing of personal stories with others not well known to them: "Occasionally, I felt forced to open up" S. 5). This concern of students feeling pressured to communicate and display perceived emotional vulnerability was noted by Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) and warrants continuous examination. However, Student 5 acknowledged that while within the groups there may have been an element of forced connectedness, overall, the formation of groups not based on friendships "may not have been a bad thing".

The fostering of relationships and the connectedness within the group helped create an environment of team unity, a mechanism whereby the group became a kind of anchor of support for those who lacked confidence and were reluctant to open-up or engage in discussions, an outcome reported also by Engebretson (2006). Thus, through the strategic organisation of groups, students were prompted to take small risks in order to connect with others and realise personal growth.

I suppose when we were doing a lot of activities, especially if boys didn't want to do them or didn't want to participate, they were really encouraged by the whole group, because there was a team environment. We didn't want to let one person miss out, so we tried to encourage everyone to give it a go, which we managed to do. (S. 2)

Teachers believed that the intentional grouping of students provided them with the opportunity to explore and develop their skills of conducting meaningful and wider conversations and develop social skills (Engebretson, 2006) and to foster and maintain friendships (Rossiter, 2016). With this goal in mind, teachers observed that students initiated, developed, and maintained new relationships with peers.

I think it's very relational. There is an element of where the boys are able to get a little bit more in touch with, so I think part of the thing is just developing relationships and thinking about relationships. So I think it's one of the key things. They form friendship there. They've bonded. (T. 3)

Students also appeared to draw closer together and developed a greater level of empathy for and understanding of each other, resulting in a deeper respect for and acceptance of other's views (see section 7.1). For instance:

In my group there were [*sic*] a range of different personalities and being able to listen to other people and not talk over the top of them [was needed]. [I noticed them] respect each other a bit more. And everyone's responsible just to be open and honest. (T. 1)

In addition, Student 6 spoke of the burgeoning of the group relationships and the support he felt during discussions:

You weren't always thinking about the serious stuff, but then when it led to the serious stuff, you can open up to a group, and I definitely think when I found it hard, I felt a lot of our mates were becom[ing] really close and helped me and understood where I was at.

The purposeful and strategic grouping of students has emerged from the retreat experience as a positive strategy. Clustering students in this way presented retreatants with

the immediate challenge to engage with each other and form friendships, which in turn was evidenced in a variety of associated activities that supported the retreat aim and objectives. Attention is drawn to the consideration of allocated time post-retreat to follow-up activities to continue the work established during the retreat.

7.5.4 *Post-Retreat Follow-Up on Student Wellbeing*

Emerging from student and teacher data were the observations about the lack of post-retreat follow-up on student wellbeing (see sections 5.6 and 6.3.6). This proved to be a concern for both students and teachers. As noted by Student 1, “I think maybe having one or two check-ups after would have been beneficial” to check in on their wellbeing and to see if the retreatants had continued to maintain what they had gained during the retreat experience. Student 2 furthered the point: “You can come back and see how everyone’s travelling, you can see if people have taken on things that they’ve learned on the retreat and use them in the real world”. This lack of follow-up prompted the consideration that the retreat experience was “definitely a three-day bubble” (S. 6) where “once the camp was done it was like a memory” (S. 5). Perhaps the most telling contribution was from Student 4 who, during the research interview, indicated that the interview question was the first time he had been asked about his retreat experience. It was during the interview that Student 4 became aware of his development and change in his attitude toward others since the retreat experience: “Now is probably the first time that I’ve noticed the change...today, just in this interview...[I]t’s the first time I’ve really thought about how it’s made me change my attitude”.

Teachers also commented on the bond and connections developed during the retreat experience and spoke about their concern that the relationships developed during the retreat may be lost once students return to usual patterns of school life. “You build this incredibly powerful set of connections between a group of people and then you just completely throw it away at the end of three days” (T. 2). However, whilst for some students a level of connectedness remained between students, as shown in the comment of Student 2, (noted in section 6.3.6) that he has maintained respect and connections with others because “it wasn’t a bubble,...you still mix with people”, the observation by Teacher 2 has implications for the school moving forward regarding post-retreat planning.

While the lack of formal post-retreat follow-up on student wellbeing was noted, Teacher 1 commented on student connection and bonding well after the retreat had finished: “Now when I see them around the school, you know, [they] have this connection”. Indeed, Teacher 4 noted the retreat experience was a turning point in the attitudes of students in their relationship with their peer group members who, prior to the retreat, had little to do with each

other. Students appeared to have maintained the connection established during the retreat once back at school, treating each other differently, having a greater appreciation of their uniqueness, engaging, and chatting with one another.

Following the retreat, leaders observed an increase in student engagement with peers they would not normally become connected with in this way. Student summation for the retreat in terms of relationships was: “I reckon the most significant impact would have been the friendships made”. For Teacher 4, it was: “A greater appreciation of difference and of others...I noticed around the school over the next few months [post-retreat] them chatting and talking with one another and having a greater appreciation for someone else in the year group that they wouldn’t normally talk to”.

7.5.5 Summary

The sub-themes of self-esteem, self-worth, goal-setting, and relationship-building, were explored in this section. Affirmation sessions and parent affirmation letters reinforced student self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth and facilitated students’ reflection on their relationship with family. Students valued the opportunity to develop goal setting benchmarks, though some teachers questioned whether the maturity level of students was sufficient to realise their long-term effectiveness. In general, the retreat experience influenced the development of friendships which remained post-retreat. The grouping of students not based on friendships proved to be an effective strategy in the developing of these relationships. Once the retreat was completed, there appeared to be no post-retreat formal interaction with students prompting the consideration this was identified as a missed opportunity to further explore student wellbeing.

The new understandings presented provide an insight into the student’s experience of Christian principles, values, character, and wellbeing during the retreat experience. It is posited, however, these experiences were supported and heightened by what is identified as retreat enablers comprising: program, environment, reflection and journaling, personal stories, and staffing. These enablers are discussed in the next section.

7.6 An Exploration of Retreat Enablers

The retreat experience is an important component of the broader school curriculum and pastoral program. It is posited that specific retreat enablers played an important role in the realisation of the retreat’s aim and objectives. Discussed in this section are: program; environment; reflection and journaling; personal stories; and staffing. Staffing includes a discussion inclusive of training, preparation, and mentoring. These are displayed in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6*Collective Reflection on Retreat Enablers*

Specific research objective	New understandings from Chapters 5 and 6	Issues for discussion	Theme
Investigate if the intended retreat outcomes inform new insights into enabling factors of program, environment, personal stories, mentoring, and skill-building.	5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5.6, 5.6, 5.7, 6.1.1, 6.1.3, 6.1.4, 6.2, 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4, 6.3.4	Program	Retreat enablers
	5.4, 5.5.1, 5.6, 6.6.1, 6.2.4, 6.3.1, 6.3.2.1, 6.3.5	Environment	
	5.3, 5.5.4, 5.6, 5.7, 6.2.2, 6.2.5, 6.3, 6.3.2.3, 6.3.6, 6.4	Reflection and Journaling	
	5.4, 6.1.3, 6.2.2, 6.3.2.3, 6.3.4	Personal Stories	
	5.1, 5.2-4, 5.5.4, 6.1.1, 6.2.3	Staffing	

7.6.1 Program

To enable the realisation of the retreat aim and objectives (see Appendices D and E), and ensure student engagement, the retreat program included a focus on physical activities, presentations, discussions, reflection, and the sharing of personal stories. Each activity was designed to enable and to encourage connection and bonding, communication, discussion, and decision-making, and to provoke reflection and depth of thought. Across these dimensions, an element of repetition provided the reinforcement of skills. As Student 3 noted, “I think that repetition tends to create habits and cycles that actually are continued beyond that, particularly because they’re so useful and necessary”. It is suggested that the manner by which the retreat program was structured provided an important enabler for the realisation of a number of elements including the fostering of relationships, bonding with peers and teachers, development of skills, and the fostering of mature, deep, and meaningful discussions about life, values, and Christianity. As Student 4 explained:

The way they broke it [the program] down was good, having speakers and reflection time was good as well. It gave you time to think about what had gone on during the day. It was like your own personal debrief. (S. 4)

The decision to engage alumni to speak to the students added value to the program. The natural linkage of these guest presenters with the boys was considered helpful in relaying the likely struggles and dilemmas to be faced in the boys’ lives as they build their identity

and understanding of who they are. Teacher 4 commented, “I think that [having alumni presenting was] particularly powerful, because the boys immediately identify with these people. I think it’s a part of them understanding who they are”. However, while the purposely planned and sequenced program of activities provided a catalyst to connect and reflect on relationships, issues and values, this linkage was not always readily apparent to the students:

The relationship and linkage of the activity with reflection wouldn’t immediately seem apparent, but then, upon reflecting on it, you realise it more, so issues and activity...segue into thinking about these deeper issues that don’t usually get brought up. (S. 8)

As previously mentioned, a valuable component of the retreat’s programming occurred when the boys received letters of affirmation from their parents (see section 5.5.6). Against a background of research on the value of such letters (Engebretson, 2006; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009), the experience of students who received letters from parents warrants particular attention. For instance, it is unknown how the retreat curriculum in each study prepared students for the reception of letters from their parents. As such, it is important to consider the process undertaken by the retreat leaders in the development of the retreat curriculum, the purposeful placement of the letters in the retreat program, and the detail provided to parents in guiding their writing of the letter (see Appendices D and H). As recalled by Teacher 5, through two purposely crafted letters of advice to parents (see section 5.5.6), parents were reminded to focus on the positive aspect of their son’s character.

However, from a general perspective, a review and evaluation of the retreat’s program is deemed important to satisfy school executive and retreat leaders that the aim, objectives and outcomes of the retreat were realised, sustainable, and in keeping with the school mission. An evaluation would enable retreat organisers to adjust the program if required (Bond, 2016; Catalano et al., 2004; Freeman, 2011; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio & Rossiter, 2010). It would be expected that teachers and students be involved in the process of sharing the retreat experience from different perspectives (Rossiter, 2016). However, a formal evaluation of the retreat program was not undertaken. This is considered as a missed opportunity for the retreat organisers to gain further insight into the value and influence of the retreat program for the students, and to build on the Christian and character-building programs undertaken at the school.

7.6.2 *Environment*

Together with the retreat program, the environment of the retreat sets the tone for the retreat experience (Rossiter, 2016). Students accepted that the teachers established a safe and trusting environment which enabled open, honest conversations without fear and judgement. Establishing such an environment fostered student engagement within the retreat experience to explore each of the program elements. This is consistent with the findings of Flynn and Mok (2002), Abbott-Chapman (2006), Tullio (2009), and Rossiter (2016) in which the established, non-judgemental environment was conducive to more open discussion and deeper reflection.

7.6.3 *Reflection and Journaling Practices*

Retreats are universally recognised as a space to consider aspects of one's life (Engebretson, 2003; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016) and reflection is an important element of the process (Emily & Creswell, 2014; Sherman et al., 2013). The retreat program provided the opportunity for students to take time out from routine school activities to reflect critically (Kember et al., 2008; Valli, 1997) on themselves, their values, and morals. Reflection may appear on several levels. The work of Valli (1997) and Kember et al. (2008) identifies three levels of reflection: understanding, reflection on action, and critical reflection. Change comes as a result of critical reflection (Kember et al., 2008). Teacher 4 considered that the opportunity to reflect introspectively (see also Schön (2016)) enabled students to examine and “understand their strengths and weaknesses and learn about themselves a person”. This deep level of self-reflection complements the Christian principle “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts” (see Appendices D and E). Opportunity for deeper reflection was well-received by the participants and was generally evidenced in their open discussion and journaling after each activity.

Though students identified the value of reflection, not all students were convinced about the level of importance attributed to it. This point was expressed by one student who observed that “Reflection was valuable, but it wasn't the most important thing in the world, but I think it was valuable, definitely required maturity and understanding of what things were about” (S. 6). While there were expectations for all students to discuss and reflect throughout the retreat program (see Appendix D), for some, it was only “when we got letters [from our parents] that heightened the focus on reflection” (S. 6). In describing the influence of the reflection experience, Student 3 acknowledged the depth of reflection and discussion. He spoke of gaining new insights on himself through self-reflection, while Student 5 noted that the depth of reflection enabled him to explore “values which will guide who I want to

be”. For Student 4, reflection supported an appreciation of the health and sporting challenges with his problematical back (see section 6.1.4).

The experience of students in self-reflection supports the view of Kohlberg (1981) who suggests some students may internalise and process a cathartic learning experience differently and some take time to consider before the realisation of what they have experienced occurs. The implication for retreat leaders and teachers is for an appropriate allocation of time in the program to continually review the aim and objective of each activity and to build an awareness as to the *how* of reflection as much as the *what*. Deep critical reflection, however, requires students to have the skills to reflect.

7.6.3.1 Reflection Skills of Retreatants.

This issue surrounds the expectation for students to actively engage in critical reflection.

It cannot be assumed that retreat participants are familiar with the practice of reflection (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013) as it is an under-developed skill in adolescents (Emily & Creswell, 2014; Sherman et al., 2013). Data from this research suggest that both students and teachers recognised the potential program dilemma caused by a lack of reflection skills and understood that reflection might not be easy for some students. For example, Teacher 5 observed that “it [skill to reflect] is actually almost a skill they develop during the three days” (T. 5) and added the observation that, by the end of the retreat, the boys were more often willing to reflect and share. However, Teacher 5 also acknowledged that reflection is “a process that boys need to get. So, it’s a skill boys need to develop during that time away”.

Students, too, shared the dilemma of being expected to reflect, yet not being adequately equipped with the skill needed to reflect. Student 5 noted during the early stages of vocalised reflection by boys in his group as being “stilted, as if scared to reflect on what they had said or had done” (S. 5). For some students, it took time to grasp the process of reflection and be able to “open up for discussion” (S.5). During the early stages of reflection on various activities, teachers noted (section 5.5.4.1) a level of change once the students had spent some time doing it. As Teacher 4 observed, “I think guided reflection is always really important. I don’t know that that’s something that boys naturally do a whole lot” (T. 4, second interview). Teacher 5 reflected that “it’s interesting they do develop the skill relatively quickly”. Through supportive reflection, the students were provided with a structure to assist their efforts to reflect. However, the need to extend professional development for students and teachers in the technique of self-reflection, and follow-up self-reflection with students

post-retreat, was noted. Teacher 4 reinforced the need of ongoing activities post-retreat to build on the reflection skills gained during the retreat:

I think there would be further opportunities for identifying significant points for these boys post-[retreat] and putting in some type of scaffolded reflection which was a requirement [during the retreat] or at least strongly encouraged because I think naturally that isn't something that boys particularly do very well. (T. 4, second interview).

From the observation of Teacher 2, the recognition for some form of professional development on self-reflection had been identified and noted for future consideration: "It is something we haven't tapped, actually, really tapped much into". While students engaged in reflection, they were also required to journal their thoughts.

7.6.3.2 Journaling.

Students were provided with a journal (see Appendix E) as part of their personal reflection process. The journal contained questions for reflection and discussion. Reflection and journal writing provided the opportunity for students to respond, explicitly or implicitly, to the retreat experience. Student 4 reported:

Most times, we'd sit down to eat, the journals would come out and we'd do an activity in the journal. Every night after dinner, we'd break off and go off with our teacher leader and we'd do stuff in the journal. (S. 4)

This structured approach is consistent with the O'Connell and Dymont (2013) contention as to the importance of self-reflections as an "opportunity for self-expression to provide a gut reaction to an experience" (p. 27), to record their experiences, and examine their current situations as starting points for future understanding. Hubbs and Brand (2005) add that the value of a journal is to self-express, instinctively or through deep reflection, events which unfold around them and act as a reference point for future understanding. However, research holds that male adolescent are less inclined to journal (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013) and hence retreat participants' reservations about journaling, combined with a lack of journaling skill, may have contributed to the lack of interest to journal by some retreatants.

Journal writing did not suit all students as they neither enjoyed nor benefited from the experience (see sections 5.5.4.2 and 6.2.5). Data gathered from the retreat acknowledged that student use, and its effectiveness of journaling were mixed. Teachers found some students "preferred to talk" (T. 1). Student 5 found it difficult to engage with the journal and he explained, "It was hard to fill in everything, because it felt like more homework. I think to

talk the reflection was more beneficial than written” (S. 5). Student 2, while he commented that the journal was useful, preferred to reflect on the activities and events rather than the journal:

[I] reflected but [did] not journal, I didn’t do much journaling, it was more things that I would keep in my mind, I just didn’t write it down...in a way, I journalised. I didn’t write it down; it was more memories that I’ve kept in my mind.

By way of contrast, Student 3 noted that the opportunity for reflection was a “useful dynamic and nice contrast to the physical activity”. However, students found difficulty writing in the allotted time frame. While Student 3 “wrote a lot”, he lamented:

There was not always time to write. There was definitely lots of stuff that I didn’t write down and that I didn’t have an opportunity to write down, but that oral reflection was still really useful, and I could still remember the things, the general concepts that we touched on there, even now.

Other students found the journal helpful, particularly as they worked through questions. Student 7 acknowledged that the “journal was needed in some sense, particularly for students who were less comfortable to discuss matters in public”.

As noted in section 6.2.5, students provided mixed responses to reflection and journaling post-retreat. Some students kept their journal and refer to it for quiet reflection and goal setting. Student preference to reflect orally rather than reflect by journaling, may have been due to their limited knowledge and skill of journaling.

7.6.3.3 Journaling Skills of Retreatants.

This issue addresses the finding that the retreatants’ limited or lack of skill to journal proved a stumbling block in the reflection process following each activity. However, since it is an expectation of the retreat that students journal their reflections, training students to journal effectively to assist reflection presented as a necessary requirement for retreat processes (see also O’Connell and Dymont (2013). Retreat leaders were cognisant of the students’ deficient journaling skills and provided a form of scaffold to assist students in their journal writing (Epp, 2008; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). As Teacher 3 observed, “Not having done any journaling, it was very difficult for them [the boys] just to journal each day, or after each activity, their thoughts, and feelings so we had to scaffold the journal”. Scaffolding included teachers’ mentoring and Student 6 said the teachers “offered up a lot of [their] own anecdotes or personal experiences, which added to that sense of comfort”. Though students’ journaling skills were limited, they enjoyed the engagement of reflection orally and the sharing of personal stories.

7.6.4 *Personal Stories*

Sharing of personal stories are an important component of a retreat (Engebretson, 2004; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Personal stories, as noted in sections 7.4 and 7.5, were employed by teachers and the alumni presenters throughout the retreat and considered a key component of the retreat curriculum. Personal stories resonated with the boys, enabling them to look more closely at their own situations and to understand the situation of others.

The establishment of a safe, trusting environment established by the teachers enabled students' willing and open engagement with the sharing of personal stories. However, some students expressed unease about the pressure they felt to self-disclose in the personal storytelling sessions and, as a result, were reluctant to share their deeper experiences. This sense of pressure on students supports the concern noted in the research of Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) that, when placed in this position where students feel compelled to share their personal stories, they will be less inclined to engage or only share to a limited level as noted by Student 5 in section 6.2.2.

Personal story sharing was also used by teachers as a strategy to assist students in the skill of self-reflection (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). As Teacher 5 explained, "Teachers will often go first and share their reflection or their view on what's experienced, just to help boys get a sense of what it might look like" (T. 5). Sharing in this way, teachers displayed a somewhat vulnerable aspect of themselves, enabling a closer relationship with the students. While acknowledging the influence of sharing personal stories, Rossiter (2016) and Tullio (2009) cautioned about sharing of personal stories as needing to be discreet and not cross professional boundaries. This advice was shared with retreat staff at their initial briefing prior to the camp. Indeed, this matter, together with staffing, training and preparing staff to lead and mentor students, plays a pivotal role in the success of the retreat experience.

7.6.5 *Staff*

Teachers played a significant role as an enabler in the success of the retreat experience. This section discusses staff training, preparation, and their role as mentors during the retreat experience.

7.6.5.1 Teacher Preparation and Training.

Teachers leading each group had the responsibility to support the emotional needs of each student in their care. In preparing teachers to lead their group, reflection and strategic planning were required. A consideration for the retreat leaders was the capacity to support

students who might be at a low emotional point and require additional support (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017; Sherman, 2013). Retreat leaders addressed this potential issue prior to the commencement of the retreat through providing information about students who, during normal school time, had been identified as students of concern. Teacher 5 spoke of the staffing arrangements to support the students during emotionally difficult times:

We sort of talk through that we might be aware of where there could be difficult relationships with parents...in the pre-briefing session with staff. We talk about keeping an eye on where the boys [are]...we typically get the boys to stay within eyesight. (T. 5)

Leaders were cognisant of the possibility that students could become emotional, upset, and withdrawn in response to an aspect of the retreat's program. During the retreat, school counsellors were available to support students who presented with signs of anxiety and / or emotional needs. As part of the post-retreat follow-up, retreat leaders provided to the housemaster and pastoral team a list of students who were anxious and / or emotional, and not as engaged in retreat activities to the level which was expected (see also Branden (1992) and Karatas and Cakar (2011)) or who "discuss things that put them on the radar for our counselling team, they would then be followed up as needed" (T. 5). As Teacher 5 further explained:

We don't get feedback of every boy, because a lot of boys are fine in the group, but where there is feedback, both positive and frankly negative, or where boys were particularly emotionally affected by it, certainly, that does go back to the housemasters. (T. 5)

There is no indication of any further follow-up of students' wellbeing.

The role of the retreat leaders was to set up a supportive environment and allay concerns of potential negative impact on self-esteem as students attempted to understand the emotions, they experienced from receiving and reading the letters. Teacher 5 observed that the student reactions to receiving letters from their parents was a "powerful emotional experience". Teacher 5 noted also, "I don't know what's in the letter, but clearly they are sharing some pretty emotional, heavy stuff". The emotional situation for Student 5 referred to earlier in this section and in section 6.4.1 ended well. He was well-supported by his peers and retreat staff. However, it could also be speculated as to what might have been the implication for the retreat experience had the outcome become more problematical.

Staff training and readiness to support students during the retreat was identified in section 5.1. Staff preparedness and skillset emerged as an area of consideration and planning

to enable effective emotional support for students. Emerging from the data is the consideration of further professional learning to prepare teachers for the difficult conversations or emotional periods of the retreat experience. This is considered important as a key role for retreat teachers mentoring students in their group.

7.6.5.2 Mentoring.

Teacher intervention and mentoring to assist the positive wellbeing, personal development and growth in maturity of the adolescent (Dolan, 2011; Dubois et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2012; Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012) became important components in the delivery of the retreat program. Students acknowledge that retreat teachers provided to the students mentoring support, encouragement and guidance during activities, respectful direction of discussions, and journaling opportunities. In this way, the teachers offered guidance to assist the positive wellbeing, personal development, and growth in maturity of the adolescent, and guidance on values, moral, ethical and spiritual matters. The relationship established between students and teachers enabled students to be confident about being open in their discussion on any topic. In fact, Student 8 considered teachers to be mentors whom he “could ask anything, both at school and the retreat”.

The alumni who presented during the retreat became a form of mentor for the students by way of their presentations on life’s journey, the problems they experienced, and the resilience displayed. They explored morals and values employed in decision-making, preparedness to explore life outside their comfort zone, and meeting and working through life’s challenges. “Just seeing where they went after school and their morals and that kind of influenced me a bit,” said Student 1. Alumni anecdotes demonstrated to students that obstacles they may experience in life can be overcome.

Teacher 4 spoke of the significance of the leadership team as mentors in the sharing of their story. He noted the vulnerability and depth of the sharing, and for teachers, it was the act of sharing which set the tone of the retreat experience. In this way it announced to the students that it is okay to be open, honest, deep, and at times vulnerable in reflection and discussion. Furthermore, the significance in the engagement by the school executive in the retreat experience reinforced to the student body and school community that the retreat was important to the overall school purpose and pastoral curriculum for students.

7.6.6 Summary

It is proposed that the success of the retreat experience, in terms of realising the retreat aim and objectives, was dependent on a number of considerations, identified as sub-

themes and placed under the theme of retreat enablers. These five enablers include the: retreat program; environment; reflection and journaling; staffing; and mentoring. Each of these sub-themes is linked to and played an important role in the themes and sub-themes of Christian principles; values, morals, and ethics; character-building; and wellbeing.

The balance of the program, its planning, and its content enabled students to develop skills and engage with a significant breadth of issues. The program contained a strong focus on physical activities, presentations, discussions, reflection, journaling, and the sharing of personal journeys. The inclusion of alumni to speak to the students about their own life experiences, struggles and dilemmas, similar perhaps to those the boys might experience during their lives, added value to the program. A formal evaluation of the retreat program with students and teachers was not undertaken. This was considered a missed opportunity to gain insight into the value and influence of the retreat program, and to build on the Christian and character-building programs undertaken at the school.

Students acknowledged that their teachers established an environment of trust and confidentiality which enabled open and honest conversations on a range of topics. The retreat program provided opportunities for students to reflect and then journal their thoughts. Students lacked skill in both of these and to assist them, teachers provided scaffolding to support student reflection and journaling. Teachers noted that students engaged with critical reflection as they grappled with a deeper understanding of themselves, others, the values they hold, and their priorities in life. Student experiences of journaling were mixed, with some students preferring to verbalise rather than journal their thoughts and views.

The sharing of personal stories was considered pivotal in gaining a deeper understanding of issues and gaining a deeper connection with themselves and with others. Staff played a pivotal role during the retreat. It is important they are well-prepared, trained, and provided with ongoing professional development to support the emotional needs of each student in their care. The support, encouragement, and guidance during activities through mentoring by teachers and alumni presenters was well-received and considered valuable by students.

7.7 Retreat Outcome

This theme contains three sub-themes: skill-building; bubble; and realisation of retreat objectives (Table 7.7). However, it should be noted that other outcomes from the retreat experience were previously identified in section 7.2 (Christian principles), section 7.3 (values and morals), section 7.4 (character-building), and section 7.5 (wellbeing).

Table 7.7*Retreat Enablers*

Specific research objective	Sources of new understandings	Issues for discussion	Theme
Investigate if the intended retreat outcomes inform new insights into retreat outcomes	5.5.4, 5.6, 6.1.3, 6.3.4-5, 6.4	Skill-building	Retreat outcomes
	5.6.1, 5.7, 6.3.6, 6.4	Bubble	
	5.4.4.2, 5.5.4, 5.6, 5.6.3-4, 6.3.2.2-3, 6.3.6	Realisation of retreat objectives	

7.7.1 Skill-Building

The stated aim of the retreat was to develop the personal skills of the retreatants to equip them for this journey into manhood (see Appendix D). The retreat experience provided opportunities for students to explore and develop several desired skills, including developing social skills (Education Council, 2019), which is considered an important component of the retreat experience (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009).

A summary of the skills developed during the retreat experience is recognised in three categories of: values – discernment, ethical decisions, and judgement – discussed in section 7.3; character – resilience, empathy, respect, active listening, and accepting views – perspective of others, appreciation of others, leadership, and teamwork – discussed in section 7.4; and wellbeing – social, communication, discussion, openness, bonding, and expressing themselves – discussed in section 7.5. The development of reflection and journaling skills is described in section 7.6.3.

Generally, the students believed that most skills encountered during the retreat were more a reminder or a reinforcement than something entirely new, but it was thought also that skills were developed, or acquired, during the retreat and transferred into school and other aspects of their personal lives. Student 2, for example, stated that the connection, communication, and social skills he gained during the retreat assisted his capacity to interact with customers at the local retail shop where he worked.

Students and teachers commented also on the need for routine and repetition for students to realise the embedding of a skill more fully. Teacher 4 supported the notion of the need for repetition and routine, especially if the learned skill was to be transitioned successfully into daily life.

I'm a big believer in routine. I think if something is going to be meaningful in terms of your learning out of it, I think that needs to translate into something different. And so, what does that look like and how do we assist boys if they want to make changes? (T. 4)

Teachers and students confirmed the students had developed some skills during the retreat which they transferred to school and life experiences more generally.

7.7.2 *Bubble*

The term, bubble, appeared in student and teacher data as a reference point for the apparent lack of ongoing post-retreat follow-up. Some students felt the retreat experience offered limited or a lack of influence for them. Some teachers and students considered the retreat was reduced to a memory once back into the routine of school and life. Student 5 commented that “once the camp was done it was like a memory”. Teachers and students shared a common view that the school has a role to play to provide a mechanism for some form of ongoing engagement with concepts covered during the retreat “to help root those experiences in the everyday of school” (T. 4).

The research of Rossiter (2016) noted the consideration that the retreat experience may be a bubble in time and not extend beyond the retreat. Rossiter (2016) contended that the retreat experience was not a one-off bubble when it was integrated into the school's overall religious program and mission. For the case study school, it is posited the retreat experience is embedded into the school pastoral program. However, this may not be apparent to the students, and the retreat may appear to be an isolated experience whereas, in reality, it was part of the extended pastoral framework of the school (see Appendix F). The case study retreat is an example of a way a school provided an alternative form of pastoral experience. Students and teachers had an opportunity to reflect on the retreat experience in terms of its realisation of expectations identified in its objectives.

7.7.3 *Realisation of Retreat Goals*

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school from the perspective of documentary expectations and the perceptions of students and staff who attended this retreat. Student and teacher data provided a view that the retreat objectives were largely realised. As illustrated throughout this chapter, student response data indicate that there was a clearly identifiable relationship between student experiences and the stated objectives of the retreat. New insights into the students' outlook on life were identified in their view of self and their approach to school and life beyond school. As Student 8 noted:

I just stopped and reflected on the future, I guess, it was more so just a focus on the future for me at the entire camp, just looking forward, what I hope to move into, occupation and stuff like that, that was the main takeaway. (S. 8)

However, for Student 3 the insight gained was not on himself. “Whilst on the retreat I learned many things. I did not gain an insight about myself as a person” (S. 3, second interview); rather, he appreciated hearing the insights of others:

I think it was more insights into the perspectives that others had of me and that’s important in terms of the way I see myself from that social component, and how did the other guys feel about me. Because I think that really, it did challenge my conceptions about other blokes in the year. It was interesting. (S. 3, second interview)

Although student expectations were varied and diverse, by and large the retreat did meet student expectations. In some instances, the retreat went beyond expectations. Students appreciated the opportunity to be away from the busyness of school and city life in a natural setting. Important objectives of the retreat which were realised by students were: connection with peers, finding new friends, and fostering friendships.

I think my expectations were to find new people to connect with and to use this retreat, this camp in the outdoors, as a way to refresh yourself from the cycle of school life. I identified and I think it met those expectations. (S. 5)

The students interviewed were posed the question, “What did you expect to get out of the retreat?” The responses ranged from being unsure to having a break and to experiencing a good time with their friends. Some responses considered a form of personal growth, while other students expressed the retreat as an opportunity to “stop from school and escape in a calm and relaxing environment” (S. 8). They valued the personal space to stop, pause and have time to think and reflect, as expressed by Student 1 who felt it “would be a chance to have time to reflect” (S. 1). In some instances, there was the desire for social interaction and development of friendship. This was especially so for students new to the school. For example, as previously mentioned, Student 1 claimed that “it was good to develop friendships ‘cause I didn’t really know anyone too well before...being new to the school”.

Some student responses demonstrated a deeper focus on their expectation of the retreat experience. Phrases included “make or break”, “be a better man”, “reflecting on values and morals and keeping what is important to me”, “have an open mind to grow”, “know who I am”, and these demonstrate an expectation of something deeper from the retreat experience. Students noted that their expectations of the retreat changed during the

experience, and in at least one instance, the realisation of change occurred well after the retreat.

However, not all students agreed. Some found the retreat experience helpful yet, because they had reflected on issues prior to the retreat, did not believe they had changed. Student 5 explained that he did not have “a moment of realisation that I was a better man, and I don’t believe it directly made me a better man. I don’t think it had that much of an effect on me”. Student 3, while noting the benefit of the retreat, said that he felt it did not assist him personally: “I think when I went on camp, I knew who I was before going onto the camp”.

Teachers provided a breadth of examples that indicated that the experiences of students undertaken during the retreat related to, and aligned with, the stated aims and objectives of the retreat. They noted students’ honest engagement in reflection activities, confidence to express themselves, open discussions with peers and teachers on a range of issues, development of maturity and skills of communication, and resilience.

The boys engage honestly and openly in everything that is on the camp. So, they give it all a go. They try in the discussions. They listen to whatever sessions there are with an open mind. They take part and it’s genuinely been really good. (T. 2)

The responses to the interview questions indicate the retreat experience did meet the outcome expectations of teachers. Teacher 4 considered the retreat objective was realised “short-term, yes. I think short-term in terms of the boys understanding what stepping up into manhood looks like and them having a multiplicity of perspectives on that.” However, Teacher 4 was less confident regarding the long-term influence of the retreat experience:

I think there’s also a long-term element as well...I think part of the longer purpose of the camp is for boys to understand what stepping up into manhood is like. And to be honest, they’re not quite there yet. Now that they’re only at the end of Year 11, I think there’s still an experience in that.

7.7.4 Summary

This theme focused on the three outcomes that emerged from the retreat experience: skill-building, bubble, and the realisation of personal goals. A number of skills were developed during the retreat experience. These are acknowledged in each section of values (see section 7.3), character (see section 7.4), wellbeing (see section 7.5), and retreat enablers (see section 7.6.3). Repetition within the retreat activities provided the opportunity for the reinforcement and embedding of skills which students then had the opportunity to transfer into school and everyday life (see section 7.7.1).

The retreat experience was an extension of the pastoral and character-building programs undertaken at school. However, once back at school, the routine of school life continued with no formal post-retreat follow-up. This outcome led some students and teachers to the view that the retreat was a form of bubble that, once finished, the retreat experience was forgotten and reduced to a memory. Teachers and students recommended the implementation of post-retreat activities be part of the retreat program.

Students and teachers indicated the retreat experience mostly achieved the aim and objectives of the retreat. For students, the retreat provided new insights on themselves, their peers, and the outlook on life. Students indicate that while their expectations were diverse, by and large the retreat experience did meet their expectations. Some students found the retreat experience helpful yet did not believe it significantly influenced them. Teacher responses indicated the retreat experiences met their outcome expectations and the retreat objective was reached, at least in the short-term. Understanding of whether long-term goals would be achieved requires further study of students, post-school.

7.8 Conclusion

The interaction of literature with retreat data provides an in-depth discussion of six themes: Christian principles; value, morals, and ethics; character-building; wellbeing; retreat enablers; and retreat outcomes.

Christian principles were threaded throughout each element of the retreat program with teachers maintaining that the retreat experience had met the Christian expectation and objective of the retreat. Conscious, however, that students were at different levels of Christian engagement, the religious dimension of the program was adjusted to meet student needs. This is consistent with the finding of Engebretson (2006), Hughes (2007), Lips-Wiersma (2006), Rossiter (2016), Sherman et al. (2013), and Tacey (2003). Students generally considered the engagement with Christian content as being approached subtly, bringing into question the consideration of a missed opportunity to deal directly with issues of faith. This finding differs from previous research into retreats which identified Christian and spirituality themes as being prominent in the program (Conn, 2009; Engebretson, 2004; Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Rossiter, 2016).

Attention was drawn to the support for teacher preparation and training to fulfil the pivotal role to ensure the identity and integrity of the Christian message. This concern is identified in previous research on schools' retreat programs (Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). One of the consequences of the declining numbers of members of Religious communities was the reduced number of Religious personnel available to lead school retreats (Flynn & Mok,

2002; Gowdie, 2017; Rossiter, 2016); the responsibility for spiritual leadership, therefore, shifted to the class teachers leading the retreat. The literature in this area also brings attention to the need to support and prepare teachers in the delivery of the Christian message (Conn, 2009; Sultmann & Brown, 2019).

Students presented the view that the values they held were fostered in the parental home, and the retreat was an opportunity to explore and reinforce them. Open, honest, frank conversation and personal reflection led to students' deeper understanding of their inner-self, and what they deemed as acceptable moral judgements. It became clear to teachers that students held a set of values and a moral code together with an ethical framework which they used to make judgements and take decisions. This is consistent with the findings of Berkowitz and Bier (2004), Conn (2009), Engebretson (2003), Rolheiser (1999) and van Bockern (2006) who advance the view that for the adolescent, spirituality and values are expressed in their way of life. A positive shift in ethical decisions was evidenced post-retreat, indicating a maturing character. The findings of Catalano et al. (2004) and Komosa-Hawkins (2012) acknowledge that values and morals continue to develop during adolescence.

Self-reflection played an important part in the students' character building which led to an increased level of maturity, resilience, empathy, and respect. Most students recognised some form of personal growth from the retreat experience. Teachers, while acknowledging the positive short-term growth of student maturity, questioned the likelihood of long-term growth and how it might be sustained. These findings on maturity are consistent with those noted by Bond (2016), Engebretson (2004), Flynn and Mok (2002), Freeman (2011), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016). Students confirmed that the retreat objective of developing and maintaining resilience was realised. They drew support from the sharing of personal stories and enhanced mindfulness of the journeys of others, including those of their peers and the presenters, noting that they were not alone in dealing and working through issues. Developing coping mechanisms and skills to break down seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their lives into achievable components provided support for their positive wellbeing. This is consistent with the findings of Laursen (2004), Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) and Masten (2014).

Through listening to and sharing of personal stories, students came to understand and accept the views of others, and, with an augmented degree of empathy, students were better able to foster deeper relationships. Emerging from the retreat was the finding that empathy can be taught, that empathising with others can occur while holding on to one's values and

personal identity, and that the capacity for empathy is linked to the development of character. This is consistent with the research findings of and (Belzung, 2014) and Palmer (2018).

Respect is acknowledged as fundamental to character-building and the enactment of Christian principles. An outcome of the retreat was that students' positive level of respect led to an increased capacity for authenticity in their relationships with peers and teachers. These findings about respect regarding character-building and the fundamentals of Christian principles are consistent with those identified in the review of literature (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Bond, 2016; Cameron, 2005; Rossiter, 2016). While the student / teacher relationship is discussed by Flynn and Mok (2002), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016), literature critiqued to date does not present the depth of value the retreat offers in fostering student / teacher relationships that has been identified in this case study.

Student wellbeing was enhanced by the retreat experience. Affirmation sessions and letters of affirmation from parents provided avenues for fostering self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth, as well as assisting in the realisation of acceptance of self and others. A central consideration for students was the capability of establishing a level of self-esteem and self-worth so as to be independent in decision-making regarding the goals they set for themselves in life. Social and communications skills fostered and enhanced the development of relationships which continued post-retreat. Literature notes the positive impact of affirmation upon self-esteem (Branden, 1992) and it is also well-noted in the research on school retreats Flynn (1985, 1993), Flynn and Mok (2002), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016). While the research of Flynn and Mok (2002) and Rossiter (2016) comment on the value of parent affirmation letters written for their child and given to them as part of the retreat experience, literature critiqued to date has not identified the depth of process undertaken by schools in both the strategy of the activity and the procedural directions to parents concerning the formation and contents of the letter. Literature also, does not provide detail of the strategic integration of the parent affirmation letter into the retreat program in order to maximise its impact.

It is posited that the group formation, not based on friendship groups, assisted in the process of learning life and communication skills and in breaking down barriers to bonding. The formation of a retreat group is not identified in literature read to date. However, an outcome of this case study research has noted the benefits of bonding and relationship-building from such formation.

The five retreat enablers, namely: program, environment, reflection and journaling, personal stories, and staffing including mentoring assisted the realisation of the retreat aim

and objectives. The program was considered balanced and included elements of repetition to reinforce significant concepts. The inclusion of the alumni and their presentations was an important ingredient in the program. Reviewed literature on retreats has not made mention of the engagement of alumni in retreats. This is viewed as a new element to enhance the delivery of the retreat program.

The environment established was one of trust for open and honest conversations. Such an environment is considered by Flynn (1993), Flynn and Mok (2002) and Rossiter (2016) as a strong foundation for an effective retreat.

Reflection and journaling were important components of the retreat experience. However, students lacked the skills necessary to reflect and journal their thoughts. During the retreat, teachers provided scaffolding to develop these skills in students. Student engagement with journaling their thoughts varied with some students preferencing oral reflection over journaling. Teachers noted that as the retreat progressed, students became confident in their competence in reflection and acknowledged their heightened level of critical reflection. Literature on retreats speaks of reflection as an integral component of retreats (Flynn, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009) however, the discourse in the literature did not speak of preparing students prior to the retreat with skills to reflect or to journal their reflections. This is considered an area for further focus.

Mentoring by the teachers and presenters was central to the guidance of positive student wellbeing, personal development, and growth in maturity of the students. Emerging from the data was the proposal for ongoing professional development for teachers to support them in all aspects of the delivery of the retreat program, and to prepare them for the potentially difficult conversations or emotional periods of the retreat experience. This proposal is in line with the findings of Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016), on school retreats which note that schools provide staff leading and attending retreats with professional development and ongoing training in retreat practices.

Retreat outcomes included an appreciation of the sub-themes of skill-building, bubble, personal stories, and realisation of retreat objectives. A significant objective was that students would be enabled to build on and develop a variety of skills which they could successfully transfer into school and everyday life.

While the retreat experience is an extension of the school's ongoing pastoral curriculum to foster growth of character, the lack of follow-up post-retreat gatherings resulted in the conclusion of some students and teachers to consider the retreat experience as a form of bubble. The lack of follow-up is inconsistent with the findings of Hughes (2007), Tullio

(2009) and Rossiter (2016), who identify and promoted the need for ongoing post-retreat follow-up with students and teachers.

Personal stories played an important role in much of the retreat program and was key to revealing to the retreatants the significance of empathy, understanding others, and looking more closely at their own situation in the development of maturity and heightened awareness of self. This is consistent with the findings of Flynn (1985, 1993), Flynn and Mok (2002), Hughes (2007), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016).

Overall, students and staff held the view that the objectives of the retreat were largely realised. Teachers indicated that the experiences of students undertaken during the retreat related to, and aligned with, the stated aims and objectives of the retreat and met their expected outcomes. Some students, while they found the retreat helpful, did not believe the retreat influenced a major change in them. However, students acknowledged they gained new insights into themselves and their view on life, realising the need to adjust expectations of themselves and others.

This chapter has brought together issues and new understandings which have emerged from the data and documentation and led to recommendations and the consideration for further research identified in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

The research problem emerged from my personal experience of approaches, including retreats, taken in different school systems to support wellbeing and character-building as students transition into adulthood. The case study that was examined in detail was an Anglican boys' school which developed and implemented a reflection retreat for Year 11 students. The focus grew from the awareness that little was known of the influence of the retreat experience on retreatants and the extent to which the aim and objectives were met from the perspective of individual retreatants and retreat leaders.

As the foundation of a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the research drew from literature on retreats and character-building programs, together with documentation pertinent to the retreat aim and objectives. However, as there is limited literature on the efficacy of retreats from the perspective of the retreatants and teachers leading the retreat experience, a case study approach was taken as the methodology for this study. Data were gathered through interviews with students and teachers, and documentary analysis of relevant school and retreat material.

8.2 Research Design

A synthesis of literature (Chapter 3) generated a specific research question which structured the design of the research process. The research question was:

In what ways do the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?

Symbolic interpretivism was the theoretical framework chosen for this research as it complements both the constructionist epistemology and the case study methodology adopted for this research (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Yin, 2013). The study focused on the perspectives of the retreat participants and their retreat, school, and social experiences (Charon, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Stake, 1995). Specific elements explored were Christian principles; values, morals and ethics; character-building; wellbeing; and retreat enablers of: the program, environment, reflection, personal stories, and staff. Moreover, symbolic interpretivism acknowledges the existence of the multiple realities of the participants (Merriam, 1998; Neuman, 2014) and the likelihood that there will not be a singular common understanding among the students or the retreat leaders despite their having experienced the same reflective retreat (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002).

Case study methodology offered an in-depth understanding of the retreat's outcomes within the confines of the single retreat experience (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2013). Participants in this research were Year 11 students who attended the retreat and the teachers who participated in leading groups and attended the retreat. A total of eight students and five teachers participated. Students were interviewed in pairs and teachers were interviewed individually (see Appendices H, I and J). Documents relevant to the retreat experience were analysed during this same time frame. These documents were used to narrate the aim and objectives of the retreat within the context of the school's mission. The data-gathering process, participant selection, and the conduct of the research met the ethical standards required of the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee and the case study school (see Appendix A).

8.3 Limitations of the Research and Further Research

8.3.1 *Limitations*

This research, conducted within an Australian Anglican school, was limited by the engagement of only one school and by the number of the responses of the participants. While the small number of student and teacher volunteers engaged in the interview process might be perceived as a limitation, data gathered was rich and provided quality in-depth information (Patton, 1990). A limitation, too, was that the focus was on students who were existing enrolments and did not include those students who had graduated from the school. Interviewing graduands would have enabled the exploration of the long-term influence of the retreat experience and thus provide further data with respect to sustained outcomes. Data gathered in the case study were gained from multiple sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990) in order to gain a broader understanding of the retreat phenomenon. Transferability to other situations or contexts can be made by the reader through engagement with the discussions and understanding of the applicability of the research (Guba, 1989; Stake, 1995).

The inherent value and application of the research rests on its authenticity in reflecting the interpretations of the interview and data presented (Bynum, 2016; Denscombe, 2003; Merriam, 1998). The researcher ensured the avoidance of the possibility of having personal bias influence the interpretation of the data provided by the students and staff facilitators (Merriam, 1998). The purposive selection of participants was to ensure that those involved could contribute effectively to the research question (Creswell, 2014). Processes to ensure participant credibility and ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the research have been respected through the use of trustworthiness strategies including participant

checking and professional integrity (Merriam, 1998). Regular peer reviews during the period of data-gathering and analysis ensured that the responses and scenarios that might have arisen, or those initially beyond the researcher's control, could be addressed ethically, confidentially, and professionally. Credibility and accuracy of the data gathered were confirmed by the participants (Briggs et al., 2012; Guba, 1981, 1989). These strategies were discussed in sections 4.9–4.11.

8.3.2 Further Research

Based upon the acknowledgement of these limitations, the following strategies are identified for consideration in further research:

1. Investigation of the long-term influence of the retreat experience on students five or ten years following their retreat;
2. Investigation of the influence the retreat experience had on teachers who attended and led the retreat program;
3. Investigation of parent observations of the retreat experience on their child;
4. Investigation of the potential difference in relationships of students with teachers who have not attended any of the retreat experiences; and
5. Investigation using a similar research design and methods in other Australian faith-based and non-faith-based schools.

8.4 New Understandings Concerning Each Research Objective

The overall research focused on “what ways do the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff?” New understandings about the case school's reflection retreat, as generated from this research, are presented under six thematic areas: Christian principles; values, morals, and ethics; character; wellbeing; retreat enablers; and retreat outcomes. These principles identify the specific impact of the retreat as per the documentation which details its overall aim.

8.4.1 New Understandings Related to Christian Principles

The specific research objective was to investigate if the intended retreat aim, objectives, and outcomes align with Christian principles.

This new understanding about this retreat experience concerns the teacher and student perceptions of the implementation of Christianity and spirituality during the retreat program. Teachers viewed the retreat curriculum as Christian. Some teachers suggested the content was evangelical, and that the Christian spiritual focus was presented openly throughout the three-day program. Students provided a contrasting view, indicating that the approach to

Christianity and spirituality was subtle. Students appreciated the subtle approach, and this has prompted the consideration by retreat leaders of a shift in the perceived paradigm of the spiritual focus of retreats.

There is a consideration that the subtle level of conversation with students concerning Christianity and spirituality presented the school with the potential missed opportunity for students to fully explore this important focus.

8.4.2 *New Understandings Related to Values, Morals and Ethics*

The specific research objective was to investigate if the intended retreat aim, objectives, and outcomes align with a growth in the student's understandings about values, morals, and ethics.

The new understanding about this retreat experience refers to student understanding and application of values, morals and ethics. Much has been written on adolescent engagement with faith and the move away from church and the traditional forms of spirituality. It became evident, however, that despite this trend, students have a strict code of values, morals, and ethics which they hold as important and apply in their decision-making. Evidenced from the retreat experience is that this degree of integrity, and being true to the inner self, are important to students.

8.4.3 *New Understandings Related to Character*

The specific research objective was to investigate if the intended retreat aim, objectives, and outcomes align with student character-building. This research generated three new understandings from the synthesis of the data concerning the specific research experience of character.

The first new understanding about this retreat experience refers to student maturity and the importance of approaching the retreat with a level of personal agency. Students acknowledged approaching the retreat with a heightened level of maturity. This attitude assisted them to process the concepts covered and to activate more fully the positive opportunities within the retreat experience. It enhanced openness and depth of contribution and response to discussions. This in turn led to greater respect for their peers and fostered relationships. For students, it was a transition from a position of following directions to one of taking ownership with mature engagement in decision-making.

The second new understanding refers to the proposition that empathy can be taught. Displaying empathy towards others and having understanding and acceptance of them are important traits in a person's character. Through a range of activities, discussion and the sharing of personal stories, students brought to consciousness their issues and deep concerns.

From these experiences, students gained an insight into the circumstances of others and an appreciation and deeper understanding of them. Students grasped the meaning of empathy and commenced engaging empathetically in their discussion and relationship with others. This confirmed the consideration presented by Palmer (2018) that empathy is a skill which can be taught.

The third new understanding emerging from the retreat experience surrounds the character trait of respect, and through the retreat program, the development and understanding of the value of being respectful. Students were directed and encouraged to engage with each activity with a level of respect. This included active and courteous listening to the personal stories of their peers, being kind, and considering the language and the tone of the language when engaging with others. Through these activities, students were able to develop and reveal a new level of interpersonal respect and fostering of friendship. Through respectful engagement, students were able to gain trust from their peers, resulting in the opening of dialogue and engaging in honest and open conversations. The giving and receiving of respect supported the promotion of personal wellbeing.

8.4.4 *New Understandings Related to Wellbeing*

The specific research objective was to investigate if the intended retreat aim, objectives, and outcomes align with wellbeing, identifying five new understandings.

The first new understanding about this retreat experience is the benefit and influence of affirmation to support student wellbeing and self-esteem. From affirmation sessions, students received positive, honest appraisal, acknowledgement and acceptance from their peers and parents, all of which added to student wellbeing and their sense of self-worth. This authentic reinforcement increased the value of self-worth (Sherman, 2013). Those with low self-esteem, often impacted by and dependent on the approval of others (Park et al., 2008), were encouraged and uplifted. The affirmation sessions led students to have new understandings of themselves and to be confident and accepting of who they are as a maturing person. Affirmation experiences also enabled students to reshape their perspective on peers.

The second new understanding is the influence of affirmation letters from parents to their sons. During the affirmation sessions students received a letter from at least one parent. The letters were purposely planned. The review of documentation noted the emphasis placed on parents by the school to ensure the content of the letter met the needs of the intended placement in the retreat program. The value of guiding parents to frame the letter content was evident and powerful, enabling parents to express their deep emotions and love of their son.

In some instances, this love and emotion had not been expressed openly at home, and for those who received a letter from parents who were not an active participant in their daily life, the experience drew out further emotions.

Receiving letters was an emotional experience for the students. The letters enabled students to express their emotions and prompted a range of emotional responses. These included a cathartic response whereby some students writing a letter in reply to their parents expressed their emotions and feelings openly. The activity provided a catalyst for students to reflect more deeply on family relationships.

The third new understanding was the positive effect of purposefully grouping students. The groups were not based on established friendships. While students may have been in the same year group with students for several years, there were instances where students did not really know members of their group. The principle of grouping students in this way was to present a situation where students were forced to use various skills to communicate and work with each other to a common goal. A positive outcome for this group formation was positive. Students interacted, developed a connection, and formed friendships which continued after they returned to a more routine and regular school life.

The fourth new understanding refers to the value of sharing personal stories assisting students in gaining a deeper understanding of themselves, others, and their general approach to life situations. Through the sharing of personal stories, students exchanged coping mechanisms in breaking down issues and working through the challenges; strategies in strengthening their resilience and providing emotional support. The process extended to deeper reflection on issues, attentive listening, deeper tolerance, respect, empathy and understanding of others, building of relationships, and revealing a level of maturity.

From the sharing of personal stories, students also gained the realisation and assurance that they are not alone with their problems. Other benefits of sharing personal stories were the insights and applications of values and morals and their place in the building of relationships with peers and teachers. As a sign of growing maturity, students were able to “see” the human side of their teachers through the sharing in common life story.

As a form of mentoring and guiding reflection, teachers, members of the school executive, and alumni shared their personal stories. This added a level of authenticity to the process, displaying a public openness which enabled students to gain a closer understanding of and connection with teachers and executive members of the school. In contrast to what were generally positive student responses to the sharing of experiences, some students said

that they had felt uncomfortable and had the sense of being forced to share deep and personal issues with members of the group they did not know well.

The fifth new understanding refers to the need for post-retreat follow-up on student wellbeing. The retreat experience was an intense three-day period where students engaged in deep discussions and sharing of their feelings with respect to a range of experiences and scenarios. Subsequently, there was no follow-up post-retreat on student personal wellbeing or on aspects of the program and presentations, including values and moral questions that were explored during the retreat. This proved a source of disappointment for many and left the students in a state of feeling incomplete. Students and teachers raised their concern about the lack of a post-retreat follow-up and students expressed their need for ongoing follow-up once back at school. They were seeking continuing support and connection post-retreat and would have welcomed their group leaders checking up with them once back at school. Teachers provided suggestions of how a regular follow-up with students might be incorporated in the busy school timetable. Concern was expressed that much had been achieved during the retreat experience and the lack of post-retreat follow-up and reconnection with students might allow the unravelling of what had been achieved.

8.4.5 *New Understandings of Retreat Enablers*

The specific research objective was to investigate if the intended retreat aim, objectives and outcome align with retreat enablers.

The first new understanding about this retreat experience is the benefit of the retreat curriculum to realise the objectives of the retreat. With the focus of building a man 40 years old, the premise of the program was to challenge the retreatants to move out of their comfort zone (see Appendix D). This included having an open mind, being able to understand, acknowledge and accept who they are (self), having the capacity to both begin the process of accepting the views of others without judgement and to consider values, morals, and ethics.

Through a variety of programmed activities, presentations, discussions, and reflections with peers and teachers, students were provided with opportunities to engage in bonding activities, develop skills, reflect, express themselves and their emotions, and prepare themselves for life at school and into the future. Students considered that the program provided balance between the activities, discussion, reflection, and free time. The retreat commenced with an activity where students, by way of a competition, made their way in groups to the retreat camp site. Activities were designed so that members of each group were engaged and relied upon each other in order to complete the task and reach their destination.

In this way, activities assisted in building an environment of unity, support and engagement as a team.

The strategy of engaging members of the alumni to assist with the delivery of the intended aim and objectives of the curriculum was insightful and well-received. These alumni, with their long-standing common link to the school, provided an instant connection with the students and an almost unquestioned level of authenticity and acceptance. Students identified with the issues and challenges experienced by the alumni, who functioned as a group of collective mentors. For some students, the ideas narrated by the alumni guided their considerations for future directions.

The retreat program was designed to align values to an activity. Following each activity, students were asked to reflect on the experience and allocate a value. Students noted that the retreat program with its activities, presentations with alumni, reflections, discussions, affirmation session and letters of affirmation from parents had a purpose which drew out different responses and qualities for each retreatant.

A second new understanding about this retreat experience surrounds the value of the environment to enable the realisation of the retreat's aim and objectives. The success of each component of the retreat program relied on the establishment of an environment that enabled unencumbered engagement during the delivery of the program. Elements of the established environment are identified in section 7.6.2. The outdoor setting provided the opportunity for physical activities on land and water, as well as a quiet setting for reflection. It was a space in time, a time away from the busyness of school activities, in order to reflect on issues they may not otherwise have considered. With respect to the social environment, teachers established a safe space, one of trust, which enabled students to express their views freely and to share personal stories, confident that trust between and within the group would be preserved and where there was no sense of being judged. The natural setting of the environment away from the busyness of school life also aided the successful delivery of the retreat curriculum.

A third new understanding as to this retreat's enablers is the benefit gained through the mentoring by teachers and presenters, including alumni, and peers, and receiving letters from the boys' parents. These intentional strategies helped students process their thoughts and emotions as they grappled with the concepts of growing to be a better person and gaining an understanding of their identity. Teachers in their role as mentors provided support, encouragement, guidance, a listening ear, and a scaffolding of ideas as students grappled with the issues of significance to them. They offered guidance on values, moral, ethical and

spiritual matters to assist and foster development of the retreatants' resilience (Catalano et al., 2004; Komosa-Hawkins, 2012; Rossiter, 2016) consistent with character and moral growth and the capacity to make healthy decisions (Chu, 2014; Dubois et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2006; Rossiter, 2016).

In some instances, students and teachers referred to the dynamic of the group, likening it to that of a family. Students valued the teachers' guidance and were comfortable speaking to them on any topic without detecting a sense of judgement. This level of confidence proved a vital part of students' exploration of their thoughts, growth, and self-awareness. Data provided an insight into the ways by which teachers strove to mentor resilience in the students; assisted with addressing their level of maturation; and contributed to the process of strengthening character in decision-making. Mentoring in this way influenced students' level of wellbeing, self-esteem, values, morals, and spirituality.

The fourth new understanding of this retreat's enablers draws attention to the need for the school to do more to integrate the retreat experience into school life. The retreat experience is considered by teachers, students, and parents as being part of the school. While teachers and students identified changes in the students as a response to the retreat experience, the teacher and student data speak of the retreat as a form of "bubble", an artificial environment or experience established at a point in time and then potentially lost once back at school. This is, in part, due to the lack of post-retreat follow-up noted by students and teachers. Teachers noted that following a powerful, emotional experience and the building of strong connections, there is an apparent loss of momentum of the retreat experience once it is finished and school routine returns and takes over. Students and teachers requested more be undertaken by the school post-retreat to support students and teachers. To counter the view that the retreat experience is separate from the experience of school, teachers presented the view that more needs to be undertaken by the school to integrate the retreat program into the life of the school and into the school's overall religious program and mission. This, if carried out, would then constitute a paradigm shift in understanding and applying the practice of retreats in the school. That is, the retreat would be an aligned and integrated program, verses a perceived one-off, add-on experience disconnected with the wider curriculum and overall life of the school.

8.4.6 *New Understandings of Retreat Outcomes*

The specific research objective was to investigate if the intended retreat aim, objectives, and defined outcomes aligned with the retreat experiences of the participants. This

research generated three new understandings concerning the research experience of the students during the retreat. They are: skill-building, reflection, and journaling.

The first new understanding refers to the value the retreat provided in skill-building. The retreat experience provided the opportunity for students to engage in the building of a range of life skills including communication; relationship competencies; character skills of respect; empathy; resilience; active listening; understanding; reflection and journaling. The skills, identified in section 7.7.1 were applied repetitively and provided the retreatants with an opportunity for each skill to be reinforced. Students and teachers noted the continued application of skills within the regular life of the school and life outside of school.

A second new understanding about this retreat experience relates to student reflection. Reflection is a key component of the retreat experience and is linked with each activity. Students valued the benefits of self-reflection and identified the need to approach reflection with a level of maturity. It was through deep, introspective and critical reflection (Schön, 2016; Valli, 1997) that students were able to examine and understand their strengths and weaknesses and so advance a deeper understanding of themselves and of others (Branson, 2007; O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). However, in the early stages of the retreat it became evident to the teachers that the retreatants had limited reflection skills or lacked them entirely. In an attempt to mitigate this limitation, teachers responded by providing scaffolding to support the development of student reflection skills (Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Students and teachers indicated that the retreat experience provided a vehicle which enabled students to reach the appropriate level of critical thinking (Kember et al., 2008; Valli, 1997). Teachers observed that by the end of the retreat, students were engaged in reflection at a deep and critical level.

The third new understanding as to the retreat's outcomes relates to the students' limited use of the journal. While journaling was not identified as an expected outcome, students were encouraged to journal their thoughts in the booklet provided. There was a preference by students to discuss their reflections with a member of their group rather than engage in journaling. Journal writing did not suit all students, with some noting that the activity was an arduous task, described by one student as like doing homework. Students were not skilled and lacked experience in journal writing. The lack of experience and skill for journaling supported the contention that adolescent males are less inclined to journal (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013).

8.5 Conclusions of the Research

The synthesis of data and new understandings generated from this research formed nine conclusions.

The first conclusion relates to the challenge of engaging Christian principles and spirituality as a foundation for reflection and action considering the objective of the retreat to nurture and build boys' spirituality (see Appendices D and E). There are a number of challenges to the achievement of this objective, specifically in light of the progressive and gradual shift in the spirituality of students away from traditional and formal Christian practices (Engebretson, 2004, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Lips-Wiersma, 2006; Mason, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tacey, 2003). Students attending the retreat have varying levels of faith and associated religious practice. Some do not have a regular connection with a religious tradition and, for many, the only engagement with a church is through the chapel services held as part of the school's formal religious activities. While this consideration of faith level was forecast in the research of Flynn and Mok (2002) and affirmed by Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016), the implication of this dilemma presents as warranting increased attention.

The challenge for the curriculum planners is the integration of spirituality into the retreat program to fulfil the needs of the retreat's aim and objective (see Appendices D and E) and to meet the standards and expectation of the school mission statement (see Appendix B). Moreover, the assumption that the religious tradition of Christianity was common to most students only served to compound the question in a context of religious pluralism.

The second conclusion concerns the positive influence on student wellbeing experienced by students. The influence of key strategies, including affirmation sessions and affirmation letters from parents, gave impetus to the development of the whole person. However, a three-day absence from their school program, with the focus away from the delivery of academic content, and activities beyond the classroom, may be considered as a distraction. Such an emphasis is not supported by the data in this case study. It is posited a reflective retreat experience should be considered an enhancement, rather than a distraction, to the delivery of curriculum content – an avenue for students to engage with wider learning as articulated in the National Goals on student wellbeing and their holistic growth (Education Council, 2019). Indeed, it is acknowledged that positive wellbeing enhances academic performance (Sherman, 2013; Walton & Cohen, 2007). The retreat experience has offered a vital lens on processes to support and boost student wellbeing and identified outcomes of significance in the development of skills, relationships, and student wellbeing. Students

confirmed that the retreat objective of self-acceptance and gaining confidence in expressing themselves was realised and met their expectations.

The third conclusion confirms the importance of personal story telling as an integral part of a retreat. The substantial value, purpose, and efficacy of the sharing of personal stories within retreat programs has long been identified (Flynn, 1985; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Sharing of personal stories assisted students in developing multiple skills. The experiences of a retreat, rich in possibilities to gain a deeper understanding of human nature, reaches the child from beyond the classroom. It is in this way the retreat experience is engaging and integrating with national goals and school and community expectations and it is through such a program of activities that students are provided the opportunity to grow holistically. This research concluded that the sharing of personal stories was central to the retreat experience and confirmed its importance as expressed in the work of Flynn (1993), Flynn and Mok (2002), and Rossiter (2016).

The fourth conclusion concerns the positive influence a well-planned and well-balanced program can be in achieving the outcomes of the retreat aim and objectives (see Appendices D and E). The retreat is a well-designed and executed experience with all the hallmarks of a well-planned curriculum. A three-day overnight stay to engage students in important personal, character-building experience without these distractions is rare. To maximise the time, much had been placed into the three-day experience. However, it was the variety, scope, and purposeful detail of activities which provided opportunity for optimum engagement by the retreatants. Such a retreat program is of enormous benefit to students if it has a well-designed, balanced curriculum with activities relevant to the student needs and staff who are skilled, trained, and prepared to lead and implement the retreat program. It is also concluded the students would gain further from the retreat experience if the students were prepared for the retreat.

The fifth conclusion concerns the lack of post-retreat follow-up from the retreat experience. Notwithstanding the findings about the qualities developed from the retreat experience, students and teachers collectively recognised the need for post-retreat follow-up for the wellbeing of students and further embedding of concepts explored during the retreat. The retreat experience was perceived as not a stand-alone program, rather, it is part of a larger, whole pastoral and character-building experience in which the students are engaged from Year 7. Students and teachers also noted the expectation to be involved in the review process of the retreat experience.

The sixth conclusion concerns the selection of an environment as an enabler to the establishment of a constructive retreat experience. Retreat organisers and leaders were cognisant of the value of establishing a safe, confidential, and social environment for the retreat experience to be effective. Students acknowledged and valued the establishment of such an environment where they were able to engage in open, honest, and mature conversations without being judged (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). The location of the retreat with its capacity for retreatants to engage in land and water physical activities was also an important component of the retreat environment.

The seventh conclusion concerns teacher preparation and training. The impact of the retreat depended on the skills and the experience of teachers who have previously led retreat groups. Retreat leaders for each student group are classroom teachers, many of whom have a pastoral role in the school and a connectedness with the students. In this way they bring a certain level of experience and formation to the retreat experience. However, the question remains as to whether or not these skills are sufficient. While there was no evidence of incidents of concern over the dealing with difficult emotional situations during the retreat, there is the potential risk on student development along with the possibility for litigation should there be inadequate response to a critical situation. One example of the significance of teacher preparation was the extent to which teachers facilitated discussions on spiritual and Christian matters. There is no indication of how the school has ensured teachers are equipped to meet student spiritual needs. Berkowitz and Bier (2004), Tullio (2009) and Rossiter (2016) established that professional development and training of staff are fundamental to ensure the successful implementation of the retreat programs. The conclusion is that schools implementing retreats have the responsibility to ensure that teachers engaged in the retreat experience are adequately trained.

The eighth conclusion refers to mentoring and its value in assisting students during the retreat experience. Mentoring is a skill that requires suitable training (Grossman et al., 2012; Komosa-Hawkins, 2010; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012). Teachers are required to engage with the needs of each student in their group. It is posited that while teachers may not have specific training as mentors, all students, in some way, benefit from the mentoring by their teachers. However, it is concluded that better preparation and training of teachers would further enhance the mentoring undertaken and support teachers in both the delivery of the program, including spiritual content, and in their support for students during emotional times.

The ninth conclusion concerns the value of and opportunity for skill-building during the retreat. An aim of the retreat was to develop personal skills that would equip the

retreatants for their journey into manhood (see Appendices D and E), the school environment, and beyond school. Many skills explored and developed during the retreat were not expressed in the aim and objectives; however, this research uncovered a considerable number of skills which students and teachers confirmed were developed during the retreat (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Skills included: discernment, ethical decisions, judgement (values); resilience, empathy, respect, active listening, accepting views and perspective of others, appreciation of others, leadership, teamwork (character); social, communication, discussion, openness, bonding, expressing themselves (wellbeing); as well as reflection and journaling skills.

The value of building skills was evident both during the retreat experience and in the transferral in school and general life (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2016; Tullio, 2009). Students and teachers noted the change of student attitude, engagement, and the relationship with each other and with teachers post-retreat. Students spoke of the essential skills of communication, rationalising of one's perspective, relational and interpersonal skills, and confidence in themselves. Focusing on skills in this way is consistent with the national goals of student wellbeing (Education Council, 2019; MCEETYA, 2008). This research concludes that the objective to develop skills during the retreat experience to better equip the retreatants as they progress into adulthood was realised.

8.6 Recommendations

The value of the inherent qualities of the retreat forms a significant platform on which adolescents are assisted in their reflection on who they are, what they value, and their development of personal skills that will equip them for their journey for the remainder of their school years and into adulthood.

However, while it is contended the retreat is an extension of a wider pastoral and character-building program, there are elements of the retreat program which can be enhanced. The research offers six recommendations which address the key conclusions. They are:

1) School mission being pursued through the retreat:

Review the integration of the Christian ethos into the retreat program to ensure the school mission is expressed inclusively and explicitly for all students.

2) Student development being advanced by the retreat:

- a) Introduce a program for the development of reflection skills and journaling skills prior to the retreat.
- b) Implement follow-up sessions with students to assist and support their ongoing wellbeing needs which emerged from the retreat experience.

3) Recognition of the retreat as integral to curriculum:

Implement post-retreat sessions to affirm and integrate the values, skills, and general retreat experience into students' lives.

4) Formation of staff:

Provide suitable professional development for teachers to assist them in the implementation of the retreat, specifically in attending to students' emotional and spiritual needs.

5) Policy to reflect new ideas:

Implement formal debriefing sessions with teachers and students as part of a comprehensive review of the program following each retreat.

6) Community engagement with parents:

- a) Follow-up with parents on their son's wellbeing and approach to school and life post-retreat.
- b) Maintain the engagement of alumni as guest speakers in the retreat program.

8.7 Final Reflection

This research has identified a number of issues pertaining to the ways the intended aim and objectives of a retreat for adolescent boys at an Australian Anglican school align with the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat leaders. This led to developing new understandings of the retreat experience which are transferrable to other retreat contexts. The research also noted and put forward recommendations for this and other retreats. This research confirms that the intended objectives of the retreat have been realised and are aligned to the intended aim and objectives of the retreat and the perceptions of the retreatants and retreat staff.

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<https://doi.org/10.2307/1387689>

Appendices
Appendix A1
Research Ethics Approval

Nina Robinson <Nina.Robinson@acu.edu.au> on
behalf of
Res Ethics <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>
Wed 6/11/2019 4:39 PM

- Christopher Branson <Christopher.Branson@acu.edu.au>;
- William Sultmann <William.Sultmann@acu.edu.au>;
- Graham Rixon;
- Res Ethics <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>

Dear Professor Branson,

Chief Investigator: Professor Christopher Branson

Co-Investigator: Dr Bill Sultmann

Student Researcher: Graham (Bruce) Rixon [Doctoral]

Ethics Register Number: 2019-188H

Project Title: The experience of a retreat for adolescent boys: A case study within an
Australian

Anglican school

Date Approved: 06/11/2019

End Date: 30/11/2020

This is to certify that the above human ethics application has been reviewed by the
Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (ACU HREC). The
application has been approved for the period given above.

Continued approval of this research project is contingent upon the submission of an annual
progress report which is due on/before each anniversary of the project approval. A final
report is due upon completion of the project. A report proforma can be downloaded from
the ACU Research Ethics website.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all conditions of approval are adhered to and
that any modifications to the protocol, including changes to personnel, are approved prior
to implementation. In addition, the ACU HREC must be notified of any reportable matters
including, but not limited to, incidents, complaints and unexpected issues.

Researchers are also responsible for ensuring that they adhere to the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the University's Research Code of Conduct.

Any queries relating to this application should be directed to the Ethics Secretariat (res.ethics@acu.edu.au). Please quote your ethics approval number in all communications with us.

We wish you every success with your research.

Kind regards,

Nina Robinson on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Assoc
Prof. Michael Baker

Research Ethics & Integrity Officer Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
T: +61 2 9739 2646 E: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

Researcher's Letter to School Headmaster



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

15th September 2019

PO Box 2015

North Parramatta

NSW 1750

graham.rixon@myacu.edu.au

XXX

Headmaster

XXX

XXX

Dear XXX,

I hope this letter finds you well. You may recall that I am undertaking a Doctor of Education. My research is through the Australian Catholic University, Strathfield Campus. Professor Christopher Branson is my Supervisor and my Co-Supervisor is Associate Professor William Sultmann AM. I have successfully completed the Confirmation of Candidature process and am ready to submit to the Ethics Committee for clearance to proceed.

Further to our verbal conversation in 2018, the focus area of my intended research is your school's Year 11 retreat program, "XXX". For ethical purposes, the School, title of the retreat or interview participants will remain confidential. The title of the research is: The experience of a retreat for adolescent boys: A case study within an Australian Anglican School.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Anglican school. The focus of the study is to understand, through the eyes of the retreatants and staff conducting the retreat, the nature and extent of the impact. The design of this study will adopt a case study approach. I will explore the nature of influence, if any, a retreat had on some student participants and compare this with the retreat's aims and objectives as understood and enacted by the facilitating staff. In this way, this research will create new knowledge about what the students are gaining from the retreat; and the relevance of the retreat experience, including individual components of the retreat program.

It is anticipated that this investigation will offer insights as to the development and implementation of the retreat program, particularly in terms of the extent to which it meets the aims and objectives intended for it. With this knowledge, it is anticipated that school leaders will be better placed to carefully assess what actions and decisions might be needed to further enhance the retreat experience for the retreatants.

I write to formally seek approval to undertake the research at XXXX School. The proposed process would involve interviews with up to ten (10) current Year 11 student retreatants, and up to five (5) staff who lead / facilitated the retreat. Interviewees would be on a volunteer basis.

It is proposed student participants be interviewed in pairs. Sometimes students feel more comfortable with another person present, and, if needed, this can be arranged. It is believed this method of small

group, rather than individual interviews, will address the potential power dynamic of student to interviewer and provide a level of confidence for the participants to respond the questions.

The staff will be interviewed one-on-one. There will be a second phase of interviews with small focus groups with two or three teachers in each group. This will provide the opportunity to confirm and validate the outcomes of the data gathered from the first staff interviews.

Participation in the interviews will be on a volunteer basis. If you approve for my proposed research of the retreat, I would write to Year 11 students, parents and staff who attended the retreat, inviting them to participate in the study and seeking their written consent. Naturally, I would assure them of complete confidentiality of their identity and the identity of the School.

Interviews will be audio recorded with written permission sort from interview participants. Interviews will not go ahead without consent. Students and staff will be identified on the audio-recording as S1, S2, T1, T2 and so on.

The interview questions will be unstructured, open-ended question. This approach will enable the participant to freely converse and engage. In this way the researcher's questions will be guided by the student's descriptions and discussion. I will provide a copy of the questions.

Interviews will be undertaken at the School, in a small block of time over a few days and convenient to the School's timing.

I have attached copies of the letters to staff, parents and students which will include consent forms.

I will be presenting my application to the ACU Ethics Committee for the October meeting. I anticipate undertaking the interviews during November at a time that is agreeable to you and the School.

Once the research has been completed, I will provide you, and the School, with the outcome of the research.

Thank you for taking time to consider my application to undertake my research of XXXX retreat and hope I gain your approval.

Please let me know if you would prefer I work through the Deputy Principal, XXXX on this matter.

Kind regards,

Mr Bruce Rixon

Response from School

----- Forwarded message -----

From: XXXX

<XXX> Date: Thu, 19 Sep 2019 at 11:27

Subject: Doctor of Education Research Request at XXX

To: XXX

Cc: XXX

Dear Bruce,

Thank you for your time on the phone and your email below. As previously indicated, this is a really interesting project.

Thank you for addressing the questions we raised about your intended research project. I have met with the Headmaster and following your clarifications, we are happy for you to conduct your research, as described, here at XXX

Please advise once your intended project receives Ethics Approval and we can discuss necessary arrangements to commence the project.

Kind Regards,

XXX

XXX

XXX

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix A2.1

Letters and Forms - Setting Up Retreat

Participant Information Letter - Parents and Students



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: The experience of a retreat for adolescent boys: A case study within an Australian Anglican School

APPLICATION NUMBER: (2019- 188H)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Christopher Branson

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Graham Bruce Rtxon

STUDENT'S DEGREE: M.Ed., B.Ed., F.T.C.L, L.Mus.A., L.T.C.L., GAICD

Dear Parents, Carers and Students,

I am a doctoral student with the Australian Catholic University (ACU) undertaking a research project of the retreat, "XXXXX" undertaken by Year 11 students. I have gained approval from the Headmaster, XXXXXX, to undertake this research. I am writing to parents of all Year 11 students who participated in the retreat seeking permission for your son to part-take in the research project described below. Participation of the research will be on a volunteer basis.

What is the project about?

The research project investigates the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Anglican school. The focus of the study is to understand, through the eyes of the retreatants and staff conducting the retreat, the nature and extent of the impact. The design of this study will adopt a case study approach. I will explore the nature of influence, if any, a retreat had on student participants and compare this with the retreats aims and objectives as understood and enacted by the facilitating staff. In this way, this research will create new knowledge about what the students are gaining from the retreat and the relevance of the retreat experience, including individual components of the retreat program. Students who assisted facilitating XXXXX will be pivotal to this research.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Graham Bruce Rixon and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Christopher Branson, PhD, Master in Educational Study, Post Graduate Certificate in Art, Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration, B.Ed., and a Diploma of Teaching. Dr Branson is Professor of Educational Leadership and Director for Catholic Leadership Studies. He is Professional Chair of the La Salle Academy for Faith Formation and Religious Education. He has a strong background in education, values and ethical leadership along with several years of experience in researching leading and presenting in these areas.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no unforeseeable risks. For ethical purposes, the School, title of the retreat and interview participants will remain confidential. No personal data of the participants will be collected. Student participants be interviewed in pairs. Sometimes students feel more comfortable with another person present, and, if needed, this can be arranged.

What will I be asked to do?

As a parent, all you are being asked to do is to provide your permission for your son to become a voluntary participant in this research.

As a student, if you choose to become a voluntary student participant you will be interviewed in pairs with a fellow student. Also, if you would prefer it, you can have a support person of your choice accompany you during the interview. You are asked not to tell others that you are being interviewed.

Furthermore, you will be asked to not share anything said during the interview with others following the interview. To ensure integrity of the interview process, you will be provided with a copy of the transcript of your interview and invited to sign the transcript once you are satisfied it respectfully records your views.

The interview questions will be open-ended. This approach will enable you to freely converse and engage. In this way the questions will be guided by the student's descriptions and discussion. The interview will be digital recorded. Participants will be identified as S1, S2, etc. Recordings and transcripts from the recordings will be treated with utmost confidentiality in accordance with ethical standards as set down by the Human Research Ethics Committee for the collection and retention of data. Interviews will be undertaken at the School, in a small block of time, about thirty minutes and convenient to the School's timing.

What are the benefits of the research project?

While the research may have no immediate benefits to the participants, this research is significant in that it will give evidence-based insight, through the lens of the students and staff leading the retreat, into the experience of a retreat program for adolescent boys. Findings from this study will be of interest to other Anglican schools throughout Australia and beyond. It is anticipated that this investigation will offer insights as to the development and implementation of the retreat program, particularly in terms of the extent to which it meets the aims and objectives intended for it. With this knowledge, it is anticipated that school leaders will be better placed to carefully assess what actions and decisions might be needed to further enhance the retreat experience for the retreatants.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. Data of participants who withdraw will not be used and will be destroyed.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results of the research will be presented to the Headmaster and published in educational research journals. Individual data gathered will not be identifiable. The research

participants, the retreat name and the school will remain confidential and not identifiable in the research document or any publication. The research will maintain confidentiality, but this cannot be guaranteed as other students may become aware of who is being interviewed. Data gathered and published will be presented in such a way as to not enable the recognition of participants. Data gathered will be stored in the ACU password protected Cloudstor.

Will be able to find out the results of the project?

The results will not be reported to the participants. A summary of the results will be presented to the Headmaster.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

I can be contacted at graham.rixon@myacu.edu.au for questions or enquiries regarding the project.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2019- 188H). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519 Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

Thank you for taking time to consider my request. The project will involve a limited number of students and selection will be on a first in basis. The process for recruitment and selection of students will be:

1. This letter outlining the project an inviting your son to participate in the project. You have an opportunity to email me should you require further information or clarification of the project prior to making the decision for your son to participate;
2. Respondents to the invitation to participate in the project will be notified their expression of interest has been received;
3. You will receive a letter indicating whether or not your child is to be involved in the project.

I hope I gain approval for your son to be part of the interview process, and for the interview to be recorded. Please complete and sign the attached consent form and return the consent form to the School.

Yours sincerely,
Graham Bruce Rixon

Appendix A2.2

Participant Information Letter - Staff



Participant Information Letter - Staff

PROJECT TITLE; The experience of a retreat for adolescent boys: A case study within an Australian Anglican School

APPLICATION NUMBER: (2019- 188H)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Christopher Branson

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Graham Bruce Rixon

STUDENT'S DEGREE: M.Ed., B.Ed., F.T.C.L., L.Mus.A., L.T.C.L., GAICD

Dear Staff,

I am a doctoral student with the Australian Catholic University (ACU) undertaking a research project of the retreat, XXXXX undertaken by Year 11 XXXX students. I have gained approval from the

Headmaster, XXXXX, to undertake this research. I am writing to all Staff who participated in leading "XXXX" retreat seeking your permission to part-take in the research project described below.

Participation of the research will be on a volunteer basis.

What is the project about?

The research project investigates the experience of a retreat undertaken by Year 11 adolescent boys at an Anglican school. The focus of the study is to understand, through the eyes of the retreatants and staff conducting the retreat, the nature and extent of the impact. The design of this study will adopt a case study approach. I will explore the nature of influence, if any, a retreat had on student participants and compare this with the retreat's aims and objectives as understood and enacted by the facilitating staff. In this way, this research will create new knowledge about what the students are gaining from the retreat and the relevance of the retreat experience, including individual components of the retreat program. Staff who assisted facilitating XXXXX will be pivotal to this research.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Graham Bruce Rixon and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Christopher Branson, PhD, Master in Educational Study, Post Graduate Certificate in Art, Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration, B.Ed., and a Diploma of Teaching. Dr

Branson is Professor of Educational Leadership and Director for Catholic Leadership Studies. He is Professional Chair of the La Salle Academy for Faith Formation and Religious Education. He has a strong background in education, values and ethical leadership along with several years of experience in researching, leading and presenting in these areas. Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no unforeseeable risks. For ethical purposes, the School, title of the retreat and interview participants will remain confidential. No personal data of the participants will be collected.

What will I be asked to do?

As a Staff member, you are asked to be a voluntary participant in this research to be interviewed and to be part of a focus group. If you choose to become a volunteer staff participant, you will be asked not to share their comments or disclose personal stories of the retreat experience. To ensure integrity of the interview process, you will sight and sign the transcript of your interview.

The interview questions will be semi-structured and open-ended to enable you to freely converse and engage. In this way the questions will be guided by your descriptions and discussion. Staff will be interviewed one-on-one. There will be a second phase of interviews with small focus groups with two or three teachers in each group. This will provide the opportunity to confirm and validate the outcomes of the data gathered from the first staff interviews. The interview will be digital recorded. Participants will be identified as T1, T2, etc. Recordings and transcripts from the recordings will be treated with utmost confidentiality in accordance with ethical standards as set down by the Human Research Ethics Committee for the collection and retention of data. Interviews will be undertaken at the School, in a small block of time, about thirty minutes and convenient to the School's timing.

What are the benefits of the research project?

While the research may have no immediate benefits to the participants, this research is significant in that it will give evidence-based insight, through the lens of the students and staff leading the retreat, into the experience of a retreat program for adolescent boys. Findings from this study will be of interest to other Anglican schools throughout Australia and beyond. It is anticipated that this investigation will offer insights as to the development and implementation of the retreat program, particularly in terms of the extent to which it meets the aims and objectives intended for it. With this knowledge, it is anticipated that school leaders will be better placed to carefully assess what actions and decisions might be needed to further enhance the retreat experience for the retreatants.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. Data of participants who withdraw will not be used and will be destroyed.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results of the research will be presented to the Headmaster and published in educational research journals. Individual data gathered will not be identifiable. The research participants, the retreat name and the school will remain confidential and not identifiable in the research document or any publication. The research will maintain confidentiality, but this cannot be guaranteed as other staff may become aware they are being interviewed. Data gathered and published will be presented in such a way so as not to enable the recognition of participants. Data gathered will be stored in the ACU password protect Cloudstor.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

The results will not be reported to the participants. A summary of the results will be presented to the Headmaster.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

I can be contacted at graham.rixon@myacu.edu.au for questions or enquiries regarding the project.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2019- 188H). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Australian Catholic University

North Sydney Campus

PO Box 968

NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059

Ph.: 02 9739 2519

Fax: 02 9739 2870

Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

Thank you for taking time to consider my request. The project will involve a limited number of staff and selection will be on a first in basis.

The process for recruitment and selection of staff will be:

1. This letter outlining the project and inviting you to participate in the project. You have an opportunity to email me should you require further information or clarification of the project prior to making the decision to participate;
2. Respondents to the invitation to participate in the project will be notified their expression of interest has been received;
3. You will receive a letter indicating whether or not you be involved in the project.

I hope I gain your approval to be part of the interview process, and for the interview to be recorded.

Please complete and sign the attached consent form and return the consent form to the School.



Appendix A2.3
Staff Consent Form



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Staff Consent Form

TITLE OF PROJECT: The experience of a retreat for adolescent boys: A case study within an
Australian Anglican School

(NAME OF) PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bruce Rixon

.....have read and understood the information provided in the
Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my
satisfaction. I agree that I may participate in this activity of interview, digitally recorded,
realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. Data of participants who withdraw will
not be used in study and will be destroyed. I agree that research data collected for the study
may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify
me in any way.

NAME OF STAFF MEMBER:.....

SIGNATURE: DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:.....DATE.....

Appendix A2.4
Parent Guardian Consent Form



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

TITLE OF PROJECT: The experience of a retreat for adolescent boys: A case study within an Australian Anglican School

(NAME OF) PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bruce Rixon..... (the parent/guardian) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity of interview, digitally recorded, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. Data of participants who withdraw will not be used in study and will be destroyed. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:.....

SIGNATURE:DATE:.....

NAME OF CHILD:.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:.....

DATE:.....

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I (the participant aged under 08 years) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in a interview digitally recorded realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision. Data of participants who withdraw will not be used in study and will be destroyed. I

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18:.....

SIGNATURE:DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:..... DATE:

Appendix B

School Mission Statement

The School fosters a learning community for its students and staff which:

- Promotes a Christian understanding of the world and society in which we live
- Pursues and celebrates academic performance in a culture of learning and thinking
- Challenges all to be responsible citizens with an attitude of service to others
- Welcomes new experience and learning at all stages of life
- Lives according to the Christ-like virtues of humility, perseverance, courage and love of others
- Develops individual gifts and talents and cultivates the habits of successful team membership. (School website)

Appendix C
School Mission Statement (1991)

To equip boys to participate in the wider community through a broad and well-rounded education of the highest standard:

- With a Christian perspective of the world in which they live.
- As responsible citizens.
- With academic achievements commensurate with their ability.
- With a knowledge of themselves, how they should live and how to relate to others.
- With a questioning mind and a continuing desire to learn.

Appendix D

Staff Program

STAFF PROGRAM _____

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PROGRAM 2019

DAY 1 – Wednesday 8 May

- 7.30am XXX Staff with cars and trailers arrive.
- 8.00am Staff briefing: All Staff (XXX and XXX) meet in XXX Hall.
- 8.23am Session 1: Camp purpose and briefing – XXX
- Luggage placed in trailer marked with Group Name. All Year 11 students (with day packs) and leaders (XXX and XXX) move into XXX Hall for Safety Briefing by XX and an XXX Leader.
- 8.50am All bags in trailers and lunches collected.
- 9.00am Session 2: Journey to Camp (XXX Cup)
- Break into activity groups with XXX staff and XXX leaders. Groups then make their own way to XXX campsite, collecting points for visiting key markers in the XXX and surrounds. All groups are assigned meeting points on the northern side of the XXX River where they will cross the river via canoe/raft/dragon boat etc. Lunch is provided.
- 9.15am All groups may depart XXX for the journey to camp.
- 1.30pm All groups to leave the XXX.
- 4.30pm Session 3: Reflection on the 'Journey to Camp' and how to get the best out of the program. All groups should have arrived at allocated lodges. Afternoon tea provided.
- Group exercises: (the length of time on these dependent on arrival time)
 - Reflection exercise on Stepping out (booklets handed out)
 - [Retreat] Values, Getting to Know Each Other
 - Life-line exercise
 - Students and leaders settle into rooms
- 5.00pm Free time at allocated lodges
- 5:45pm Orderlies:
- 6.00pm Dinner: at allocated lodges
- 7.00pm Session 4: XXX Old Boy Journeys
- Lodge Facilitator: Introduction to session and interviews with Old Boys
- 8:30pm Group Session: Reflection on interview
- 9.00pm Supper

DAY 2 – Thursday 9 May

- 7.45am Orderlies:
- 8.00am Breakfast

8.45am Session 5: The Journey

Lodge Facilitator: Brief students on today's sessions.

The Journey – Leg 1 (Bike, Hike or Water)

Group Leaders: Lead students through journey with associated activities

Key ideas - Bike (Reflect on those who have influenced you)

Hike (What are your values that guide you through life?)

Water (What is your character manifested in the great moments?)

The Journey – Leg 2 (Bike, Hike or Water)

Group Leaders: Lead students through journey with associated activities

Key ideas - Bike (Reflect on those who have influenced you)

 Hike (What are your values that guide you through life?)

 Water (What is your character manifested in the great moments?)

Lunch

The Journey – Leg 3 (Bike, Hike or Water)

Group Leaders: Lead students through journey with associated activities

Key ideas - Bike (Reflect on those who have influenced you)

 Hike (What are your values that guide you through life?)

 Water (What is your character manifested in the great moments?)

5.00pm Finish and move to allocated lodges

5.45pm Orderlies:

6.00pm Dinner: at allocated lodges

7.00pm Session 6: Affirmation of 'Who I Am'

Lodge Facilitator: What we look for, we find in others

- Group Affirmation exercise
- Group Leaders: Parents Affirmation exercise
- Group Leaders: Parents Letters to Students

8.30pm Supper around camp fires

DAY 3 – Friday 10 May

7.45am Orderlies:

8.00am Breakfast

8.45am	Clean up and vacate rooms –
Session 7	
9.00am	Session 7: Wisdom for Life – XXX
10.00am	Morning Tea
10.30am	Session 8: #HeForShe: Champions of Change (Attitudes to Women)
11.30am	Session 9: Who do you want to step up to be?
	Attitudes to Women Discussion
	Place of Christianity
	Future Life-line and Your Values
12.15pm	Letter writing exercise (Solo Reflection) and debrief camp in groups
12:30pm	Orderlies:
12.40pm	Lunch
1.10pm	Wrap up and farewell in Rec Hall
1.30pm	Departure

Aim

The aim of XXX is for boys to take time out from the busyness of life to reflect on who they are (with the things they value, the people that have influenced them, and the character they manifest), so that they will develop personal skills that will equip them for their journey into manhood.

Objectives

To increase a boy's confidence:

- To be himself at all times
- To express his thoughts and feelings
- To stand up for his own values

To build a boy's:

- Trust with others
- Resilience
- Communication skills
- Maturity, and
- Spirituality

Outcomes

At the end of [the Retreat] we expect that the boys will be able to:

- Engage with and understand more about themselves
- Build skills of resilience and discernment
- Make decisions based on sound ethics, values and morals
- Identify and validate emotions

- Develop a meaningful vocabulary in order to foster and maintain successful relationships

Day 1 – Wednesday 8 May - Activities

Session 1 Camp Purpose and Briefing

Luggage placed in trailer marked with Group Name. All Year 11 (with day packs) and leaders (XXX/XXX) move into XXX hall for briefing by XXX.

Purpose

To establish the context and purpose of camp and to provide information for next phase.

Timings

8.00am	All XXX staff and XXX staff meet in XXX for briefing
8.23am	Students move into XXX
8.25am	XXX will introduce the Retreat and its purpose Journey to Camp (XXX Cup) briefing (PPT) Chaplain prays
8.50am	Groups move out one at a time with staff to prepare for Journey to Camp Pick up lunch bags

Details

Staff briefing – chance to meet XXX leaders, clarify movements etc.

Luggage placement – Luggage to be placed in trailer marked with Group Name. Boys and staff move into Playfair with day pack and dressed to move off straight after briefing.

Session 2 Journey to Camp (XXX Cup)

Break up into groups with XXX leaders and XXX staff and make own way to XXX camp site, collecting team points by visiting key marker points in the XXX area. All groups assigned meeting points on North side of XXX where they will move across river via canoe/raft/dragon boat etc.

Purpose

The Journey to Camp is designed to get the boys thinking about journeys and the great journey of life as well as help to establish group dynamics. Each student is given the chance to make decisions/lead the group.

Timings

9.00am	Collect lunches and plan trip
1.30pm	Must start leaving the city
4.30pm	Arrival at Camp

Details

iPads – used for photos and Tripview (set up using staff hot spot)

Map and details (see next page) read instructions carefully

Floating XXX across (see following page)

Discussion – Use time to develop relationships in groups. Perhaps discuss during travel favourite/best/worst journeys. Try to give as much freedom as possible to students, yet gently direct and give each a go at leading.

XXX XXX Journey to Camp

Your team must make their way to camp arriving no later than 4:00pm. Along the way you will have many decisions to consider, think through them carefully. You may only use public transport systems to travel. As you travel to camp you will be competing for the XXX Cup. On your way, points can be earned by travelling to certain destinations completing tasks. The destinations and tasks are listed below. You have a deadline to leave the city by 1:30pm which means you will not be able to complete every task. Choose wisely.

Once you have exited the city you will be given a location to get to in order to get transport to camp. Each group has an iPad which may be used for navigating around the city, taking photos and planning your journey.

As you travel the following rules must be followed:

1. Your team must not split up for any reason
2. You may only cross a street where there is a crossing or on a traffic light 'walk' signal
3. You must complete at least one Red Destination Challenge.
4. Your entire team must stop for a 30 min lunch break.
5. For every minute after 4:00pm that your team is late you will lose 50 points
6. Your teacher or instructor may penalise the team by deducting points or enforcing a time penalty which the team must immediately stop for.

Additional points will be given for various tasks:

Each time a group uses public transport they will receive the following points:

- Ferry – 30 Points
- Light Rail – 20 points
- Bus or Train – 10 points

Photos will also gain additional points:

- See Photo Bonus List

Bonus Marker Points:

- The first team to complete each Red Marker will receive a bonus 100 points.
- The team that completes the most destination challenges will have the privilege of going first for every meal once at camp

Section 3 Reflection on 'Journey to Camp' and getting the best out of the program.

All should have arrived at allocated lodges. Have afternoon tea and then move to group areas to complete exercises in journals. Students and leaders then locate bags and settle into rooms.

Purpose: To debrief the Journey and discuss how to get the best out of the program.

Timings

1.30pm – 4.30pm arrive at lodge site

Get some afternoon tea

Find group meeting place and hand out Student Journal

Reflection exercise in journals

Retreat Values

Getting to Know Each Other exercise

Life-line Exercise

Students and Leaders settle into rooms – Students must be in the correct room for Duty of Care purposes at all times during the Retreat.

Details

Reflection Exercise

In Journal reflect on different aspects of the journey down to camp eg best part, worst part, I used to think...but now I think (about yourself, others, surroundings).

Retreat Values

Quickly walk students through the Retreat agenda over the next few days;

Day 1 and 2 Reflection through journeys on who they are

Day 3 Who do they want to be and how they are going to get there

Explain 'Retreat' values to ensure groups are a safe place with acceptable levels of comfort and integrity throughout the retreat (so as to prevent harm).

Respect all people, be humble, be honest, be generous and remember confidentiality.

Warm students up to self-disclosure and how to respond to each other – discuss the Retreat Values.

Explain much of [the retreat] is going to be about building up your capacity to like yourselves even more, even when the pressure is on, or when you may have made a big mistake.

Ask – Given what you know about the next couple of days, if we did NOT respect all people here; if we were NOT humble; were NOT honest with each other; NOT generous and did NOT respect confidentiality, what would we be saying and doing to each other?

Ask – How do we want to treat each other whilst we're at the Retreat? What does respect, humility, honesty, generosity and confidentiality mean to each of us?

Getting to Know Each Other – Life-line exercise

- Group Leaders: Explain how to do life line by sharing/showing some of their own life line. (2mins max)
- Boys draw the key events that have occurred in their lives along the lifeline in their journal
- Paired share with another nearby student or in your group
- If group happy and there is time, perhaps share with whole group

NOTE: If a student becomes overly emotional about events that occurred in their life-line, refer the student to your Lodge Facilitator.

Session 4 XXX Old Boys Journey

Students meet in lodge rec halls where they will hear from four different Old Boys about their life journey

Purpose Students are to hear from and reflect on the lives of Old Boys with whom they have a connection within terms of attending school.

Timings

7.00pm Students move into rec halls

Each Old Boy will have 25 minutes (including question time) and 5 minutes travel time between each lodge. Each lodge will have one 30 minute slot in which they can have a lodge discussion.

9.00pm Group discussion and journal reflection on interviews

9.30pm Supper

10.00pm Bed time

10.15pm Lights out

Details Old Boys

Interviews

DAY 2 – Thursday 9 May - Activities

Session 5 The Journey – (Bike, Hike or Water)

Groups meet in recreation halls in allocated lodges.

Format: Each activity group remains together until dinner. During this time they will complete three journeys; a hike, a bike ride and a water trip.

During these three legs they will reflect on the following ideas:

Bike (Reflect on those who have influenced you);

Hike (What are your values that guide your through life?)

Water (What is your character, manifest in the great moments?)

They will travel between the two points marked out for them on the map. They will be provided with a GPS and an

XXX leader. This is a time to continue discussion. It is designed to be not too hard and to be an enjoyable challenge or journey.

There will be six groups in each time slot doing the hike. The journey and initiative activities will take about 90 – 120 minutes and the discussion will take 60 minutes. Three groups will start with the discussion and three will start on the journey to help stagger departures. This should enable groups to move around in their own space. There is an initial activity before they start walking where they must pick three objects from a collection of items.

The Hike Leg

Discussion

The big idea in the leg is for the students to reflect on what things they value most, for your values are the compasses by which we all make decisions, particularly when we are confused, under pressure and tired.

- Ask the students to stand up and spin around until dizzy. There will be days in your life when you have to deal with dilemmas, deadlines, pressures and you will feel pressured to make decisions. Our values are the compass by which we all make the right decision when life is confusing, you feel exhausted and the pressure is on.
- Journal – ask them to identify a list of things that they value most in their lives.
- Ask them to discuss in pairs
- Look at list of values (page 28 in student booklet, page 30 in Master Program)
- Give them an ethical dilemma (found in 'Appendix')
- Ask students to read stories and think about what decisions and actions they would take to handle the situation.
- Invite students to discuss their decisions/actions and explain to the group their reasoning.
- Ask students to name what values they are using to make their decisions and actions. If the individual student cannot identify the values they are using, invite other group members to identify the values being used by the student sharing their viewpoint.
- Give a few minutes at the end to journal.

Initiatives

Postponing Popping Party Popper – PPP

The group needs to delay the remote detonation of a party popper to reveal the next clue.

Using sticky tape, plastic bag, bucket and rope/string (all provided) and anything else available, construct a device that will automatically detonate at least 10 seconds after the final human interaction with the device (use instructions if needed).

Debrief: When you had your choice did you value the right objects?

Floating Fire – FLF

The group needs to construct a raft using the materials available. A fire then needs to be started on top of the raft. The fire needs to last at least two minutes.

Debrief: If you had to list what you valued, what order would you put the following: Task, objects, people.

Everybody Up

The group needs to use each other to pull themselves up. Start in pairs with feet together and hands joined. As the group improves, join pairs to make groups. Aim to have one circle where each member relies on each other.

The Water Leg

Discussion

The big idea in this leg is for the students to reflect on what character they manifest in the big moments of life. This is taken from Phillip Brooks' quote "Character may be manifest in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones".

- Get the group to decide upon 10 big moments of life. These need to be both positive and negative in nature. Eg winning a final, sitting an exam, being lost, being very sick, being dropped from a team, going on a first date, etc..
- In pairs, get them to identify individuals from society who "do" these moments best and worst and explain what parts of their character shine through in these moments.
- Have each individual journal how they react in each of these situations, what positive or negative character traits are manifested at these times. Can share if group dynamics are good, but may be too early.

Initiatives

Boats -Toxic Pen – TXP

Similar to Toxic Waste, each member is to hold a line attached to a pen. Under the pen is a piece of paper. The leader is to dictate to the group, numeral at a time, the coordinates needed next. No member is allowed within 1 metre of the piece of paper.

Debrief: Were there any people on the group who displayed good characteristics of a leader? What were they?

Boats-Straight Arm Tea – SAT

Each member of the team must have their paddle placed on their shoulders and taped at the wrist. The group will eat morning tea or afternoon tea. As they cannot feed themselves they must help each other to open packets, eat and clean up.

Debrief: What does it feel like to be unable to help yourself? What sort of character does it take to admit that you need help?

Canoe-Carry the King

This activity is the aquatic version of the pole bearing the Kings on their thrones. Choose a canoe for (or anyone with a birthday?) to be the Kings of canoe, then get the other canoes to form a raft and pull the Kings canoe up onto it. They are then to paddle the Kings canoe to a designated location and unload it.

Canoe-Shapes & Letters

The group is required to move their canoes into different configurations for this one.

The leader will call out a shape or a letter and the group as a whole needs to manoeuvre their canoes into that position. They could spell CANOE a letter at time.

Dragon Boat-Bow to Stern

All paddlers must get a ball to pass from bow to stern using only paddles. The ball must be outside the boat and above the water although the ball may not touch the water. Use a ball for each side. Once each side has successfully completed the challenge, get each side to race the other.

The Bike Leg

Discussion

The big idea in this leg is for the students to reflect on those who have influenced them most.

- Ask students to journal all those who influence them most.
- Important to highlight the significance of relationships. That we are relational beings who need and are shaped by those around us.
- From the list they have made, get them to use the bush surroundings to represent how and why these people might have influenced them. E.g. different size rocks to represent how much each person has influenced them. Or a rock represents their father and a stick their mother and God a cup of water.

Initiatives

Slow Race – SLR

Everybody must be on their bikes. Designate a finish line ahead of you. The winner of the slow race is the last person to cross the finishing line. If a rider touches the ground they

must dismount and walk their bike to the finish line. Riders can't move backwards. Give students the tip to peddle while holding the brakes.

Debrief: Did you allow yourself to be influenced by others?

Popsicle Push-Up

Everyone must elevate themselves off the ground, hands are the only thing touching the ground and everyone must have physical contact within the group. It is a people problem so use each other to support rather than objects. The aim is to do a group push-up with feet on shoulders.

Tarp Turn – TRT

Everybody must be on the tarp. Without removing anyone from the tarp, it must be flipped, so that the 'ground' side is now the upturned side; thus revealing the next coordinate.

Debrief: Who in the team influenced your success?

Session 6 Affirmation of "Who I Am"

7.00pm: Lodge Facilitator: Opening

Session 6: Formal

7.00pm – Lodge Facilitator: What we look for, we find in others

7.15pm – Group Leaders: Affirmation exercise

8.00pm – Group Leaders: Parents Affirmation exercise

8:15pm – Group Leaders: Parents Letters to students

8:30pm – Camp fires and supper

- Use the "Paul Potts" video and the statements below to introduce and frame the affirmation exercises.
- What we put our attention on we see. This also happens with people. If we put our attention on only their faults, we only see their faults, mistakes and weaknesses. When we do this we ignore their talents, strengths and gifts.
- We are all talented in something and we all have relative weaknesses. That means different people will be good at doing different things and do relatively poorly at other things. In the end, we all do the best we can, given the capabilities we have developed to this day. We are as capable as we can be.
- This is important in relationships. If you put most of your attention on only a person's shortcomings, then automatically you'll see more of their weaknesses, which can be irritating, resulting in you paying them out and them responding defensively by trying to put you down. The loser is the friendship.

- If you want to get on well with people in your life, have friends and succeed, then it's important to see the whole person. To put your attention on a person's strengths, as well as weaknesses. That way you are dealing with reality, not just part of it.
- When you see what's good in a person it's amazing how they respond in bringing those attributes out in everyone.

7.15pm Group Leaders: Group Affirmation Exercise

- Instruct group members to sit in a circle
- Instruct group members to spend a moment considering what they appreciate about each student in their group.
- Go around the circle focussing on one person at a time. Students observe / comment on "what I appreciate about your is..." for each of the boys in the group. There should be at least three (3) positive observations / comments. All boys are included in the process. The aim is to build their inner strength from the observation of others.

NB: This is a very important activity. Staff must ensure that enough time is given to this activity and to each of the boys in your group. The activity begins the building for the powerful evening session.

8.00pm Group Leaders: Parents Affirmation Exercise

- Students note individually in their Journal
 - What are my father's strengths and good qualities?
 - What are my mother's strengths and good qualities?
 - Which of my father's and mother's strengths and good qualities do I want to take on into my future?
 - What do my mother and father appreciate about me? What do they see as my strengths and good qualities?

8.15pm Group Leaders: Parents Letters to Students

- Hand out the letters from the parents and all time/space for the students to read them privately.
- Remind them that breakfast is at 8am. Clean out rooms for 9.15am opening Lodge Recreation Hall.
- Be alert for students who need emotional support from you or a School Counsellor.
- Emphasise confidentiality. Boys should not share their letter/s with other boys.
- Encourage them after reading their letter, to spend time responding to it in their journal. How did they feel about the letter? Did they agree with the it? What would they like to say to their parents in response?

NB: No noise before 8.30pm

8.30pm Supper and camp fire

Exercise – write on paper something you wish to burn up as you move forward.

Day 3 – Friday 10 May - Activities

7.45am	Orderlies
8.00am	Breakfast
8.45am	Clean up, vacate rooms and walk to XXX hall
9.00am	Session 7: Wisdom for Life – XXX
10.00am	Morning tea
10.30am	Session 8: Champions of Change : Attitudes to Women – XXX
11.30am	Session 9: Who do you want to step up to be? Attitudes to women discussion Place of Christianity Future Life-line and Your Values

- Break into groups to discuss Christianity and Attitudes to women

1. Consider your own mother: what have you learned about womanhood from her?
2. Consider your father's relationship with your mother – regardless of whether your parents are currently married or separated/divorced. What messages have been sent to you by your parents' marriage about how men treat women in close relationships? What aspects of your father's behaviour would you like to emulate? What aspects do you want to do differently?
3. The Christian heritage of XXX promotes the idea of husband's loving their wives 'as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her'. What do you think about the idea that becoming a husband is about making a choice to 'serve' your wife and to 'give up your life' to look after her?
4. What do we know about the differences between the way men and women experience and express sexuality?
5. Matt McCormack is an English author who has written about his own use of pornography. He has written: *I believed I could keep the time I spent using pornography partitioned away from the rest of my life and my attitudes, values and behaviour. But it became more and more obvious that this 'partitioning' was not possible; that porn continued to negatively influence the way I viewed women and could not be separated from who I was and how I behaved.* (Big Porn Inc., 2011. P284). What themes about women are expressed in pornographic image and videos? How do these themes influence a young man's attitudes, values and behaviour? How does pornography undermine a young man's preparation for respectful relationships with women? How can we ensure that the proliferation of pornography in our society not undermine the attitudes of a respectful man/husband?
6. What does it look like to have moral courage when looking at issues of respect and equality for women?

<http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/>

- Finish by asking students to reflect in their journals about Christianity and attitudes to women.

Group Leader : Being a Good Man

- Day 1-2 spent time reflecting on who they are now, today, who do they want to be?
- Ask students: Who are some of the people you would like to be like? What is it they admire about them?
- Explain the next few tasks.

Group Leaders: Future Life-line, Your Values, Attitudes and Blockages

- Close your eyes and see and feel what you want your life to be like in 2-5 years' time.
- Where do you want to be? Where are you living? What is it like being with your family, friends, with God?
- Hear yourself talking to them with a certain tone of voice. Notice how that feels. See, hear and feel yourself using all your good qualities to take on and handle the challenges in your life. Notice how you think and feel about yourself as you do these things. Notice what you are achieving, what events you want to see unfold.
- Now see yourself in 5 years' time. Repeat visualisation instructions.
- See if you can see even further into the future and again see, hear and feel what your life will be like. Notice all the events that you want to happen in your life occurring.
- Nod your head if you can see or hear or feel the future you want to create in yourself.
- Now open your eyes and consider the question:
- Open your journal and note the key events you want to see happen in your life from today to as far in the future as you can see.
- Now consider what values and character will be most important to you in making your future lifeline happen. Suggest to the boys they decide on 4-6 that they can remember easily.
- What values/character will be most important for you to achieve what you want in Year 12? Ask the students to put their 4-6 values in the rank order of relative importance for completing Year 12.
- Invite students to share their values with their group members.
- What could be some inhibitors that will block their journey? E.g. family conflict, depression, alcohol and drugs, discrimination, the environment, abuse, bullying, stress, sexuality. Discuss. Reflect on not just external factors but internal inhibitors as well. E.g. fear, self-image, bad values, weak character etc..

12:15pm Letter writing exercise (Solo Reflection) and debrief camp in groups

Write a letter to yourself (paper and envelopes are provided)

After letter writing debrief camp as a group

Letters collected by each group leader and placed in provided envelopes.

This exercise gives students the opportunity to record some of their own reactions and feelings on paper by writing a letter to themselves. It is something that can be referred to in the future. Any resolutions, plans, ideas and hopes they want to remember next week, next month and next year should be included in this letter. Being able to read this letter in the future will be a revealing reminder of what you hoped for yourself as you finished *[the retreat]*. It will be a way to keep *[the retreat]* alive in your daily life.

This is to be done on your own, somewhere around the grounds, not in your room. This is a time of silence.

Please respect the rights of others to be left alone and stay away from them. No one will read the letter you write, so please be open and honest with yourself.

Please give this exercise serious thought and express clearly in writing what your thoughts are at this time. You may not appreciate the value of this activity until time has passed and you later read the letter you write now. Be very specific about how you want to live; the learning and commitment you made during *the retreat*.

Letter Content

Begin by summarising the impact of *[the Retreat]* for you personally in one sentence.

Expand on this one summary sentence by putting down any feeling, reactions, resolutions and thoughts that are uppermost in your mind and heart at this time.

Below are some questions to guide you in writing your letter.

Learning

- What have you learnt that you always want to remember?
- What have you heard from others that you always want to remember?

Self

- What do you most value/appreciate/love about yourself?
- What do you want from yourself in your life?
- What values do you want to live your life by?
- What promises have you made to yourself?
- What obstacles could you encounter in keeping these promises?
- How do you want to handle these obstacles?
- Who could help you handle these obstacles?

Others

- What have you learnt about other people?
- What attitudes, values and behaviours do I want to have towards women?
- What promises have you made to others in your life?
- What obstacles could you encounter in keeping these promises?
- How do you want to handle these obstacles?
- Who could help you handle these obstacles?

When finished put your letter into the envelope provided, seal it and give it back to your Group Leader.

Your letter will be posted to you one year following the Retreat.

12:30pm Orderlies

12:40pm Lunch

1:10pm Wrap up and farewell in Rec Hall

1:30pm Departure

Famous Sayings

Biblical

“I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.”

Philippians 4:13 – (also used to be on Fijian rugby jerseys!)

“This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and gave his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

1 John 4:11

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 139:23, 24

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” (CS Lewis)

General

“Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” (Abraham Lincoln)

“I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.” (Mark Twain)

“Here is the greatest secret of success: work with all your might but trust not in your own power to achieve. Pray with all your might for God’s guidance and blessing. Pray, then work, work and pray; and again pray and work. Whether you see much fruit or little fruit, remember that God delights to bestow real blessing. This comes generally in answer to earnest, believing prayer.” (George Muller)

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.” (Galileo Galilei)

“Whatever has begun in anger ends in shame.” (Benjamin Franklin)

“Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true.” (Leon J. Suenes)

“Success is the good fortune that comes from aspiration, desperation, perspiration and inspiration.” (Evan Esar)

Human Feelings

Positive Feelings

Excited
Optimistic
Energised
Alert
Calm
Confident
Capable
Intelligent
Passionate
Enthusiastic
Focused
Happy
Proud
Fulfilled
Loving/Loved
Warm
Compassion
Safe
Accepted

Negative Feelings

Frustrated/Annoyed/Irritated
Resentful/Angry
Disappointed
Powerless
Hopeless
Helpless
Foolish/Dumb/Thick/Stupid
Inadequate/Incapable
Embarrassed/Ashamed
Not Good Enough
Inferior/Less Than/Small
Resigned
Alone/Unsupported/Unloved
Hurt/Pain
Fear/Afraid
Shocked
Jealous
Sad/Down
Failure

A List of Values

Kindness	Respect	Loyalty	Financial security
Honesty	Compassion	Tolerance	Being independent
Love	Freedom	Safety	Making a difference
Fairness	Initiative	Caring	Environmental issues
Industriousness	Unity	Patience	Peer acceptance
Equity	Conscience	Sincerity	Getting a job
Perseverance	Logic	Hope	School or study satisfaction
Common good	Character	Teamwork	Physical and mental health
Integrity	Peace	Support	Family relationships
Trust	Diligence	Knowledge	Spirituality/faith
Responsibility	Honour	Dedication	Friendships
Dignity	Cooperation	Commitment	Feeling needed and valued
Courage	Fidelity	Creativity	Possessions
Generosity	Justice	Brotherhood	Status, power, position
Discipline	Individualism	Understanding	
Community	Selflessness	Awareness	
Truth	Balance	Leadership	

Ethical Dilemmas

Noah sees the same bully torment the same victim every day in the schoolyard and nobody does anything about it. Should Noah speak up and risk being labelled a “dobber”, or should he ignore it and mind his own business?

You are waiting with a few other people to board a bus. The bus pulls up and before you can board the driver gets out and goes into the convenience store to get a coffee. The others all climb on board. Do you get on with them or wait for the bus driver to come back to pay your fare?

Erin's chemistry teacher made a huge mistake on Erin's final grade. A mistake that was very much in Erin's favour. Should Erin point out the mistake to her teacher, or accept her good fortune quietly and gratefully?

James has a girlfriend who he really likes. They have been together for about 4 months. He has promised to take her out to dinner and a movie on Saturday night. His friends have been giving him a hard time saying that he is “under the thumb” and if he is really their mate he will come to a party with them which is also on Saturday night. What should James do?

Someone left \$200 sticking out of an ATM machine and there's nobody in sight. Nobody but you, that is. What would you do? Would your actions be any different if others were nearby?

but you were relatively certain they didn't notice the money? What would you do if your friends were with you and encouraging you to take the money?

The mood at Baileyville High School is tense with anticipation. For the first time in many, many years, the basketball team has made it to the state semi-finals. The community is excited too, and everyone is making plans to attend the big event next Saturday night.

Jeff, the coach, has been waiting for years to field such a team. Speed, teamwork, balance: they've got it all. Only one more week to practice, he tells his team, and not a rule can be broken. Everyone must be at practice each night at the regularly scheduled time: No Exceptions.

Brad and Mike are two of the team's starters. From their perspective, they're indispensable to the team, the guys who will bring victory to Baileyville. They decide—why, no one will ever know—to show up an hour late to the next day's practice.

Jeff is furious. They have deliberately disobeyed his orders. The rule says they should be suspended for one full week. If he follows the rule, Brad and Mike will not play in the semi-finals. But the whole team is depending on them. What should Jeff do?

You are a boarder and hold a School leadership position (Head Boy / Prefect / House Captain / Captain of Rugby, etc.). You discover that two of your peers have snuck out at night and were smoking marijuana when you hear them bragging about it to some younger boys. They all know that you have overheard their conversation and know what occurred. Your peers ask you to not say anything for fear that they will be expelled, but you also know that “news will spread” and most of the school will soon hear about what happened. What should you do? Would your actions change depending upon which position you actually

Appendix E

Student Journal and Program

Contents

Program 2019

DAY 1 Wednesday 8 May	4
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DAY 3 Friday 10 May	6
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Activities 2019

Day 1 Wednesday 8 May	8
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Day 2 Thursday 9 May	14
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Day 3 Friday 10 May	22
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Program 2019

DAY 1

Wednesday 8 May

7.45am XXX Staff with cars and trailers arrive.

8.00am Staff briefing: All Staff (XXX and XXX) meet in Playfair Hall.

8.20am SESSION 1: CAMP PURPOSE AND BRIEFING – XXX

Luggage placed in XXX Courtyard in lodge groups. All Year 11 (with day packs) and leaders (XXX and XXX) move into XXX for Safety Briefing.

8.50am All bags in trailers and lunches collected.

9.00am SESSION 2: JOURNEY TO CAMP (XXX Cup)

Break into activity groups with XXX staff and XXX leaders. Groups then make their own way to XXX campsite, collecting points for visiting key markers in the XXX and surrounds. All groups are assigned meeting points on the northern side of the Port Hacking River where they will cross the river via canoe/raft/dragon boat etc. Lunch is provided.

9.15am All groups may depart XXX for the journey to camp.

1.30pm All groups to leave the city.

4.30pm SESSION 3: REFLECTION ON THE 'JOURNEY TO CAMP' AND MAKING THE MOST OF THE PROGRAM.

All groups should have arrived at allocated lodges. Afternoon tea provided. n Group exercises: (the length of time on these dependent on arrival time) n Reflection exercise on Stepping out (booklets handed out)

- Retreat Values, Getting To Know Each Other
- Favourite / Least Favourite Animals exercise n
- Life-line exercise
- Students and leaders settle into rooms

5.00pm Free time at allocated lodges

5:45pm Orderlies

6.00pm Dinner: at allocated lodges

7.00pm SESSION 4: XXX OLD BOY JOURNEYS

Lodge Facilitator: Introduction to session and interviews with Old Boys

8:30pm Group Session: Reflection on interview

9.00pm Supper

DAY 2

Thursday 9 May

7.45am Orderlies
8.00am Breakfast

8.45am SESSION 5: THE JOURNEY
Lodge Facilitator: Brief students on today's sessions.

Leg 1 (Bike, Hike or Water)

Group Leaders: Lead students through journey with associated activities

KEY IDEAS BIKE (Reflect on those who have influenced you)

HIKE (What are your values that guide you through life?)

WATER (What is your character manifested in the great moments?)

Leg 2 (Bike, Hike or Water)

Group Leaders: Lead students through journey with associated activities

KEY IDEAS BIKE (Reflect on those who have influenced you)

HIKE (What are your values that guide you through life?)

WATER (What is your character manifested in the great moments?)

Lunch

Leg 3 (Bike, Hike or Water)

Group Leaders: Lead students through journey with associated activities

KEY IDEAS BIKE (Reflect on those who have influenced you)

HIKE (What are your values that guide you through life?)

WATER (What is your character manifested in the great moments?)

5.00pm Finish and move to allocated lodges

5.45pm Orderlies

6.00pm Dinner: at allocated lodges

7.00pm SESSION 6: AFFIRMATION OF 'WHO I AM'

Lodge Facilitator: What we look for, we find in others

- Group Affirmation exercise
- Group Leaders: Parents Affirmation exercise
- Group Leaders: Parents Letters to Students

8.30pm Supper around campfires

DAY 3

Friday 10 May

7.45am Orderlies

8.00am Breakfast

8.45am Clean up and vacate rooms

9.00am SESSION 7: WISDOM FOR LIFE – XXX

10.00am Morning Tea

10.30am SESSION 8: #HEFORSHE: ATTITUDES TO WOMEN – XXX

11.30am SESSION 9: WHO DO YOU WANT TO STEP UP TO BE?

Attitudes to women discussion Place of Christianity

Future Life-line and Your Values

12.15pm Letter writing exercise (Solo Reflection) and debrief camp in groups

12.30pm Orderlies

12.40pm Lunch

1.10pm Wrap up and farewell

1.30pm Departure

Aim

The aim of the Retreat is for boys to take time out from the busyness of life to reflect on who they are (with the things they value, the people that have influenced them, and the character they manifest), so that they will develop personal skills that will equip them for their journey into manhood.

Objectives

To increase your confidence:

- To be yourself at all times
- To express your thoughts and feelings
- To stand up for your own values
- Maturity, and
- Spirituality

To build your:

- Trust with others
- Resilience in yourself
- Communication skills

Outcomes

At the end of the retreat we expect you to answer the following questions:

- Have I a deeper knowledge of myself?
- Have I a deeper relationship with my family, my friends and God?
- Have I developed resilience to the pressures I encounter in life?
- Have I developed strategies to cope with difficult situations (crises, failure and rejection)?
- Have I developed an appreciation for the lives of others?
- Have I developed awareness of the skills of leadership?
- Have I developed the ability to follow the leadership of others?
- Have I developed a deeper understanding of the Christian faith?
- Have I developed greater confidence in communicating with others?

At the end of the retreat we expect that the boys will be able to:

- Engage and understand more about themselves
- Build skills of resilience and discernment
- Make decisions based on sound ethics, values and morals
- Validate emotions
- Develop a vocabulary which is a vital component of meaningful relationships

DAY 1

Activities

SESSION 3: REFLECTION ON 'JOURNEY TO CAMP' AND HOW TO GET THE BEST OUT OF THE PROGRAM

What was the best part of the trip down?

What was the worst part of the trip down?

I used to think about myself...

Now I think about myself...

I used to think about my group...

Now I think about my group...

I used to think about Sydney...

Now I think about Sydney...

Retreat Values

What is the Retreat?

Why is the retreat important to you? We are as capable as we can be.

Why we should be accepted for who we are.

Retreat Guidelines

- Respect at all times
- Be humble.
- Be honest Be generous
- Confidentiality

Getting to Know Each Other

What is my most favourite animal?

LIKED QUALITIES

What qualities do I LIKE about
my favourite animal?

DISLIKED QUALITIES

What qualities do I DISLIKE about
my favourite animal?

What is my least favourite animal?

LIKED QUALITIES

What qualities do I LIKE
about my least favourite
animal?

DISLIKED QUALITIES

What qualities do I DISLIKE
about my least favourite
animal?

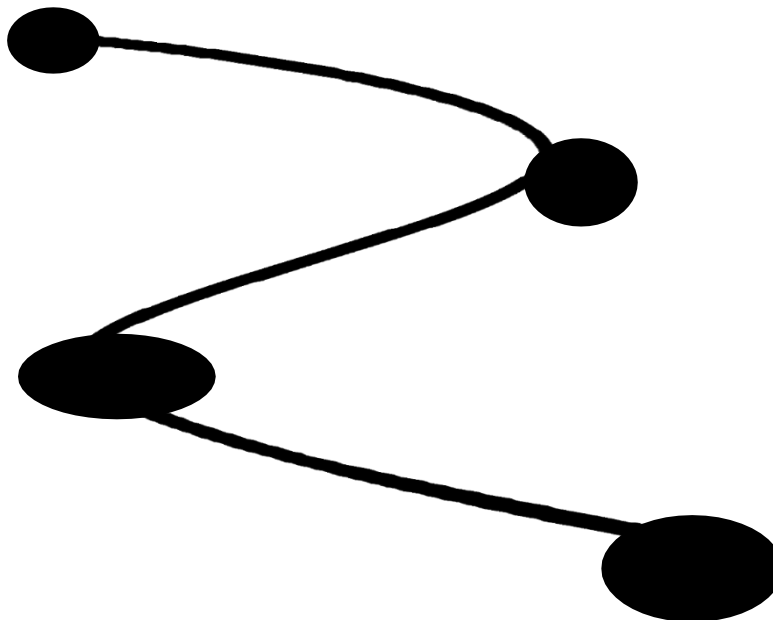
How relevant are these qualities to you?

Which qualities I like about my favourite animal do I think are qualities that I like about myself?

Which qualities I dislike about my least favourite animal do I think are qualities that I dislike about myself?

How could the retreat be important in my life?

Draw my life-line and then share it



What I have discovered and my response:

DAY 2

Activities

SESSION 5: THE JOURNEY – HIKE LEG

Values – Compass to your Life

What are some things that you value most? (You may want to look at the list on page 28)

For the journey you need to take three of the following items – toilet paper, bag of lollies, brick, toothbrush, length of rope, newspaper, plastic cup, plastic knife, marble, balloon.

Which three would you take and why?

Ethical Dilemma Exercise

Story #1:

What is the situation?

What is the decision and action you would take?

What values are your decisions/actions based upon? (Refer to list of values on page 28)

Story #2:

What is the situation?

What is the decision and action you would take?

What values are your decisions/actions based upon? (Refer to list of values on page 28)

Story #3:

What is the situation?

What is the decision and action you would take?

What values are your decisions/actions based upon? (Refer to list of values on page 28)

Story #4:

What is the situation?

What is the decision and action you would take?

What values are your decisions/actions based upon? (Refer to list of values on page 28)

What I have discovered and my response:

SESSION 5: THE JOURNEY – BIKE LEG

Who are the people that influence you most and how?

1. At home

2. At school

3. In the media

4. In the world

What I have discovered and my response:

SESSION 5: THE JOURNEY – WATER LEG

“Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones” PHILLIP BROOKS

Below are five big moments of life. You need to choose three more as a group which are both positive and negative in nature. In pairs, work out who you would want to help out in those difficult situations; firstly, from your year group, and secondly someone else from society (can be anyone, including your family). Work out what part of their character best suits them for the situation.

1. Crucial sporting game that could win the season

a. Year 11 student

b. Someone in society

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

2. Sitting the XXX English exam

a. Year 11 student _____

b. Someone in society _____

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

3. Being lost in the bush for 48 hours

a. Year 11 student _____

b. Someone in society: _____

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

4. Parents are going through a divorce

a. Year 11 student _____

b. Someone in society: _____

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

5. Going on a first date

a. Year 11 student _____

b. Someone in society: _____

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

6. Situation

a. Year 11 student _____

b. Someone in society: _____

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

7. Situation: _____

a. Year 11 student _____

b. Someone in society: _____

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

8. Situation: _____

a. Year 11 student _____

b. Someone in society: _____

c. What characteristics make them suitable?

What I have discovered and my response?

SESSION 6: AFFIRMATION OF 'WHO I AM'

Parents' Affirmation Exercise

What are my father's strengths and good qualities?

What are my mother's strengths and good qualities?

Which of my father's and mother's strengths and good qualities do I want to take on in my future life-line?

What do my mother and father appreciate about me? What do they see are my strengths and good qualities?

What have I discovered and my response:

(Perhaps take the time to write a letter to your parents below)

DAY 3

Activities

SESSION 7: WISDOM FOR LIFE – XX

SESSION 8: HE FOR SHE' – XX

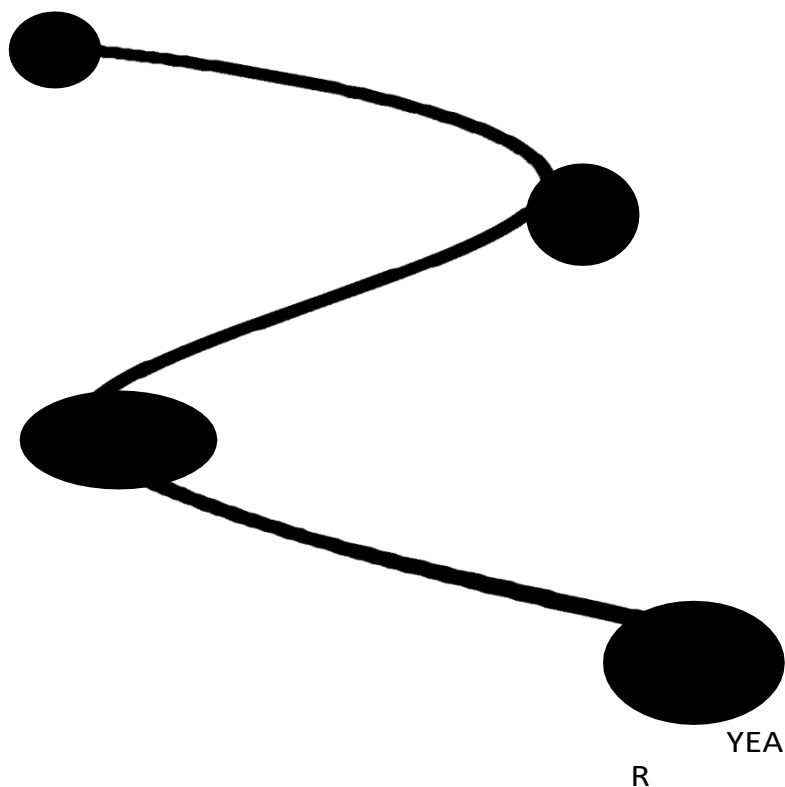
1. What are your attitudes towards women?

2. What place does Christianity have in your life journey?

SESSION 9: WHO DO I WANT TO STEP UP TO BE?

Future Life-line and Your Values

1. Note the key events you want to see happen in your life-line from today to as far in the future as you can see.



2. What values will be most important to you in making your future Lifeline happen?

3. What could be some inhibitors that will block your journey?

Letter Writing – Solo Reflection

Write a letter to yourself (*paper and envelopes are provided*)

This exercise gives you the opportunity to get some of your own reactions and feelings down on paper by writing a letter to yourself. It is something that can be referred to in the future. Any resolutions, plans, ideas and hopes you want to remember next week, next month and next year should be included in this letter. Being able to read this letter in the future will be a revealing reminder of what you hoped for yourself as you finished [the Retreat]. It will be a way to keep [the Retreat] in your daily life. This is to be done on your own somewhere around the grounds, not in your room. This is a time of silence.

Please respect the rights of others to be left alone and stay away from them. No one will read the letter you write, so please be open and honest with yourself.

Please give this exercise serious thought and try to express clearly in writing what your thoughts are at this time. You may not appreciate the value of this activity until time has passed and you later read the letter you write now. Be very specific about how you want to live considering what you have learnt and the commitment you made during [the Retreat].

Letter content:

Begin by summarising the impact of [the Retreat] for you personally in one sentence.

Expand on this one summary sentence by putting down any feeling, reactions, resolutions and thoughts that are uppermost in your mind and heart at this time.

On the next page are some questions to guide you in writing your letter.

LEARNING:

- What have you learnt that you always want to remember?
- What have you heard from others that you always want to remember?

SELF:

- What do you most value/appreciate/love about yourself?
- What do you want from yourself in your life? n What values do you want to live your life by?
- What promises have you made to yourself?
- What obstacles could you encounter in keeping those promises?
- How do you want to handle these obstacles?
- Who could help you handle these obstacles?

OTHERS:

- What have you learnt about other people?
- What attitudes, value and behaviours do you want to have towards women?
- What promises have you made to others in your life?
- What obstacles could you encounter in keeping these promises?
- How do you want to handle these obstacles?
- Who could help you handle these obstacles?

When finished put your letter into the envelope provided, write your name on the front of the envelope, seal it and give it back to your Group Leader.

Your letter will be posted to you some time in the future.

What I have discovered and my response:

Famous Sayings

BIBLICAL

"I can do all things through Him who gives me strength."

(Philippians 4:13) – Also used to be on Fijian Rugby jerseys!

"This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and gave his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:11)

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23, 24)

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." (C.S. Lewis)

GENERAL

"Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." (Abraham Lincoln)

"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." (Mark Twain)

"Here is the greatest secret of success; work with all your might but trust not in your own power to achieve. Pray with all your might for God's guidance and blessing. Pray, then work, work and pray; and again pray and work. Whether you see much fruit or little fruit, remember that God delights to bestow real blessing. This comes generally in answer to earnest, believing prayer." (George Muller)

"I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use." (Galileo Galilee)

"Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame." (Benjamin Franklin)

"Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true." (Leon J. Suenes)

"Success is the good fortune that comes from aspiration, desperation, perspiration and inspiration." (Evan Sear)

Human Feelings

Positive Feelings

Excited
Optimistic
Energised
Alert
Calm
Confident
Capable
Intelligent
Passionate
Enthusiastic
Focused
Happy
Proud
Fulfilled
Loving/Loved
Warm
Compassion
Safe

Negative Feelings

Frustrated/Annoyed/Irritated
Resentful/Angry
Disappointed
Powerless
Hopeless
Helpless
Foolish/Dumb/Thick/Stupid
Inadequate/Incapable
Embarrassed/Ashamed
Not Good Enough
Inferior/Less Than/Small
Resigned
Alone/Unsupported/Unloved
Hurt/Pain
Fear/Afraid
Shocked
Jealous
Sad/Down

List of Values

Kindness	Respect	Loyalty	Financial security
Honesty	Compassion	Tolerance	Being independent
Love	Freedom	Safety	Making a difference
Fairness	Initiative	Caring	Environmental issues
Industriousness	Unity	Patience	Peer acceptance
Equity	Conscience	Sincerity	Getting a job
Perseverance	Logic	Hope	School or study satisfaction
Common good	Character	Teamwork	Physical and mental health
Integrity	Peace	Support	Family relationships
Trust	Diligence	Knowledge	Spirituality/faith
Responsibility	Honour	Dedication	Friendships
Dignity	Cooperation	Commitment	Feeling needed and valued
Courage	Fidelity	Creativity	Possessions
Generosity	Justice	Brotherhood	Status, power, position
Discipline	Individualism	Understanding	Acceptance
Community	Selflessness	Awareness	Failure
Truth	Balance	Leadership	

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Appendix F

What is Character Education: Building Good Men

Building Good Men

1. Home
 2. Pastoral
 3. Building Good Men
-

We must remember that intelligence is not enough.
Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.
—Martin Luther King Jr.,

What Is Character Education?

Character education fosters ethical, responsible and caring young people by modelling and teaching good character. It provides long-term solutions that address moral, ethical and academic issues of growing concern to our society and key to the safety of our schools.

Good character is not formed automatically; it is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning and practice. It is developed through character education. The intentional teaching of good character is particularly important in today's society since our youth face many opportunities and dangers unknown to earlier generations. They are bombarded with many more negative influences through the media and other external sources prevalent in today's culture.

Building Good Men

XXX is a Christian school and we seek to educate our boys with a clear understanding of the principles and values of the Christian faith.

XXX Building Good Men program promotes the importance of virtue and character based upon the School's Christian values. Our aim is to build and strengthen character within our boys to influence how they think and act, especially when faced with challenging situations that will confront them as they move through their adolescent years and into manhood. Too often we read in the newspapers of teenagers, university students, sports stars, and business and political leaders behaving selfishly and showing a complete lack of integrity, respect and self-control. Our hope is that our boys will always consider the needs of others ahead of their own and have the moral courage to stand up for what is right.

Building Good Men is a program in character education, which challenges boys to consider the type of man that they want to become and the virtues that will guide them through their adult life. It was written by a team of twelve XXX staff (six Housemasters and six Tutors) and is specifically tailored for the 'XXX boy'.

All Year 11 boys facilitate sessions within Tutor Group, under the guidance and assistance of a Tutor, providing them with opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The Year 11 boys receive training in delivering the program and leading a small discussion group. They work in teams of 3-4 and meet with a specific Year group from within their House. The program uses a number of teaching strategies and resources such as film clips to provide clear examples of the virtue being addressed and to motivate and inspire the boys.

Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Character	Honesty	Courage	Integrity
Respect	Self-control	Serving others	Resilience
Online Ethics	Gratitude	Leadership	Manhood

Appendix G

First Parent Letter

12 March 2019

Dear Parent,

Early in Term 2 your son will be attending the Personal Development Camp, XXX. The focus of XXX is to develop personal skills for his journey into manhood as he embarks upon his final two years of schooling at XXX.

The program is designed to enable boys to engage with and understand more about themselves; to build skills of resilience, discernment and decision making based on sound ethics, values and morals. One of the hopes is to validate emotions and develop a vocabulary which is a vital component of meaningful relationships. XXX will be very different from other camps the boys have attended. They will be challenged mentally, physically and spiritually as they are encouraged to push boundaries and move out of their comfort zone.

Prior to the camp, boys will be allocated into groups of 10 – 13 students and will remain in their group for the entire program. All groups will be led by a member of XXX Staff and assisted by an outdoor education instructor. On arrival boys will receive an extensive journal for personal entries. The journal is to help boys formalise and record their thoughts.

A major focus of the program is the idea of a *Journey*. Linked with the sessions will be some physical activities which may include canoeing, kayaking, mountain bike riding and hiking. A list of suggested clothes and personal items to bring is included within this letter. This time away will also be an opportunity for reflection and personal growth. To ensure the fewest distractions as possible we enlist the support of parents in ensuring that students do not bring to camp mobile phones, iPods, MP3 players and electronic games etc.

XXX will take place on Wednesday 8 and conclude on Friday 10 May 2019 and is held at XXXX - (Please note the emergency contact numbers are XXX or XXX). Boys depart XXX after Session 1, which is held in the XXX, on Wednesday 8 May at 8.50am and return to XXX by 2.45pm on Friday 10 May at the corner of XXX Streets. If boys have a co-curricular commitment on Friday afternoon, after they return to school, they are expected to honour that commitment.

The School database has been substantially redeveloped in the last few years. We are now at a point where the School retains very detailed records of your son's medical, dietary, special needs and other requirements. It is essential that you review this information and update your son's details via XXX, as required, prior to the camp. For a guide on how to do this, please open the second attachment entitled '2019 March – XXX – Medical Dietary – CreateModifyUpdate.pdf'.

The estimated cost for XXX should not exceed \$600 and will be charged to your school account. The cost includes accommodation, meals, transport, hire vehicles, fuel, outdoor activities, stationary and other miscellaneous expenses.

As mentioned previously, a list of what the boys need to bring to camp is included within this letter. We do wish to stress that boys are not permitted to bring mobile phones to the camp.

If you do need to contact your son, whilst he is on camp, you can ring the emergency numbers provided on the previous page of this letter.

Should you need to contact me, please do so on XXX or email XXX@XXX.XXX.edu.au

Yours sincerely,

XXXX

XXXX

Encl.

What to Bring:

The following list is the minimum equipment required for camp and should be packed in a clearly named sports type bag or similar.

Boys should also bring a small day pack to use during activities.

Please ensure your son is adequately prepared.

Your son will be required to wear appropriate shoes, clothing and sun protection to be able to participate in activities.

Clothes:

- Hat
- T-shirts
- Closed-in comfortable footwear (joggers/sneakers – NO thongs/sandals))
- Shorts / jeans
- Jumper
- Underwear and socks
- Pyjamas
- Old covered-in shoes / wet-shoes for water activities
- Swimmers / towel

Personal Equipment:

- Toiletries (soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, bath towel etc)
- Medicines (Please inform the School of any medication needed whilst at camp)
- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Sleeping bag
- Torch
- Water bottle
- Day pack

DO NOT BRING:

- Mobile phone
- iPod or MP3 player
- Electronic games
- Money
- Laptop

Exemption Procedure

Leave or	Leave
Absence	<p>Requests for leave from camp must be submitted <u>at least four weeks prior</u> to the activity in writing or by email to XXX, XXX, XXX@XXX.XXX.edu.au. If the leave request is a complete absence from all school activities then it should be directed to XXX, Deputy Headmaster, XXX@XXX.XXX.edu.au. Approval will be given in writing and noted as an approved absence on the student's attendance records. Requests after this four week period will not be granted and any absences will be recorded as unapproved leave. Camps are an integral part of the school's educational program and leave will only be granted under exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Should a student suffer illness or injury within the four week period prior to the commencement of a camp, the parent or guardian must provide the School with a medical certificate that details the nature of the illness or injury which includes medical advice recommending the student not attend the camp.</p> <p>Camp fees will not be charged to students who are granted <u>approved leave or an exemption</u> at least four weeks prior to camp. Students who are deemed medically unfit to attend camp and do not notify the school within the appropriate period (four weeks) will be charged all or any pro-rata fees levied by the provider for non-attendance.</p> <p>Absence</p> <p>If your son is ill or injured and unable to attend camp at the time of its commencement, you should <u>email</u> XXX (XXX@XXX.XXX.edu.au) indicating your son's Name, House, Year Group, the camp he was to attend and the reason for absence.</p> <p>Although your son may be unable to attend camp he should still attend school as usual unless he is granted permission to stay at home due to his illness or injury. Your son must attend school from 8.20am to 2.50pm each day where he will be supervised and given meaningful work and tasks. He should report to the Office of XXX in school uniform.</p>

Appendix H

Second Parent Second Letter

20 March 2019

Dear Parents,

We write to you regarding a special action that we ask you to undertake as part of the Year 11 XXX Personal Development Camp.

On the second night of XXX we make a powerful presentation to the students as part of a session entitled “Know Yourself: Who Am I?” During this session we wish each boy to receive a letter written by his father or mother, or both. We are writing to request you set aside time to write such a letter.

The letter becomes an integral part of the session which is an affirmation exercise. The letter should tell your son what he means in your life and how much you appreciate, value and love him. This could be a special opportunity for you to say things that might not often be verbalised, things that are deepest in your heart, yet sometimes become clouded in day-to-day living. It should be noted that this is not a time for expressing displeasure at your son’s shortcomings, rather a time for expressing your deepest feelings and the hopes you have in your heart. Reading and hearing how special each son is to his parents can be a powerfully moving experience.

You may wish to use some of the suggestions below:

- Recall a moment that may have been small for your son but which “will live forever” in your memory
- Comment on how for you the XXX is ultimately insignificant. It is the quality of your son that matters, not numbers or certificates
- Note that parenting is hard, but when you see your son doing ‘such and such’, you realise what a blessing he is to you
- Acknowledge his arts and cultural experiences you have noticed or can relate to
- Recall any moments in his sport that were special for you
- Recall something that you learned from him
- Recognize that he finds some things difficult, and that you admire the way he perseveres and copes

The contents of these letters are a surprise; help keep this moment memorable! Please do not mention anything about the nature of the letter to your son or to other people. Your letter will be treated with total confidence and will not be read by anyone except the addressee, your son.

Please place the letter in a separate envelope with your son's name on the outside, as well as the name of the person/s writing the letter. Finally, place the letter in a larger envelope (marked CONFIDENTIAL) addressed to:

Mr XXX

XXX

XXX School

XXX

XXX

All letters should be returned by no later than Thursday 11 April 2019. Delivery by Australia Express Post or courier is preferred. If you are concerned about posting the letter you may wish to email a scanned attachment to me (XXX@XXX.XXX.edu.au). Mark emails as CONFIDENTIAL.

Please note, as the first day of camp is an "Amazing Race" style journey down to Port Hacking, ensure your son, in addition to his other belongings, brings with him:

- A day pack
- Hat
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen
- Towel
- Wet Shoes
- NO THONGS
- NO MOBILE PHONES as there is a water crossing

The camp is compulsory, therefore the Leave and Absence Policy is attached to this email for your information.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation and participation. Your efforts will make the impact of this camp a lasting treasure for your son. If you have any questions, please call me on XXX Monday to Friday or leave a message on XXX.

Yours sincerely,

encl

Appendix I

Document Analysis

Documentation provides a source of data that is characterised as stable and non-reactive, unchanging, easily available, relevant and well-suited to qualitative research (Bowen, 2009). Within the research to be reported, this form of incorporating the content coded and categorised into themes, similarly to interviews, Bowen views as “evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding of the phenomenon is developed” (2009, p. 32). It enables the researcher to give voice to and meaning around the phenomenon being studied while maintaining a high level of objectivity and sensitivity to its content (Bowen, 2009).

Documentation analysis in this study provided a platform for the triangulation of interview data thereby increasing the credibility and validity of the research (Bowen, 2009; O’Leary, 2014). The process for the document analysis followed the steps outlined by O’Leary (2014). Consideration was given to the criteria of author and writing style, context, intended audience, type of document, purpose, content—including the key points expressed, general message and perspective of the message, and significance of the document.

Along with the criteria-based examination of documents, the researcher looked for key themes and their relationship to the central theme of the research, as well as the latent content of the documents, and the writing style of the author (Bowen, 2009; O’Leary, 2014). Within the context of a school setting, documentation relevant to the research question included the school’s mission statements (see Appendices B and C) and an outline, “What is Character Education?”, illustrating part of the process involved in the formation of good character (Milson, 2000; see Appendix F). In addition, physical evidence analysed included letters to the parents (see Appendices G and H), and the staff and student programs (see Appendices D and E).

Heading 1: School Mission Statement (Appendices B and C)

The school mission statement is a public document, available on the school website for the general public and prospective parents. This document informs the reader of the school’s purpose and educational processes together with the desired outcomes for students. Within the present research, the relevant school mission statement (see Appendix B) espouses themes of Christian values, self, learning, reflection, challenges, resilience, team, empathy,

and growth of character. These themes are entwined in the retreat aim, objectives and outcomes discussed in 5.2.

The school mission statement (see Appendix B) has been modified in the years since the inception of the retreat. In 1991, as part of the process of strategic planning, the Principal, senior staff and Council interpreted the school's mission and enunciated the aims of the school as a Mission. These were reaffirmed in the strategic plan in 1996, and, within the context of its mission, the aims of the school were updated. The 1991 mission is expressed in Appendix C.

The 1991 Mission Statement was current at the time of the inception of the retreat. It was the fourth clause within of the document that the retreat initiative was conceived as a student-centred experience, “with a knowledge of themselves, how they should live and how to relate to others”. This statement became an important cornerstone of the aim and objectives of the retreat. While it is not present as such in the current mission statement, reference is made to “authentic and transformative Christian faith, with an emphasis on growth in character”. It is noted that while the statement from the 1991 document (see Appendix C) does not appear in the current school mission statement, it has remained in the stated aim of the staff program booklet. The themes of character, self, values, spirituality, and maturity are prominent in the aim, objectives, and outcomes of the retreat. Indeed, the reference in the retreat aim is for the boys “to reflect on who they are” (see Appendix D). The staff program sites an objective of the retreat is for each boy to “be himself, to express his thoughts and feelings and stand up for his own values is reflected from the mission statement develop individual gifts and talents and cultivates the habits of successful team membership” (see Appendix D).

Heading 2: Character Education (Appendix F)

The website of the case study school has articles that reference the school’s consideration of what constitutes *character education* and *building good men* “with a clear understanding of the principles and values of the Christian faith”. The school acknowledges its responsibility to foster “ethical, responsible, caring young men, provide long term solutions to address moral and ethical issues” to influence “how they think and act, especially when faced with challenging situations that will confront them as they move through their

adolescent years and into manhood”. Themes of manhood and journey and terms of resilience, values, moral formation, respect, and integrity were central to the retreat program.

Documents on the website of the case study school also claim that wellbeing—physical, social, emotional, spiritual and vocational—is at the core of its mission. Three traits, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, from the school mission statement, were identified in the retreat program and were clearly linked to the aim and objectives of the retreat program:

- social wellbeing, with satisfying relationship and interaction with others,
- emotional wellbeing, with the capacity to express emotions appropriately and comfortably, and
- spiritual wellbeing, guiding value and meaning in life.

These traits are clearly linked to the aim and objectives of the retreat program (see Appendices B, C, D and E).

Heading 3: Physical Evidence of Documentation

In addition to website documentation, communications with parents also provide insight into the expectations and processes of the retreat. This documentation includes the first letter to parents (see Appendix G), second letter to parents (see Appendix H), staff program (see Appendix D), and student journal and program (see Appendix E).

Heading 4: First Letter to Parents (Appendix G)

The first letter to parents provides an outline of the aim of the retreat program. The theme and program focus of “journey towards maturity” was introduced and unpacked for parents. Parents were informed the retreat would be very different from other camps the boys had previously attended or experienced. The grouping of students for the retreat was mentioned as was the arrangements that groups would be led by the teachers, assisted by outdoor education instructors. The notion of students undertaking reflection activities is noted with the comment that “journals for personal entries would be provided to the boys on their arrival at the retreat site” (Appendix G). Requests were made of parents to support the school with minimum distractions during the retreat and enlisted their help to ensure their child did not bring mobile phones and other such devices to the retreat.

The camp was listed as compulsory. Parents were provided with the process to seek dispensation to attend and an explanation of expectation and definition of Leave and Absence was provided, along with the form, and the process required to taken by parents if their son was not attending the retreat. As well, the letter detailed camp logistics, start and finishing

times, location, emergency contact arrangements, requests to update medical information, dietary needs, and anticipated cost. It also included a list of what the boys needed for the camp. Parents were provided with a statement of risk and contact details for support parents should they require clarification of any aspect of the risk statement, or the retreat logistics. The letter was posted to parents approximately two months prior to the retreat, thereby permitting time for parents to complete the necessary medical and approval forms.

Heading 5: Second Letter to Parents (Appendix H)

Correspondence to parents provided them with some understanding of the retreat to be experienced by their sons. It invited them to engage in some way with the program, particularly the wellbeing affirmation activity session. A second letter to parents (see Appendix H) was posted two weeks following the initial letter. This communication was more specific in the purpose of the retreat and clearly identified the goal of the retreat experience. It informed parents the camp was for personal development and outlined the role for parents to play through the writing of a letter to their son with the realisation of the aim and goals of the retreat program. It was explained that a key element of the retreat program was an affirmation session during which boys received the letters from their parent(s). The letter (from the parent) became an integral part of the affirmation session, stating:

On the second night of the Retreat, we make a powerful presentation to the students as part of a session entitled “Know Yourself: Who Am I?” During this session we wish each boy to receive a letter written by his father or mother, or both. We are writing to request you set aside time to write such a letter. (see Appendix H)

Parents were reminded the letter was to be one of affirmation:

The letter should tell your son what he means in your life and how much you appreciate, value and love him. This could be a special opportunity for you to say things that might not often be verbalised, things that are deepest in your heart, yet sometimes become clouded in day-to-day living. It should be noted that this is not a time for expressing displeasure at your son’s shortcomings, rather a time for expressing your deepest feelings and the hopes you have in your heart. (see Appendix H)

In support of the letter writing request of parents, a list of considerations was provided of what parents might include in their letter of affirmation. The letter and its contents were intended to be a surprise to each boy, and parents were requested, in bold print, not to mention the letter to their son or other people.

Assurance of confidentiality was provided to parents, confirming that their letter would be read only by their son. Directions were provided on the process for the letter to arrive at the school in a confidential manner. The second letter (see Appendix H) noted the journey activity on the first day of the camp to the camp site and reminded parents of what their son should bring for the first day. Parents were reminded (see Appendix E) each camp contained an element of a risk. A statement, factual in content, for the mitigation of risk for the retreat was included with the letter.

The aim and objectives of the retreat are linked to the school mission statement. While the purpose behind the innovation, creation and implementation of the retreat is clearly identified in the 1991 school Mission Statement, it is argued the same level of intent is present in the revised and current school mission statement (see Appendix C).

Heading 6: Staff Program (Appendix D)

The staff program was written by the school Chaplain and the logistics co-ordinator of the retreat. The context of the staff retreat program (see Appendix F) was a factual operations document and the intended audience was the staff who attended and led student groups. The purpose of the handbook was to convey information and instructions, including time frames, to all participating teachers.

The staff handbook was presented in a mixed style of continuous prose, dot points and lists. It presented in four sections: summary of the three-day program, a diary of each day, times and events for each day; stated aim, objectives and outcomes and what may be classified as two appendices. The staff handbook includes stimulus material for group sessions and material about operational logistics for the retreat. Also included is a record of sensitive medical and dietary information for some boys and commented on the provision of iPads to teachers for taking photographs and Tripview, maps and detailed safety instructions for the journey to the camp site.

The last portion of the staff program was presented in the form of two appendices. The first of these appendices contained supplementary support material for retreat teachers to draw upon for discussion and reflection activities and used as a reference point or stimulus material for teachers during the various sessions. These include: Biblical and famous sayings; a list of human feelings; a list of positive feelings (18) and negative feelings (19); a list of values (65), and ethical dilemmas (7).

The second of the appendices contained factual data deemed very important for the operation and logistics of the camp. It contained a staff list, their lodge, room, group and

mobile number; list of students and their group number, lodge, room and bus; and student group medical information. While extremely important for the operation of the retreat, it was not deemed necessary information to be included in the body of the handbook.

Heading 7: Student Program and Journal (Appendix E)

The context of the student retreat program and journal (see Appendix F) was a factual operations document intended for students attending the retreat. It was prepared for students' daily reference. It contained a skeleton headline of each daily program activity along with the aim, objectives and intended outcomes of the retreat.

Like the teachers' handbook, this document was written in a mixed style of continuous prose, dot points and lists. It included the following sections: daily program and timing of events; stated aim, objectives and outcomes; list of values and guidelines; and allocated space for journal entries. Significantly, the student handbook provided an opportunity for students to journal their reflections that followed each activity. One section contained material to support private reflection. The last portion of the student journal and program was a replication of the staff program, providing lists of Biblical and famous sayings, a list of human feelings, positive and negative feelings, values, and ethical dilemmas for students to draw upon for discussion and reflection activities.

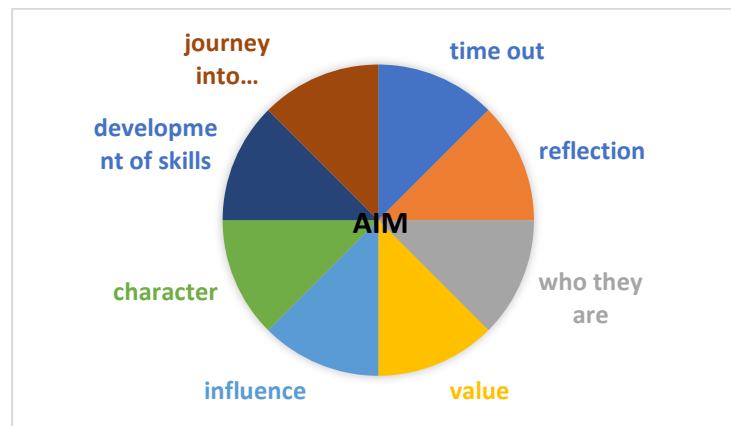
Heading 8: Aim, Objectives, and Outcomes

Heading 9: Aim

The aim of the retreat journey into maturity was for boys to take time out from the routine of school life to reflect on who they are (with things they value, the people who have influence on them, and the character they manifest), in the hope that they will advance personal skills which will equip them for their journey into post-school life. A breakdown of the overall program is expressed in Figure I1. The document did not specify the balance and integration of these sub-themes into the program.

Figure I1

Retreat Aim—Journey Into Maturity

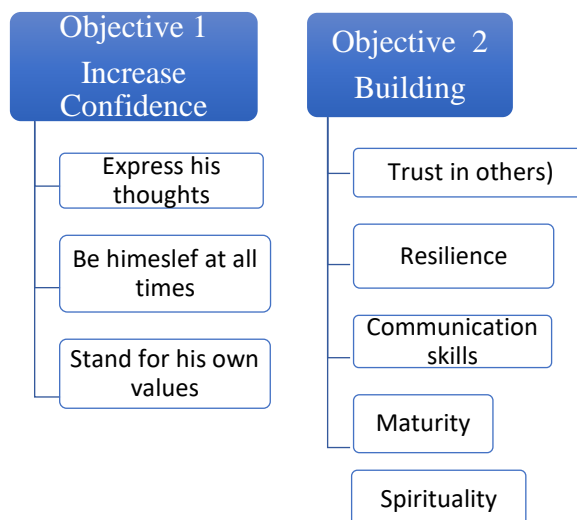


Heading 10: Objectives

The objectives of the retreat were to increase participant confidence, support values, build resilience, enhance communication skills, develop trust in others, and advance maturity and spirituality. Figure I2 displays the objectives expected to be achieved during the retreat, with the retreat process as the learning space. Two objectives are given priority: to increase confidence and to build skills. The success of each component relies on the establishment of an environment that enables student engagement and exploration during the experience of the program.

Figure I2

Retreat Objective 1 and Objective 2

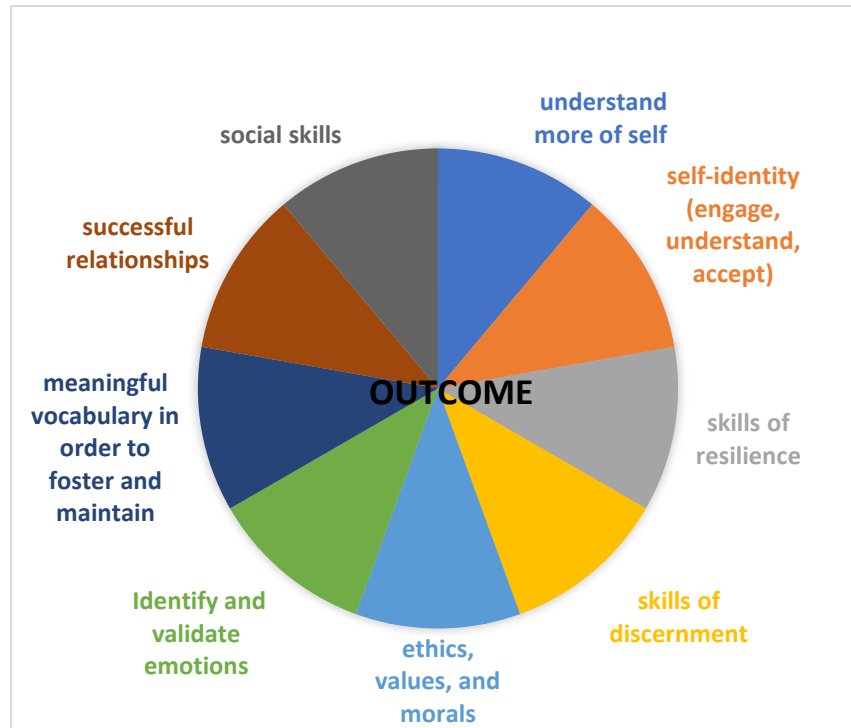


Heading 11: Outcomes

Figure I3 expresses the stated outcome of the retreat. The quality and skills in delivery of the program are central to the enabling of the realisation of these intended outcomes.

Figure I3

Expected Outcomes of Retreat



Heading 12: Latent Outcomes

For the purposes of this research, latent objectives and outcomes are defined as active, but not openly explicit retreat outcomes and illustrated in Figure I4. A closer review of the program discerned a number of outcomes which have not been stated, rather, they are implied outcomes expected as a result of the retreat experience. These include development of: the capacity to reflect; skills of journal writing; relationship of peers, teachers, friends, and family; an understanding and acceptance of others and empathy for them; and leadership opportunities relating to physical activities, discussions and decision-making for the team.

Figure I4

Latent Objectives and Latent Outcomes of the Retreat



The documents analysed are relevant to the study of the retreat phenomenon. They are criteria from which interview data provided informative data.

Appendix J

Teacher and Student Coding and Themes

As noted in Chapter 4, Methods, NVivo program was employed to sort the codes that emerged from the data into categories, themes, and sub-themes.

To understand the phenomenon more deeply, student and teacher data were coded separately. They were then reported in separate chapters: Chapter 5 Teacher Data and Chapter 6 Student Data brought together discussed with new understandings in Chapter 7.

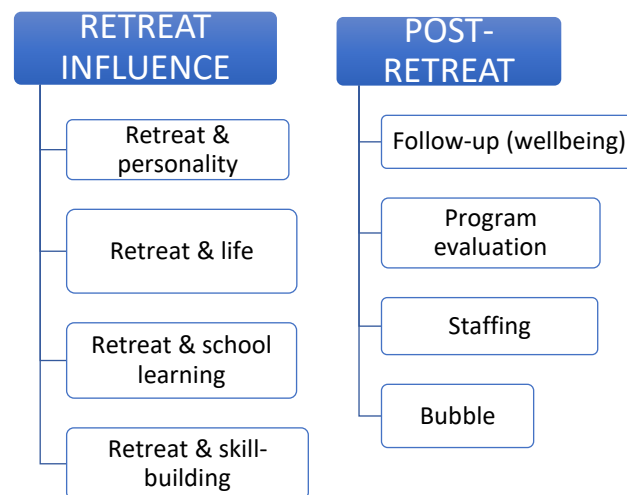
The following is the process undertaken to establish the themes identified and discussed in Chapter 7.

Heading 1: Teacher Thematic Framework

There are two overarching themes for the teacher thematic framework, retreat influence and post-retreat. Figure J1 shows the categories and emerging themes relating to teachers' post-retreat and as retreat influence.

Figure J1

Categories and Emerging Themes Relating to Teachers Post-Retreat and as Retreat Influence

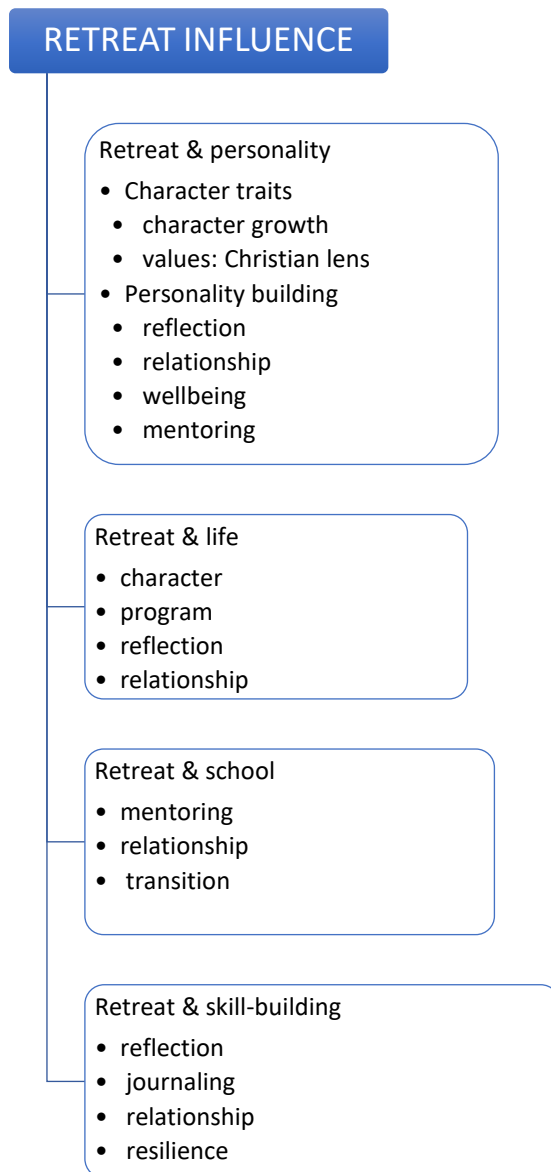


Heading 2: Retreat Influence

Four sub-themes were identified as retreat influence: retreat and life; retreat and personalities; retreat and school, and retreat and skills. Each of these sub-themes has a number of categories as presented in Figure J2.

Figure J2

Four Sub-Themes and Their Related Categories of Retreat Influence



Heading 3: Retreat and Personality

Two sub-themes are in this sub-theme: character traits and personality-building.

- Character traits considers maturity and growth in character of the students. Codes relating to empathy, understanding, respect, resilience, and potential change or no change to students have been established. This sub-theme is the

home for any reference to the retreat as a turning point for the students.

Character, discernment, decision-making and judgement are reflective of the values, morals, and ethics to which one ascribes.

- Personality-building contains four sub-categories which also have further sub-categories. Due to the focus on character-building—a key focus of the retreat, this is a somewhat larger section. Particular reference is made to reflection and self-wellbeing—discovering self. Coded data for reflection are separated into the sub-categories of fostering skills for student reflection; the experience of journaling; personal stories and their use to foster reflection by students and to discuss their experiences and observations of student reflection; and student responses to letters received from their parents. Another sub-category, self-wellbeing—discovering self—contains data coded on student affirmation; counselling support; teachers' view of students as they commence the journey of discovering themselves; students acquiring the vocabulary to express their emotions; and the affective response of students receiving letters from their parents, particularly from a parent who might not have a daily presence in their life or is deceased.

Heading 4: Retreat and Life

Teachers provided observations on four focus areas: character, program, reflection, and relationship

- Character: teachers preparing students for adulthood through the exploration of character traits befitting, expected and accepted in society. They included respect, honesty, trust, empathy, resilience, treatment of women, and active listening. Sharing personal stories, the school executive and teachers demonstrated that it is okay to display vulnerability and, through perseverance, to learn from mistakes.
- Program: teacher observations on presentations on life's challenges, resilience, decision-making, mistakes in life, content, and student response to the presentations. Presentations included the Christian view when discussing values, morals and ethics. Some presentations were led by well-known Alumni. The Alumni, with their long-standing common link to the school, were considered an important element of the retreat program. They provided the opportunity for an instant connection with the students.

- Reflection: teachers' approach to supporting and mentoring of students to reflect and discuss in preparation for life experiences. This included sharing of personal stories to assist students grasp the process for self-reflection. Teachers assisted in the skilling of students to reflect and to journal their thoughts. Discussions included discernment and values for decision-making.
- Relationship: equipping students with communication, connection, and relatable skills to better engage with people the students may not know, appreciation for others, and fostering and maintaining relationships.

Heading 5: Retreat and School

This theme has three sub-themes: mentoring; relationship; and transition. Teachers had a role to play in mentoring students during the retreat. Data collected and coded notes track the development of communication between peers and between teachers and students. This sub-theme notes teacher observations on the potential transition of the retreat experience upon student return into school life.

Heading 6: Retreat and Skill-Building

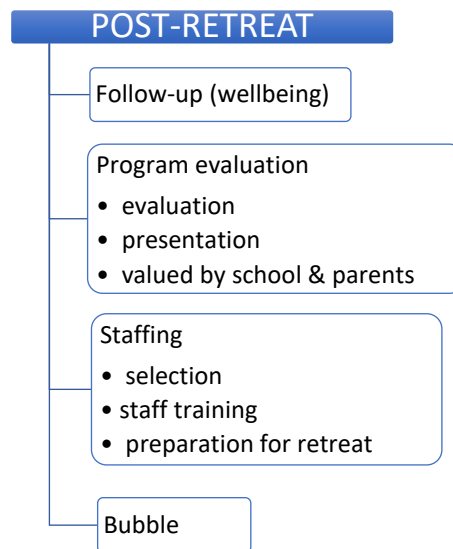
Codes related to the fostering and development of skills, including the fostering of relationships; resilience; support provided to students who may have had initial difficulties in reflection; journaling activities; and student letter-writing to themselves setting goals for future attainment.

Heading 7: Post-Retreat Sub-Themes and Categories

Post-retreat was revised to four sub-themes: follow-up on student wellbeing once back at school; consideration of the retreat goals being realised; program evaluation and feedback by teachers, including the involvement of alumni; staffing, including selection, preparation for the retreat, and training. The fourth sub-theme is bubble, in which the views of some staff view the retreat as a potential stand-alone event. Sub-themes—program evaluation and staffing—each have three categories. The framework of the teacher post-retreat is illustrated in Figure J3.

Figure J3

Teacher Thematic Framework – Post-Retreat



Heading 8: Follow-up (Wellbeing)

Students identified by teachers during the retreat were noted with details provided to the housemaster for follow-up. The sub-theme discusses teachers' concern for ongoing follow-up of all students post-retreat and proposed strategies for the school to support students in this way.

Heading 9: Program Evaluation

The interview questions explored with teachers their view of staff debrief and program evaluation including retreat presentations by the Alumni. Responses recorded here include consideration of the retreat format and structure, as well as Year 12 exit surveys. The Alumni with their experiences in common with students play an important role in the retreat program. Data recorded in this sub-theme note the role modeling by the Alumni, their resilience, and their approach with a Christian perspective to challenges they experienced. This sub-theme identifies the value of the retreat program for parents and for the school.

Heading 10: Staffing

It was considered important to gain a deeper understanding about staffing the retreat to ensure the best possible experience for students. Data gathered identified three main categories: staff selection process; training provided to staff to engage with students during the retreat; and the overall preparation of staff for the retreat.

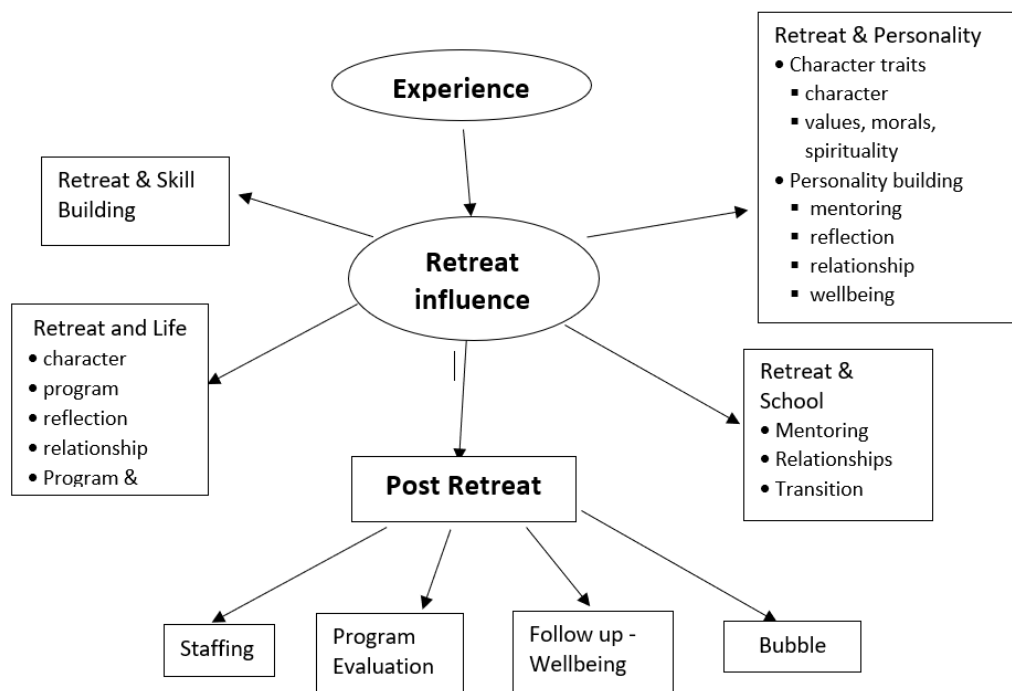
Heading 11: Bubble

While noting a level of influence the retreat had on the boys, some teachers remarked that the retreat was some form of a bubble; that, once back in the environment of their busy school life, students resumed life as before. Teachers noted the importance of the retreat and provided recommendations for increased linkage between the retreat and life once back at school.

The elements of the sub-themes identified in the teacher data are brought together and expressed in Figure J4.

Figure J4

Teacher Themes



Heading 12: Student Thematic Framework

Two overarching themes emerged from the data gathered. They are Retreat Influence and Post-Retreat.

Figure J5 expresses the two key themes, retreat influence and post-retreat influence. It is noted, though, that the data are not duplicated across the sub-themes.

Figure J5

Student Themes, Retreat Influence and Post-Retreat Influence

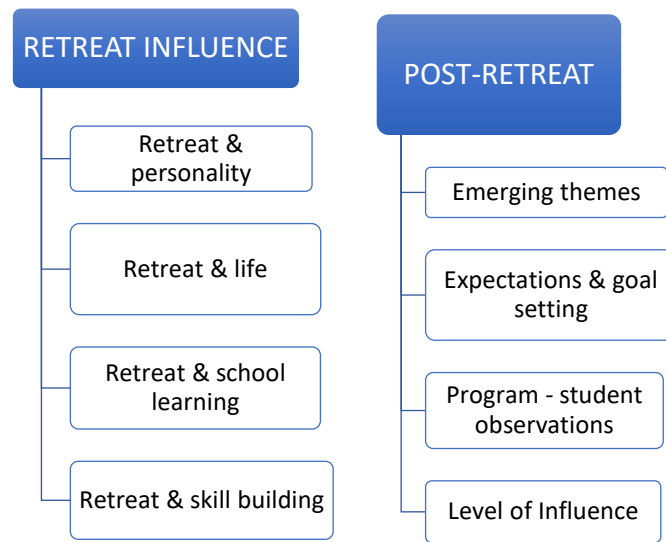
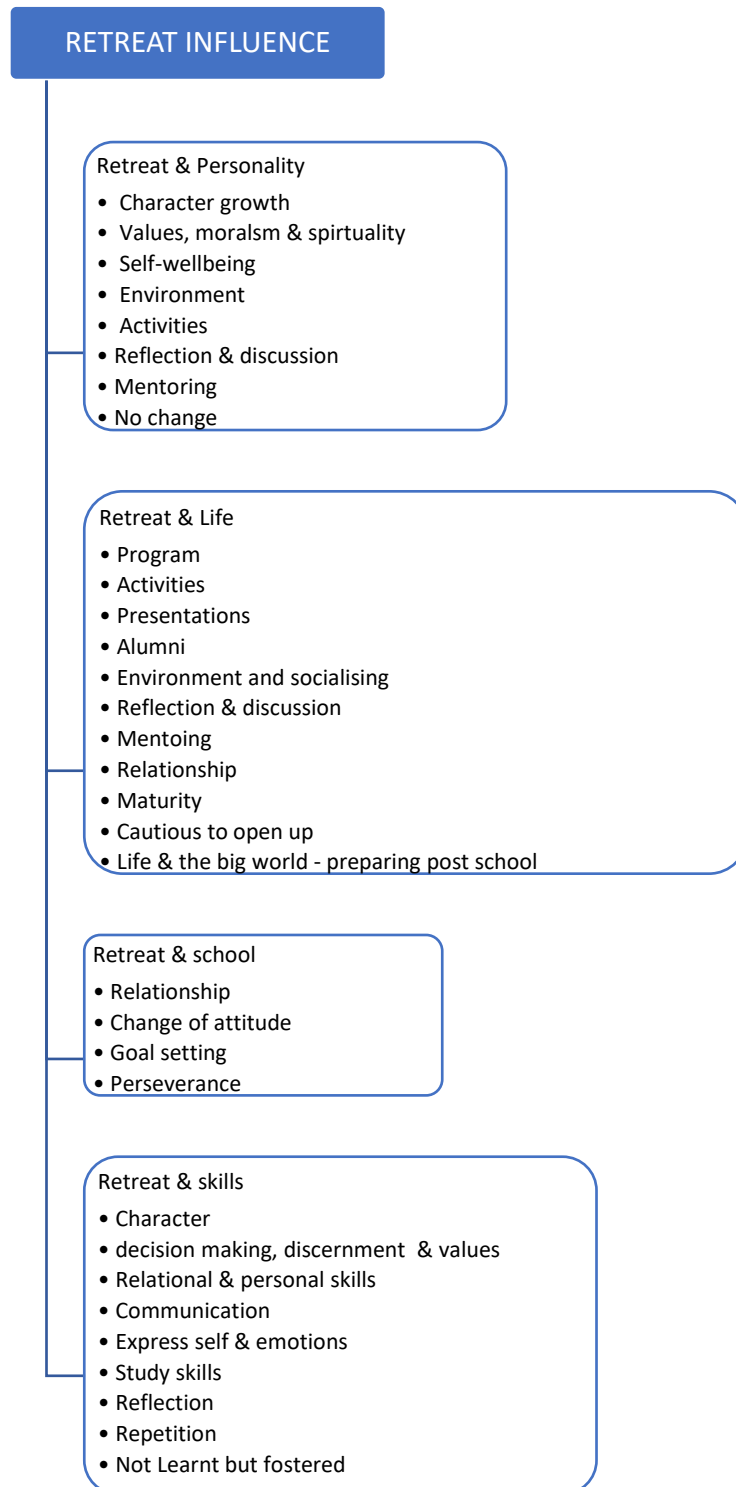


Figure J6 expresses the expanded version of the sub-themes to the themes presented above.

Figure J6

Student Themes, Retreat Influence and Post-Retreat Influence, and Sub-Themes Expanded

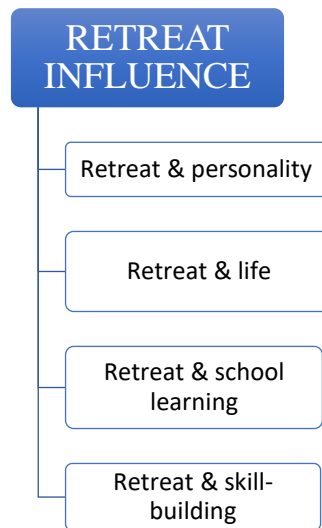


Heading 13: Retreat Influence

Four sub-themes emerged: retreat and life; retreat and personality; retreat and school; and retreat and skill-building as expressed in Figure J7.

Figure J7

Student Retreat Influence Sub-Themes.

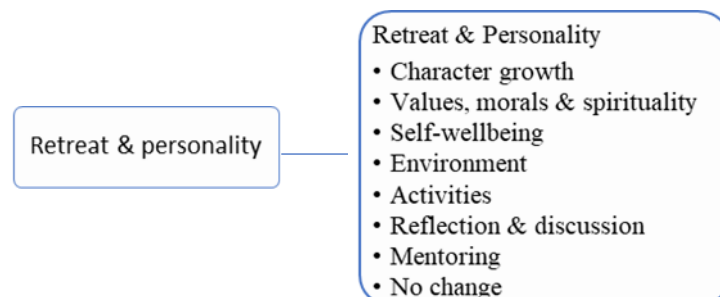


Heading 14: Retreat and Personality

Codes identifying aspects and traits which had an influence on character; self-wellbeing; decision-making based on values, including a spiritual perspective; maturity; and the growth of character were applied to this theme. The influence of letter-writing, by parents and in some instances by the boys to their parents and to themselves as goal setting, was considered important and valuable. Other relatable elements are environment, mentoring, program, reflection, and relationship with self and others, as shown in Figure J8.

Figure J8

Retreat and Personality with Categories

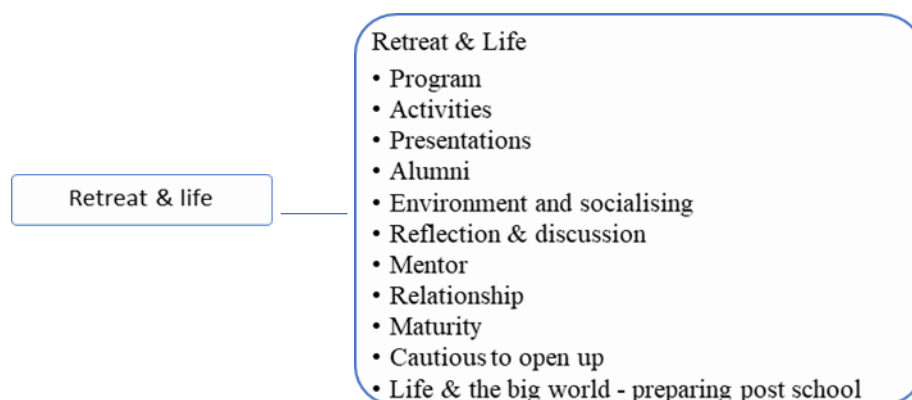


Heading 15: Retreat and Life

This sub-theme is a collation of codes where students responded regarding the influence of the retreat for life beyond schooling years. A component of the retreat was for the boys to consider their potential life path and goals as men of forty years. Key to this sub-theme were the components of support provided during the retreat experience including the program with Alumni presentations, reflection, discussion, mentoring by their group leaders, and the overarching environment which enabled engagement. These are listed in Figure J9.

Figure J9

Retreat and Life with Categories

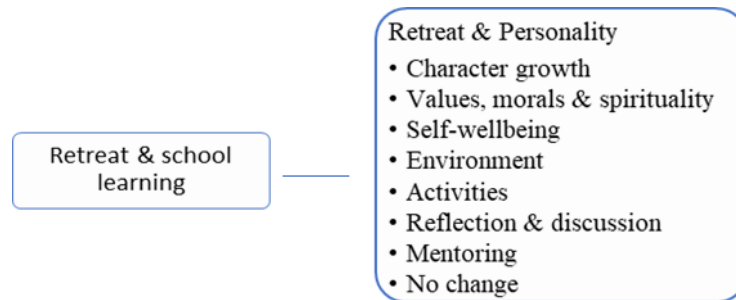


Heading 16: Retreat and School

During the retreat, students had the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their life at school, their relationship with others, teachers, studies, and the potential change of attitude and direction they may require in the remaining time at school. Teachers provided mentoring assistance in the discussion process. Data which noted student identification of some change or no change towards their attitude toward school life were included in the theme, life at school. Codes related to these components, listed in Figure J10, were grouped into four areas: life at school, program & relationship, reflection on school, and mentoring.

Figure J10

Retreat and School With Categories

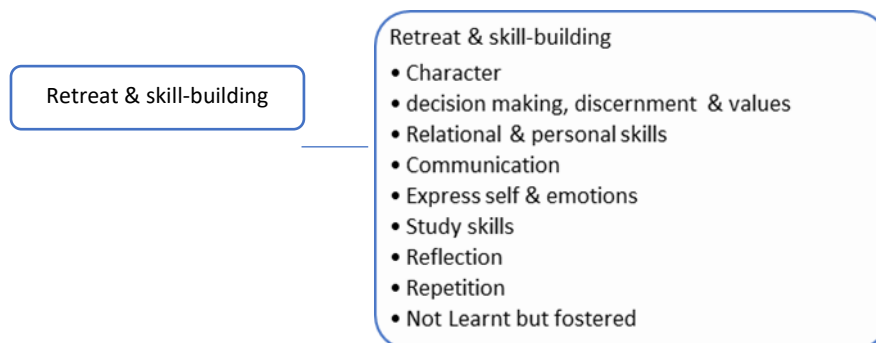


Heading 17: Retreat and Skill-Building

An aim and objective of the retreat was to develop certain student skills. This became an a priori category and ultimately a theme. Codes related to the fostering and development of skills, including the fostering of relationships, together with associated program and reflection activities connected to the development of skills, shown in Figure J11, have been gathered under the umbrella of this theme.

Figure J11

Retreat and Skill-Building With Categories

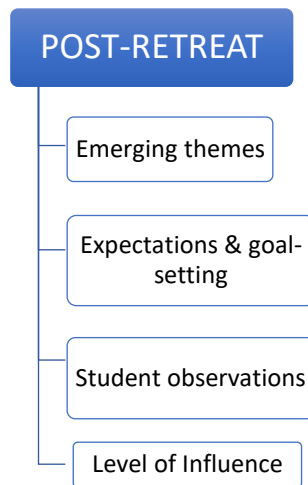


Heading 18: Student Post-Retreat Sub-Themes and Categories

Following a series of reviews, the post-retreat period was revised to four sub-themes: emerging themes, follow-up of student wellbeing, expectation and goals, program evaluation through the observation of students, and level of influence. These are shown in figure J12.

Figure J12

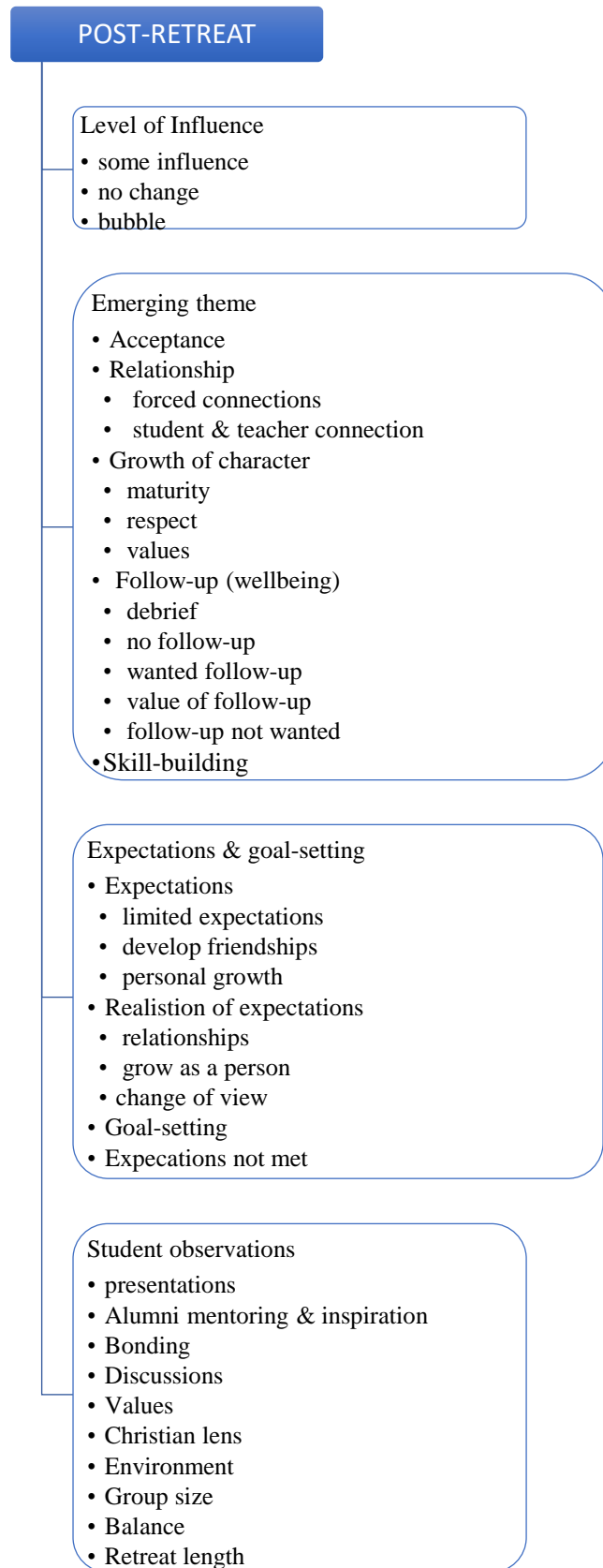
A Summary of the Components of the Sub-Themes of the Period Post-Retreat



Post-retreat sub-themes and categories are expressed as an overview in Figure J13.

Figure J13

Student Post-Retreat Sub-Themes and Categories

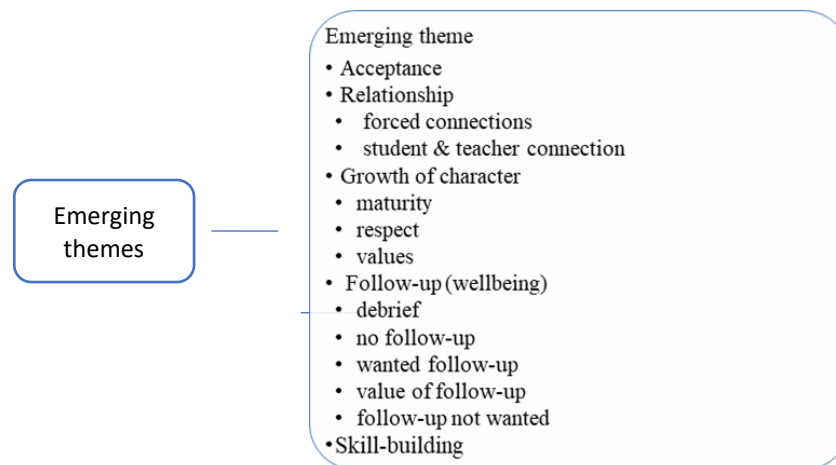


Heading 19: Emerging Themes

Five categories emerged and were placed in this sub-theme: acceptance, relationship, growth of character, follow-up (wellbeing), and skill-building.

Figure J14

Emerging Themes With Categories

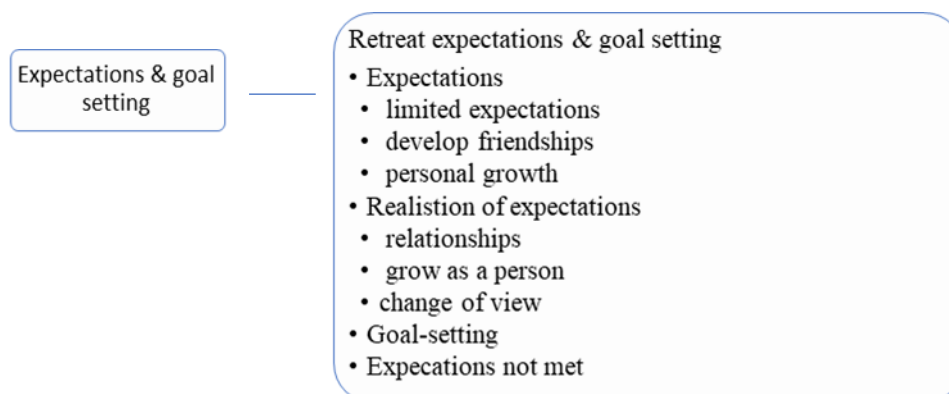


Heading 20: Expectations and Goal setting

The purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of the realisation, if any, of the aim and objectives of the retreat. Student data provided rich information on students' view of the retreat goals and whether they had realised these intended goals. Coded data on perception of goal realisation personally through growth of character and perspective of things, in preparing for the remaining schooling years, or life beyond school, and goal setting are recorded here, as shown in Figure J15.

Figure J15

Expectations and Goal Setting With Categories

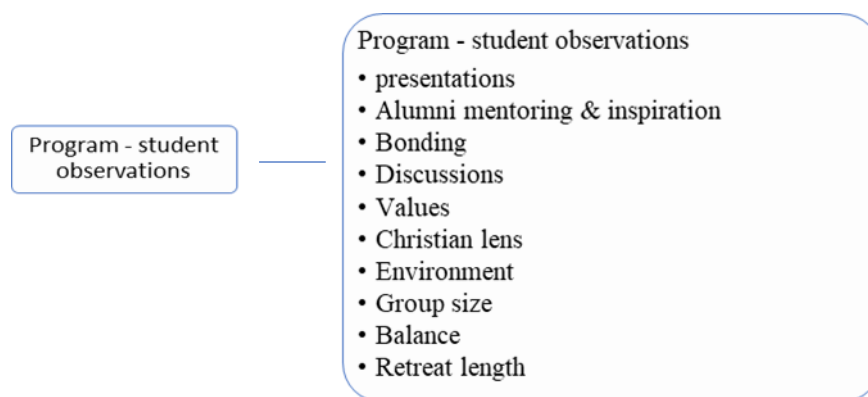


Heading 21: Student Observations

Interview responses by students provided comments on their observation on the retreat and their evaluation of the retreat program. These include all activities, the experience of going to the retreat, discussions, reflection, affirmation sessions, letters from their parents, and reference to the presentations by members of the Alumni.

Figure J16

Program: Student Observations With Categories



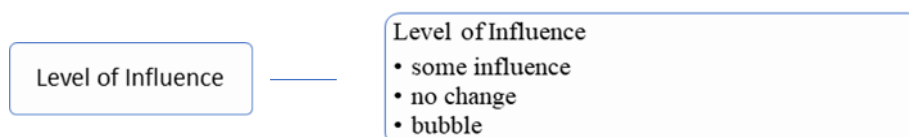
Heading 22: Level of Influence

Observations by students noted differing levels of influence the retreat experience had on them once they were back at school. This category is identified in three segments: some influence, no influence, and bubble.

The data coded represent the comments of some students who acknowledged the retreat as some form of a bubble. To them, once back in the environment of their busy school life, the retreat did not seem to impart an influence of change on them. This data has been acknowledged in the category level of influence.

Figure J17

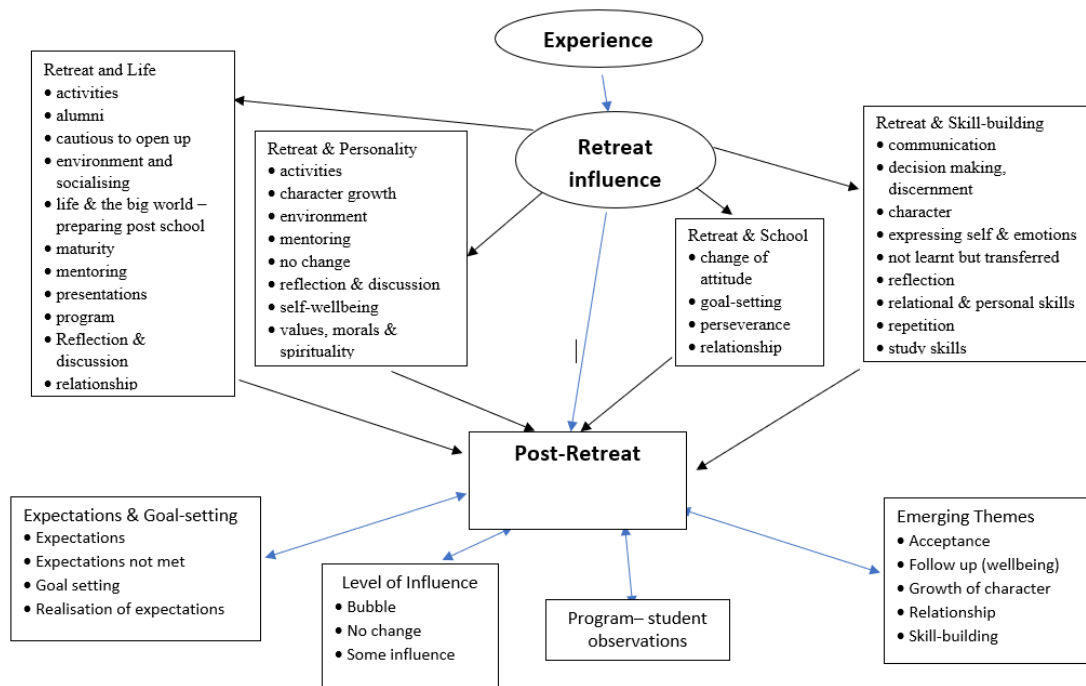
Level of Influence with Categories



The elements of the sub-themes are expressed in Figure J18, bringing together the influence of the retreat experience expressed in the student data

Figure J18

Student Themes

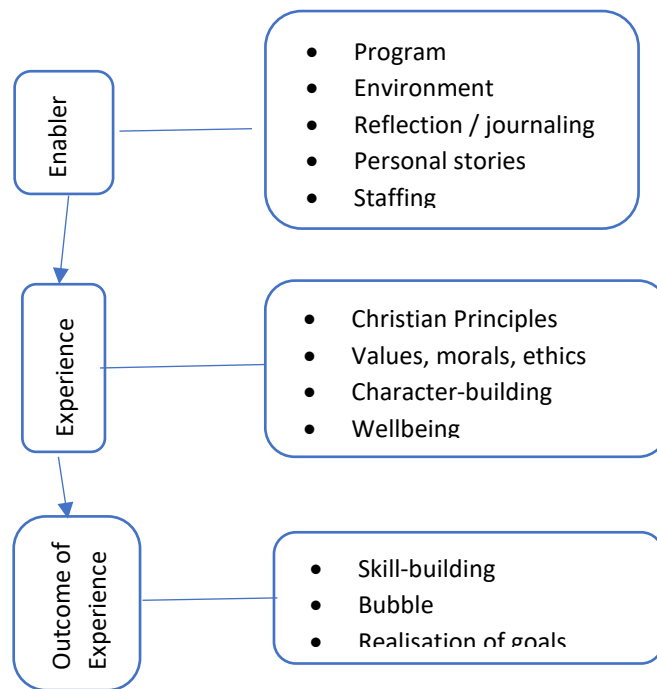


Heading 23: Final Thematic Framework

A number of categories and sub-themes are common to both the student thematic framework and the teacher thematic framework. Expressed in Figure J19 is the merging of student and teacher themes discussed in Chapter 7.

Figure J19

Student and Teacher Emerging Themes



Appendix K

Teacher Coding Thematic Framework

APPENDIX K TEACHER THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Name	Files	Referen	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modifi
retreat influence	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 2:59 PM	BR
retreat & skill building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:59 AM	BR
skill development	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:04 PM	BR
relational & personal skills	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:05 AM	BR
reflection	7	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:46 PM	BR
not learnt - fostered	4	11	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:02 AM	BR
communication - express emotion	6	19	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:33 PM	BR
character	3	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:09 AM	BR
retreat & school learning	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:00 PM	BR
relationship	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:43 AM	BR
perseverance	6	15	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:55 AM	BR
Goal setting	6	17	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:56 AM	BR
change of attitude	6	24	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:55 AM	BR
retreat & personality	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:15 AM	BR
values & morals spirituality	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 4:42 PM	BR
reinforced & strengthened	4	13	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
decision - discernment	5	16	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
Christian view & subtle	7	18	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	24/08/2021 5:55 AM	BR
accountability	1	4	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	29/07/2021 1:48 PM	BR
self-wellbeing & Letter	6	22	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:40 AM	BR
reflection	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:12 PM	BR

APPENDIX K TEACHER THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

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program & relationship - self & others	3	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:34 PM	BR
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environment and character building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:06 PM	BR
character & personality building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/06/2021 11:50 AM	BR
retreat & life	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:09 PM	BR
reflection & discussion	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	14/06/2021 5:52 PM	BR
program & relationship	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:03 PM	BR
mentoring	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:03 PM	BR
life & the big world - preparing post school	5	9	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/06/2021 12:19 PM	BR
environment and socialising	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:08 PM	BR
Post Retreat	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:16 PM	BR
Program - student observation	6	49	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:54 AM	BR
level of influence - bubble	4	31	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:53 AM	BR
goal - expectations - realised	6	69	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	2/08/2021 9:19 PM	BR
emerging themes	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:17 PM	BR
skill building	8	17	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 9:04 PM	BR
relationship - forced	6	25	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:22 AM	BR
growth of character	6	38	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:53 AM	BR
follow up (wellbeing)	6	45	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	1/08/2021 9:06 AM	BR
acceptance	6	35	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	1/08/2021 4:51 PM	BR

APPENDIX K TEACHER THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

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retreat & skill building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:59 AM	BR
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study focus	3	5	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:03 AM	BR
repetition	3	5	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 9:15 PM	BR
decision making - discernment & values	6	27	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:34 PM	BR
relational & personal skills	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:05 AM	BR
transition - daily life	6	21	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:45 AM	BR
connect & working with people	4	14	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:45 AM	BR
reflection	7	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:46 PM	BR
not learnt - fostered	4	11	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:02 AM	BR
communication - express emotion	6	19	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:33 PM	BR
character	3	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:09 AM	BR
retreat & school learning	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:00 PM	BR
relationship	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:43 AM	BR
connection - teachers	3	9	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
connection - new friends	6	10	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	14/06/2021 6:32 PM	BR
perseverance	6	15	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:55 AM	BR
Goal setting	6	17	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:56 AM	BR
change of attitude	6	24	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:55 AM	BR

APPENDIX K TEACHER THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

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retreat & personality	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:15 AM	BR
values & morals spirituality	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 4:42 PM	BR
reinforced & strengthened	4	13	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
decision - discernment	5	16	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
Christian view & subtle	7	18	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	24/08/2021 5:55 AM	BR
accountability	1	4	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	29/07/2021 1:48 PM	BR
self-wellbeing & Letter	6	22	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:40 AM	BR
wellbeing	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	14/06/2021 6:58 PM	BR
who am I	8	44	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:50 PM	BR
dad affects me	2	6	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:21 PM	BR
letter - student response	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	17/06/2021 4:43 PM	BR
letter - to parents & father	3	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	29/07/2021 1:51 PM	BR
letter - disappointment of father - maturity	2	6	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:56 PM	BR
letter - to self	3	6	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	14/06/2021 8:06 PM	BR
emotions from letter experience	4	12	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:58 PM	BR
affirmation - letters - wellbeing of self - loved	8	32	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:58 PM	BR
reflection	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:12 PM	BR
self-reflect - who am I	6	32	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:32 AM	BR
reflect - others	4	13	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	3/06/2021 8:04 PM	BR
reflect - life - resilience	6	17	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	3/06/2021 12:13 PM	BR
reflect - activity link	5	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	14/06/2021 8:32 PM	BR

APPENDIX K TEACHER THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

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journal writing	6	27	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:25 AM	BR
discussion - supportive reflection & express self	5	18	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:28 AM	BR
program & relationship - self & others	3	7	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:34 PM	BR
mentoring	5	11	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:33 PM	BR
environment and character building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:06 PM	BR
safe & trust	5	27	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
maturity engagement & discussion	4	12	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
character & personality building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/06/2021 11:50 AM	BR
change of attitude or no change	6	79	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:43 AM	BR
challenged - embrace challenge	7	52	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:43 AM	BR
retreat & life	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:09 PM	BR
reflection & discussion	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	14/06/2021 5:52 PM	BR
maturity & depth	1	6	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:41 AM	BR
life & deep issues	5	26	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
journal	3	6	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
activity - discussion & discernment	5	10	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/06/2021 12:22 PM	BR
program & relationship	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:03 PM	BR
team building - life experiences	4	18	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:42 AM	BR
maturity to open up to peers & teachers	5	25	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 7:52 PM	BR
connect - peers bonding & support	6	22	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/06/2021 12:18 PM	BR

APPENDIX K TEACHER THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

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mentoring	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:03 PM	BR
positive - teacher connection	3	6	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:41 AM	BR
mentor - life	5	12	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:03 PM	BR
life & the big world - preparing post school	5	9	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/06/2021 12:19 PM	BR
environment and socialising	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:08 PM	BR
safe - trust - open up	6	35	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 7:10 PM	BR
down time to think	5	16	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:42 AM	BR
balance - fun, social & serious	6	15	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:42 AM	BR
Post Retreat	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:16 PM	BR
Program - student observation	6	49	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:54 AM	BR
level of influence - bubble	4	31	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:53 AM	BR
goal - expectations - realised	6	69	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	2/08/2021 9:19 PM	BR
emerging themes	0	0	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:17 PM	BR
skill building	8	17	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	22/08/2021 9:04 PM	BR
relationship - forced	6	25	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:22 AM	BR
growth of character	6	38	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:53 AM	BR
follow up (wellbeing)	6	45	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	1/08/2021 9:06 AM	BR
acceptance	6	35	27/03/2022 6:31 PM	BR	1/08/2021 4:51 PM	BR

Appendix L

Student Coding Thematic Framework

APPENDIX L STUDENT THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modifie
retreat influence		0	0 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 2:59 PM	BR
retreat & skill building		0	0 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:59 AM	BR
retreat & school learning		0	0 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:00 PM	BR
retreat & personality		0	0 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:15 AM	BR
retreat & life		0	0 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:09 PM	BR
Post Retreat		0	0 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:16 PM	BR
Program - student observa		6	49 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:54 AM	BR
level of influence - bubble		4	31 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:53 AM	BR
goal - expectations - reals		6	69 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	2/08/2021 9:19 PM	BR
emerging themes		0	0 27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:17 PM	BR

APPENDIX L STUDENT THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

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retreat influence	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 2:59 PM	BR
retreat & skill building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:59 AM	BR
skill development	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:04 PM	BR
study focus	3	5	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:03 AM	BR
repetition	3	5	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 9:15 PM	BR
decision making - discernment & values	6	27	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:34 PM	BR
relational & personal skills	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:05 AM	BR
transition - daily life	6	21	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:45 AM	BR
connect & working with people	4	14	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:45 AM	BR
reflection	7	7	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:46 PM	BR
not learnt - fostered	4	11	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:02 AM	BR
communication - express emotion	6	19	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:33 PM	BR
character	3	7	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:09 AM	BR
retreat & school learning	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:00 PM	BR
relationship	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:43 AM	BR
connection - teachers	3	9	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
connection - new friends	6	10	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	14/06/2021 6:32 PM	BR
perseverance	6	15	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:55 AM	BR
Goal setting	6	17	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:56 AM	BR
change of attitude	6	24	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:55 AM	BR

APPENDIX L STUDENT THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Name	Files	Referen	Created On	Created	Modified On	Moc
retreat & personality	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:15 AM	BR
values & morals spirituality	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 4:42 PM	BR
reinforced & strengthened	4	13	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
decision - discernment	5	16	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:44 AM	BR
Christian view & subtle	7	18	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	24/08/2021 5:55 AM	BR
accountability	1	4	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	29/07/2021 1:48 PM	BR
self-wellbeing & Letter	6	22	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:40 AM	BR
wellbeing	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	14/06/2021 6:58 PM	BR
who am I	8	44	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	22/08/2021 8:50 PM	BR
dad affects me	2	6	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:21 PM	BR
letter - student response	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	17/06/2021 4:43 PM	BR
reflection	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:12 PM	BR
self-reflect - who am I	6	32	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:32 AM	BR
reflect - others	4	13	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	3/06/2021 8:04 PM	BR
reflect - life - resilience	6	17	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	3/06/2021 12:13 PM	BR
reflect - activity link	5	7	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	14/06/2021 8:32 PM	BR
personal stories - at times uncomfortable	5	17	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 7:58 PM	BR
journal writing	6	27	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:25 AM	BR
discussion - supportive reflection & express self	5	18	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 4:28 AM	BR
program & relationship - self & others	3	7	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:34 PM	BR
mentoring	5	11	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:33 PM	BR

APPENDIX L STUDENT THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Name	Files	Referen	Created On	Created	Modified On	Moc
environment and character building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:06 PM	BR
safe & trust	5	27	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
maturity engagement & discussion	4	12	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
character & personality building	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/06/2021 11:50 AM	BR
change of attitude or no change	6	79	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:43 AM	BR
challenged - embrace challenge	7	52	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:43 AM	BR
retreat & life	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:09 PM	BR
reflection & discussion	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	14/06/2021 5:52 PM	BR
maturity & depth	1	6	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:41 AM	BR
life & deep issues	5	26	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
journal	3	6	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:40 AM	BR
activity - discussion & discernment	5	10	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/06/2021 12:22 PM	BR
program & relationship	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:03 PM	BR
team building - life experiences	4	18	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:42 AM	BR
maturity to open up to peers & teachers	5	25	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 7:52 PM	BR
connect - peers bonding & support	6	22	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/06/2021 12:18 PM	BR
cautious & forced to open up	1	7	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	14/06/2021 6:02 PM	BR
mentoring	0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:03 PM	BR
positive - teacher connection	3	6	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:41 AM	BR
mentor - life	5	12	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	16/06/2021 8:03 PM	BR

APPENDIX L STUDENT THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Name	Y	Files	Referen	Created On	Created	Modified On	Moc
life & the big world - preparing post school		5	9	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/06/2021 12:19 PM	BR
environment and socialising		0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:08 PM	BR
safe - trust - open up		6	35	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	22/08/2021 7:10 PM	BR
down time to think		5	16	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:42 AM	BR
balance - fun, social & serious		6	15	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	23/08/2021 11:42 AM	BR
Post Retreat		0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:16 PM	BR
Program - student observation		6	49	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:54 AM	BR
level of influence - bubble		4	31	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:53 AM	BR
goal - expectations - realised		6	69	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	2/08/2021 9:19 PM	BR
emerging themes		0	0	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	26/05/2021 3:17 PM	BR
skill building		8	17	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	22/08/2021 9:04 PM	BR
relationship - forced		6	25	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 5:22 AM	BR
growth of character		6	38	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	9/08/2021 3:53 AM	BR
follow up (wellbeing)		6	45	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	1/08/2021 9:06 AM	BR
acceptance		6	35	27/03/2022 6:18 PM	BR	1/08/2021 4:51 PM	BR

Appendix M

Student and Teacher Open-ended Questions

Student Questions

1. What you remember most about the retreat?
2. Did the retreat give insight about yourself as a person?
3. Did the retreat help you to develop personal skills that you can transfer into everyday life?
4. Did you feel the experience influenced your life at school and life in general?
5. What did you expect to get out of the retreat?
6. Did the retreat meet your expectations?
7. What was the most significant impact of the retreat?
8. Is there anything more that you would like to say about the retreat?

Staff

1. What was the most significant impact of the retreat?
2. Did you see change in the student's personal development, not only during that experience, then subsequently?
3. Did the retreat help students develop personal skills that were transferred into their schooling and everyday life?
4. Do you feel the retreat experience had an influence in the students' wider learning?
5. Did the retreat meet all the goals that were identified in the program?
6. Is there anything else that you'd like to add about the retreat?