LOVE SPOKEN HERE: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF ONE PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH A SCHOOL /COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

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Authenticity; Care; Community; Community Partnerships; Contextualised Sensitive Care; Critical Theory; Cultural Diversity; Ecological Co-Production; Equity; Ethics of Care; Interpellation; Leadership; Mutual Dialogue; Parental Engagement; Parental Involvement; Parent Participation; Participatory Democracy; Partnerships; Power; Principals; Reciprocity; School Culture; Schools; Shared Decision Making; Social Class; Social Capital; Social Inequalities; Social Inclusion; Social Justice; Sociocultural Responsivity; Socio-economic Disadvantage; Transformation.

Abstract

Parental engagement is low SES schools is either minimal or rarely valued. Subsequently, this critical ethnography explores perspectives of staff and parents of the Community Partnerships Program (CPP) in a multiethnic, low SES, Catholic primary school in South East QLD. The purpose of the CPP was to offer support for students, staff and parents. Whilst the program excelled at sociocultural responsivity and care, questions arose as to whether demonstrated authentic parental engagement entailing transformation through participatory democracy. Staff and parents' perspectives of how they perceived care and transformation as purpose for a school based CPP are explored in this thesis, along with how they perceived power enabled or constrained care and transformation. Moreover, staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for a caring and transformative school-based CPP are also explored. Findings and recommendations include the discussion of the quality of parental engagement, the role of principals in impacting staff perceptions and attitudes toward parents and parental engagement and the benefit of preservice and inservice teachers in undertaking professional development in best practice for parental engagement. An example of a framework for personalised parental engagement, titled contextualised sensitive care, is developed to demonstrate how it is possible to offer a CPP that is not only caring, but also a transformational one for families and school communities.

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ACSSO	Australian Council of State School Organisations
ACU	Australian Catholic University
APRE	Assistant to the Principal (Religious Education)
BCE	Brisbane Catholic Education
CC	Community Centre
CDP	Community Development Program
CDW	Community Development Worker
CDW	Cultural Development Worker
CPP	Community Partnerships Program
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CYMHS	Child & Youth Mental Health Service
ESL	English as a Second Language
GSS	General Social Survey
IRSED	Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage
LBOTE	Language Background Other than English
Low SES	Low Socio-Economic Sector
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
NESB	Non-English-Speaking Background
NVCI	Non-Violent Crisis Intervention
P & F	Parents and Friends Association
PD	Professional Development
PI	Parent Involvement
SAE	Standard Australian English
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SLA	Statistical Local Area
SWPBS	School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Chapter 1: CHAPTER 1:   INTRODUCTION

Research has found that authentic parental engagement in many schools (especially low socio-economic schools) is infrequently occurring (Auerbach, 2010; Schutz, 2006). To increase parental involvement and engagement many schools are now negotiating family/school/community partnerships (Barbour, Barbour & Scully, 2011; Dryfoos, 1999; Epstein, 2001, 1995; Vinson, Rawsthorne, Beavis, & Ericson, 2015). Despite multiple documented benefits of family/school/community partnerships, there are unique challenges which need to be addressed. These challenges include leadership, culturally relevant programs, social justice, parents as partners and community collaboration (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Crozier, 2000; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Edgar, 2001; Theoharis, 2010; Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). Therefore, this ethnography, completed as a component of an Educational Doctorate (EdD), aims to explore caring and transformational characteristics of authentic family/school/community partnerships. It also aims to share individual experiences of those involved. In addition, this study aims to value the benefits, discuss possible challenges and offer some strategies for the sustainability of such partnerships. The humanising experiences of the low SES and multi-ethnic families at a school which I will call St Elsewhere, and the community partnerships program which was established to care for them will be highlighted. I will be drawing attention to an often-underrated aspect of care in schools. This issue is that of caring *for* parents through utilising what I have termed contextualised sensitive care (see table 7.1, chapter 7). The notion of caring *with* parents enough to value their authentic and transformational engagement will be also explored. The everyday workings of a community development program (CDP) at a Catholic parish primary school in south-eastern Queensland will be broadly examined.

An ethnographic case study of the family/school/ community partnership being trialled at the school has potential to provide insights into benefits and challenges of family/school/community partnerships informed by a CDP model. This is for both the education sector and government departments. The data gathered may prove useful when planning programs and allocating funds for future family/school/community

partnerships. This significant research involves an exploration of a caring community development program in a low socio-economic, multicultural, disadvantaged metropolitan context. This study aims to divert the discourse from one focused on support to one that celebrates participants' agency and capacities for social success and transformation.

This chapter will identify the context of the research problem, through providing an explanation of the impetus for this study. It will explore the research issue and purpose, the research design and significance, as well as an outline of the thesis.

1.1   CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1.1   Personal Context – Teaching Culturally Diverse Children in Low Socio-Economic Area

As an advocate for social justice, my almost 40-year career of early years and primary teaching has been richly enhanced by nine years teaching in Papua New Guinea. My experience in PNG included nearly six years as a Catholic lay missionary, in which I was acting deputy head of school, and volunteer year 10 RE teacher. I then taught three years in an Independent International school, followed by time back at my original school.

My Dutch and Austrian parents both spoke English as a second language (ESL). My mother spoke four languages fluently. So, this multilingual perspective provided insight into the challenging loyalty struggles faced by children of migrants with a language background other than English (LBOTE). My parents endeavoured to both preserve their family's culture (especially on my father's part) and, simultaneously become assimilated dinky di Aussies (on my mother's part). My mother expected me to converse in English at home, (against my father's wishes). Whilst my father insisted on my learning German to edit and translate his written engineering papers for him. I don't recall my father ever coming to either my primary or high school, and my mother's visits were very few. One time she clashed with the principal over the corporal punishment I was meted out daily for her refusal to send me to school in uniform, because Dutch children didn't wear uniforms. The embarrassing outcome for me was that mum bought a roll of blue uniform cloth and sewed me matching short pinafores and bloomers.

When asked why she didn't attend Parents' and Friends' (P and F) meetings like other mothers, she replied that as a shift working nursing sister, morning and afternoon meetings were unfeasible because the group's inflexible meeting times made her attendance impossible. She always contributed beautifully crafted items for stalls, fetes and fundraisers, including delicious continental baked goods for cake stalls. (Though I vacillated between shame and delight about her tortes and strudels amongst the Aussie sponges and lamingtons, her goods were always snatched up within minutes of appearing for sale).

She always dressed us up for every special school event, including the P and F's annual apron day. For this day mothers sewed and donated an apron for children to wear on stage. Then people bid on them with proceeds going to the school. My year three apron day was memorable because my mother attended. She came to watch me wear my layered pink silk apron with a broad ribbon tie, unique amongst cottons of all textures and colours. Bidding started at five cents, (which some aprons went for), but my mother couldn't afford to rebuy her own apron at eight dollars! Despite raising the most money, mum's apron was overlooked for a prize. After the Aussie P and F president's daughter was announced as winner, my mother resigned as a P and F member. She stated that she would never return to the school because "it was rigged against new Australians", and she mostly kept her word. (Maybe then the seeds of authentic and inclusive parental engagement were planted in my mind).

As a justice-driven woman, throughout my career I have chosen to teach in schools in low socio-economic areas that were educationally disadvantaged and poorly resourced. I observed that many parents in these low SES schools felt their engagement in their children's education was not valued or welcomed by the school. So, they traditionally stayed away. These feelings or perceptions of being unwelcome led to what was often perceived by school staff and leaders as a lack of care on the parents' part about parental engagement and participation. In my personal experience, though, I had observed that parents not physically appearing at school did not necessarily denote a lack of care. After graduation I was determined that no parents in my classes would feel the exclusion my mother had felt during my school days.

In my first teaching role in Papua New Guinea (PNG), my passion for parental engagement resulted in my being appointed as teacher's representative on the P and F. As a strategy for parental involvement I devised and coordinated the annual family fun day. Then I created and facilitated the fortnight long annual arts festival for students and families to showcase their talents in anything artistic. Later as a means of supporting parents at home, I organised for donations of books from Australia (to which one 12-year-old girl donated nearly 2000 books herself) and established the school's first library.

Parental involvement and participation were encouraged because I valued parents' input and their children's pride, but I wasn't familiar with the notion of parents as leaders. I experienced the tenets of democratic parental participation in my second PNG school with its active board of management. This was comprised of parents wanting the best education possible for their children. Although my interview for the position had both the principal and the board of management chairman present, my appointment letter was signed by the board chairman, on behalf of the principal. All parents were active in school decision making, including vision, mission, finances and curriculum matters. This further increased my appreciative respect for capabilities of parents.

After returning to Australia, I purposefully enrolled my children in the only Catholic preschool in my home city (which was a great start for them). Then I chose to change schools for grade one onwards to the smaller Catholic school in the same parish. This was because of my passionate belief that children perform better in a small school. I joined its active P and F, whilst the school had a playgroup and mother's club. It also had ties to cultural groups through its welcoming of African and Bosnian refugees.

When the school was closed I enrolled my remaining child, (my youngest daughter, diagnosed with central auditory processing disorder) in St Elsewhere for years six and seven. My decision was purely for its caring and inclusive ethos, which I had personally experienced as a contract teacher there.

I chose to use the pseudonym, St Elsewhere, for the focus school, because the name represents any small suburban Catholic parish based primary school. Nearly a decade later, I work at St Elsewhere, as a relief teacher and past staff member since 1990.

As well as teaching, I have volunteered in many capacities. These included nearly 20 years as a Girl Guide Leader and over 35 years of service through the Society of St Vincent de Paul. I also volunteered with Fusion, an Australian youth organisation which is committed to developing community partnerships focused on transformative youth leadership.

As an employee of Brisbane Catholic Education Office (BCE), at the commencement of my studies I was the Indigenous studies teacher at St Elsewhere. The Indigenous program encouraged students and parents to work closely with the community partnerships program (CPP). It worked in partnership with organisations such as Ngutana Lui, BCE's Indigenous Studies Centre. The Indigenous program was advised by the Indigenous parents' forum. It engaged in transformational enrichment activities, including ten-day Reconciliation pilgrimages to Uluru and Advent processions with Fusion and film making and excursions with Ngutana Lui. There were staff professional development (PD) days and the presentation of workshops on St Elsewhere's Indigenous parental engagement program at local and state level. As well as teaching, I was employed for a term in the CPP as a community development worker.

My extended study length, combined with my diverse roles at St Elsewhere, provided unique insight into the everyday workings of the caring and transformational aims of the CPP. I recorded these observations in anecdotal note form over several years. The focus school's social and cultural environment will be discussed in the following section.

1.1.2   The Focus Catholic School's Social and Cultural Environment

The focus school, St Elsewhere, is in a critically low socio-economic area, displaying multifaceted and ingrained disadvantage (Vinson, 2007; Vinson et al., 2015). To support this research, I will refer to the demographics of the 2011 census data (CDATA) findings, in the basic community profiles. These are produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and were modified 1/9/12. It is the most current accessible census data on the focus school's suburb (as of Feb. 2017).

The focus Catholic primary school, St Elsewhere is situated in an inner suburb of a small Queensland city, located 20 km from a major capital city. This suburb has a growing population of over 57000. Of these, nearly 3000 identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and 19000 as born overseas.

In the 1960s, the then Housing Commission acquired large tracts of land in this city, aimed at providing affordable housing in outer metropolitan areas. Nearly 60 years later, the local city council identifies the focus school's suburb as the area of highest disadvantage in the city. This is because of its high generational and situational poverty, compounded by high unemployment (Duncan, Coe, & Hill, 1984).

A report entitled *Dropping off the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia* (Vinson, 2007) was tabled in Federal Parliament in February 2007. It stated that St Elsewhere's suburb was a priority area for effective federal and state government intervention. Moreover, the report placed the Statistical Local Area (SLA) as being in the highest band, Band 1 of 40 of Queensland's highest ranking SLAs on the 'disadvantage' factor (Vinson, 2007, p. 76). This finding was based on major characteristics such as year 12 being incomplete or early school leaving. Other characteristics included limited or nil computer use or internet access. This was compounded by limited post-school qualifications leading to unemployment and long-term unemployment. There were a high number of criminal convictions and terms of imprisonment. Findings were also based on average taxable income and high numbers of those receiving disability/sickness support, as well as some cases of child maltreatment. Some less major characteristics included non-attendance at pre-school, deficient work skills, low income families, and higher levels of suicide (Vinson, 2007).

Of the 41403 people (aged 15 years and over) who stated their highest year of school completion, 3127 completed year eight or less, whilst 653 did not go to school and 4407 declined to state their highest level attained. 1400 were attending technical and further education (TAFE) and 1212 were attending university or another tertiary institution.

Despite the 2015 report *Dropping off the Edge: Persistent Communal Disadvantage in Australia* placing the suburb in a slightly better position at Band 3, it is the highest disadvantaged SLA in the Brisbane area (Vinson et al., 2015).

The 2011 CDATA in Basic Community Profiles states that in the focus suburb, there were more than 11000 one parent families. Nearly 4000 families existed on a total weekly family income of under $800. This fact included 145 families' total income of $0, and 217 families living on an income of $1-$199. Median total personal weekly income was $491 and median family combined income was $1196.

Nearly 2000 families had six or more residents in their household. Compounding financial difficulties for families in this area, the median monthly mortgage repayments were $1629 and median weekly rent was $280. A higher proportion of residences were rented, rather than owned with a mortgage, or owned outright. Approximately 6000 dwellings had four, five, six or more bedrooms, or declined to state the number. As well as renting through real estate agents, nearly 2000 properties were rented through state or territory housing authorities. Over 200 properties were rented through a residential park (including caravan parks and marinas) and nearly 150 were through housing cooperatives or community church groups.

The area is culturally rich and proudly celebrates its diversity. Over 13000 residents speak languages other than English at home. These languages include Arabic, Assyrian, Australian Indigenous, Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese and others), Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Indo-Aryan languages (including Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi and others), Iranic (including Persian and others) Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian and Maltese.

The focus Catholic school's suburb consists of a large cross-section of persons of refugee and other multicultural backgrounds with high cultural diversity and low socio-economic indicators. This is an interesting challenge for educators. How the focus school's context provided impetus for this study is revealed in the next section.

1.1.3 The Focus Catholic School's Context as Impetus for this Study

Despite advances in the Australian overall standard of living, there are between a million, and a million and a half people living below the poverty line in contemporary Australia (McClelland, 2000). Poverty in Australia is considered to be 'relative'

poverty. That is, people are poor if they are unable to participate fully in the ordinary activities of society (Harding and Szukalska, 2000). Vinson (2007) describes:

> "The mundane but enduring story of the disadvantaging consequences of limited education and associated lack of information retrieval and exchange skills, deficient labour market credentials, poor health and disabilities, low individual and family income and engagement in crime [with possible] child maltreatment" (Vinson, 2007, p. 96).

In Australia, the poor include the unemployed, sole parents, people living with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, immigrants and refugees. One in eight Australian children live in poverty. This is a high rate, when compared with other industrialised countries. Living in poverty sets up a debilitating cycle of inadequate diet and sleep, poor hygiene, lack of energy and limited resources. All of which may impact negatively on students' learning (McClelland, 2000; Vinson, 2007).

The General Social Survey (GSS) measures resources reflecting well-being of individuals and communities, with a focus on social capital. Social capital is defined in the GSS as a resource available to individuals and communities. It is founded on mutually supporting networks, reciprocity and trust, community support, and social and civic participation. The 2014 GSS results indicate that people with lower levels of education were less likely to engage in forms of community support and social activities, or to feel that their voice 'counted' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The results reveal that the level of financial stress experienced by a household is impacted by the employment status of its residents. An indicator of financial distress is whether the household has experienced a cash flow problem in the last 12 months. This includes an inability to pay bills on time or seeking help from family and friends. Another indicator is not being able to raise $2000 within a week for a pressing need. The GSS has found that where people live is directly connected to their experience and levels of advantage or disadvantage (ABS, 2014).

However, Vinson's (2007) study recommended that strengthening social bonds between residents could minimise the debilitating impacts of socio-economic disadvantage (Vinson, 2007, p. 98). This finding is validated by research conducted

at several low SES schools, which recommended addressing characteristics of disadvantage, through strategies such as raising parental engagement by implementing community partnerships programs (Parrett, 2005; Vinson et al., 2015). After in engaging in evidence based research, St Elsewhere became motivated to trial a caring community partnerships program aimed at three main areas. These were enhancing pupil learning and wellbeing, enabling and transforming parental engagement, and augmenting staff teaching and interaction with families.

The focus Catholic school, St Elsewhere, is a prep to year six primary school with over 300 students from diverse cultures (as of 2017), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Pacific Islanders, and Europeans. It currently welcomes refugees from areas including Africa, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Iraq and Syria.

According to its mission statement, St Elsewhere educates within a Josephite ethos. The Australian Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart (often called the 'Brown Joeys' or Josephites) was founded in Penola, South Australia in 1866. It was founded by an Australian woman, Mary MacKillop (St Mary of the Cross MacKillop) and an English priest, Reverend Julian E. Tenison Woods. The early sisters lived in twos and threes among the ordinary people throughout the various colonies. They provided education and caring support for the children and families living in isolated areas and city slums. Mary MacKillop's motto was: "Never see a need without doing something about it" and St Elsewhere has adopted this as their motto. The Josephite sisters have incorporated this motto into their contemporary vision of seeking first the poorest and most neglected parts of God's vineyard to transform their lives for the better (http://www.sosj.org.au/about/index.html). Up until recently there was a Josephite sister working in pastoral care at the focus Catholic primary school. To this day the Josephites maintain a strong caring connection with the school.

St Elsewhere's Josephite legacy inspires its caring history of striving for social justice. This is specifically in the form of creating transformative and equitable conditions for the poor and marginalised. It has a student population of difference, drawn in the main from low socio-economic, LBOTE or Indigenous families. This is combined with its physical constraints, due to insufficient human, physical, and financial resources.

This school faces many challenges, including the high number of children at risk of disengagement from learning. The problematic complexities and difficulties in these children's home lives are many and varied. These include living in poverty with compromised family issues, single parent families and households with non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB). There are variables in parental education and parental health.

Despite these challenges, the results of the national testing programme (NAPLAN 2016) for years three and five indicated that children at St Elsewhere were performing well. These results were despite the fact that, according to the NAPLAN website:

> "students with language background other than English, who arrived from overseas less than a year before the tests, and students with significant disabilities *may* be exempted from testing, [however] they are included in calculations of percentages of students below national minimum standard".

These promising student results partly validated the choice to implement a community partnerships program in 2006 (see table 1.1). [1]

Table 1.1 - Percentages of children at the focus Catholic primary school, scoring at or above national benchmark 2016

	Year 3 2016	Year 5 2016
Numeracy	76%	76%
Reading	83%	76%
Writing	83%	77%
Spelling	86%	74%
Grammar & Punctuation	86%	80%

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[1] The link to the NAPLAN website has been excluded to protect the focus Catholic Primary School's anonymity.

1.1.4 Catholic Education's response to the differences of St Elsewhere

The Brisbane Catholic Education Office (BCE) oversees St Elsewhere. BCE outlined in its vision statement its commitment to providing a quality, caring education for all Catholic children. The vision statement mentioned that "teachers in this diocese transform their students' world through education, and exercising a preferential option for the poor and marginalised" (*BCE Revised Vision Statement, 2005*). To transform students' learning and engage marginalised families of St Elsewhere, BCE released funds to trial a unique community development program. This program incorporated a full-service schooling model. Over time, this dynamic model of school/community partnerships evolved into the current caring St Elsewhere community partnerships program.

The community partnerships program was originally implemented as a participatory/reciprocity model. It drew loosely on the transformational philosophy of the Reggio Emilia (Northern Italy) model for family engagement. The originality of Reggio Emilia's approach lay in its "strong focus on developing relationships between children, educators, families [and] educational programs" (Harcourt, 2015, p. 26). Parents in the Reggio Emilia approach are invited to contribute to educational programs, as staff actively plan strategies to support participation in students' education. Whilst sustained shared thinking between all participants is a core principle of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, there is no prescribed curriculum framework with predetermined outcomes. A major learning focus is inquiry, through professional questions that educators devise to develop knowledge. Educators are committed to an ethic of care, evidenced by the time and professionalism they devote to planning and designing programs (Harcourt, 2015, pp. 26—28).

Reggio Emilia's philosophy of including parents in a learning team of shared wisdom ensured that it was an ideal model for the St Elsewhere's community partnerships program to replicate. It was ideal as a model to utilise caring and transformation as challenges to traditional models of parental engagement. Two spare classrooms were designated and repurposed as the community centre (CC), as a place and space for parents, families and the wider community to meet. This CC has become the hub of the current day community partnerships program, which now incorporates a

community linked model of school/community partnerships that is discussed in the following section.

1.1.5 St Elsewhere's Community Linked Model of School/Community Partnerships

St Elsewhere's mission statement[2] reveals that it "is committed to integrating with the community by working alongside students, staff, individuals, families and community agencies to develop opportunities, activities, information and resources for the local community. The St Elsewhere school community partnerships program (CPP) is a community linked model of full service schooling that is designed to facilitate community engagement and enhance flexible learning." The community partnerships program model developed organically, from firstly a full-service schooling model, to a participatory/reciprocity process model. Thereafter, it morphed into the community linked model of school/community partnerships which it is today.

Originally, St Elsewhere's cultural development worker regularly met with school staff to ensure that mutual dialogue remained open and transparent. The first cultural development worker's interests included an art cooperative, film-making, digital photography, technology and environmental sustainability through permaculture. These interests were useful for developing flexible learning activities for students at risk of becoming disengaged from learning. There is a large mural of Mary MacKillop, painted on an exterior wall by the cultural development worker with a year five class which is visibly displayed at the school entrance and beautiful artwork situated in the school office. The incoming cultural development worker described himself as "a hands-on worker" and, as such, he developed a diverse range of alternative programs. These included a term program of repairing bicycles with year six students and improving the bush tucker garden, with year four to six Indigenous students.

This role is now shared between two trained teachers. The first one liaises exclusively with students in traditional classroom subjects, such as literacy and numeracy

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[2] The link to St Elsewhere's website has been excluded to protect the focus Catholic Primary School's anonymity.

support and behaviour management. The other, whose role is more flexible, liaises with the wider community and coordinates the Indigenous program. As a teacher and CD worker, I observed both workers in their roles in the community centre and in the classroom.

There is a role for a community development worker to network with parents, staff and the wider community, linking those who can assist with those who require it. The original community development worker's role covered diverse areas such as the (now defunct) school bus, which I travelled on and supervised for six years. He facilitated homework club, breakfast club, playgroup and computer club. I could be a participant observer at all those programs, except the computer club where I chatted informally with the parent who coordinated the club. I participated as a staff member in the community development worker's staff in-services on non-violent crisis intervention (NVCI) and school-wide positive behaviour support (SWPBS). He invited parents to become involved in co-facilitating special events, at which I was a participant observer, usually with my entire family in attendance. These included community gardening days and lunches, harmony day, NAIDOC week, and St Elsewhere's family fun day.

For some time, a permaculture expert from Myanmar (formerly Burma) facilitated classes for Burmese and non-Burmese families. These classes were in sustainable gardening and nutritious meal preparations, and an English-speaking interpreter was supplied. My daughter and I attended one of these mornings and enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. The St Vincent de Paul migrants and refugees sewing group became incorporated into the St Elsewhere community partnerships program. I was privileged to be an observer at a number of these sewing classes and networked with them to produce articles for classes in my Indigenous studies role. All my participant observer roles produced rich, thick descriptions for this thesis.

The community development worker liaises heavily with migrant and refugee families. As the community centre has been designated by the local council as a community hub, the female community development worker's role is shared with the two cultural development workers. The three roles are not as clearly delineated as

they originally were. However, the CPP has benefitted greatly from a third worker's input.

The life skills centre, which entails a fully functional kitchen, washing machine and sitting area, is a major component of the community centre. I have observed it being utilised by students, parents and the general community for functions such as the bi-weekly breakfast club and homework club. There are cooking, health, hygiene and nutrition classes, as well as meetings and information sessions, some of which I have attended as participant observer.

When the community centre was first established it coordinated community days which I attended with my family, on one Saturday a month. As involved community members we worked in the shared community garden or collected eggs from the free range chicken run.   We attended art workshops or watched the community sponsored St. Elsewhere's cricket team play, before sharing a meal.   This may have been a sausage sizzle with freshly picked garden salad or a shared multicultural feast, cooked at home by parents, with expenses reimbursed by the CC funds.   These monthly community days became a weekly community day. Eventually they became shared class/community lunches on a Wednesday. These days no longer happen, whilst the chickens are gone and excess garden produce is no longer sold to staff to cover some expenses. Bus trips were once organised by the community centre.   My family and friends joined others on a trip to places including organic farms, where people purchased seeds for the community garden using CC funds. But these trips no longer occur.

Nowadays, because of parental input the community garden is a thriving shared enterprise.   It has sections planted by African, Burmese and Australian families, to name a few. Although there is an outdoor kiln, donated by a grateful grandparent, I am unsure whether it is still in use. New seating areas with dividers that shelter parents from the students have been built at both the front and side of the community centre and a covered sand pit for use by playgroup.

A grant was given for the upgrade of an Indigenous bush tucker garden and native foods trail. This had originally been established by Indigenous students and the Indigenous parents' forum. It had been decorated with a whole school Aboriginal mural, and now has brightly decorated poles with a stone archway as its entrance.

The plants are identified on stone plaques and the winding trail incorporates yarning circles for seats. This spiritual retreat is a highlight of the community partnerships program. Other highlights of the CPP include the Mary MacKillop prayer mandala, built in a garden originally dedicated for a dearly loved deceased staff member and the staff's prayer garden, located within the school office.

At one stage the community centre facilitated the planting of many fruit trees around the school. This was with a view to eventually being able to supply fresh fruit for the children's morning teas. However, some parishioners of the adjoining church were worried about fruit bats, so the trees were removed.

An initiative implemented through the community centre is a healthy eating program for LBOTE new arrival families. This has been jointly run with Nutrition Australia under the coordination of the pastoral care worker. It has been coordinated with organisations such as the Red Cross, which supplies food for breakfast club. Families cook a variety of nutritious meals from their culture each week. Migrant and refugee students are invited to attend these sessions as interpreters for their parents. CC staff are always amenable to any outside organisation wishing to utilise the centre for adult education courses, group meetings or functions.

One group which utilised the centre since its inception was the computer club. A selection of ex-government computers was sourced by a centre volunteer forming the foundation of the CC's computer lab. It was freely available to any parents or wider community wishing to develop skills or access the internet. When these obsolete computers were discarded, the space was incorporated into the community hub for general wider community use. Parents may access the password to the CC's Wi-Fi. If they don't own a computer, parents may utilise the CC computer and printer for exceptional circumstances.

1.2 THE RESEARCH PROJECT- POSITIVE CONTRIBUTORS VERSUS MARGINALISED ONLOOKERS

The marginalised children who attend Catholic schools frequently represent symbols of hope for a better life for their families. Educators should always remain sensitive and receptive to the positive and diverse contribution that children and their families

can bring to a school (Boethel, 2003; Gonzalez et al., 1993). Despite individual circumstances, everyone can contribute to "funds of knowledge" which can positively influence the content of programs in the classroom (Gonzalez et al., 1993, p. 1). Schools need to view parents from a strengths-in-difference perspective. Parents should be treated as partners working collaboratively towards the same goal of success for their children. Schools which work collectively with the wider community may observe optimum outcomes.

> "It is simply not enough for schools to promote individual achievement as a path out of [poverty] … A critical limitation of efforts to reform schools, however, is our tendency to focus only on individuals when the evidence indicates that, in our most oppressed areas, with few exceptions, individual success can only come in conjunction with more empowered communities" (Schutz, 2006, p. 703).

1.2.1 Towards a Definition of Community

The term "community" can evoke different meanings in varying contexts. The concept of a community working as a TEAM - Together Everyone Achieves More - implies co-operating together collegially. This in no way diminishes individuality. In its broadest sense, Schutz (2006) defines community as "a condition in which people share something with each other" (Schutz, 2006, p. 693). Epstein (2001) envisions schools, families and communities as overlapping circles of influence, each affecting student achievement and growth. She argues, that for students, "a family-like school recognises each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included" (Epstein, 2001, p. 3). Vinson et al., (2015) have found that:

> "The cycle of extreme disadvantage needs to be tackled at the community level, employing strategies that cultivate a willingness to work for the benefit of the community, developing cohesion - mutual trust - an authentic effort to strengthen community and to consolidate collective efficacy" (Vinson et al., 2015, p. 119).

Because schools are now beginning to aim for authentic community engagement, what this entails for a school is discussed in the following section.

1.2.2   Authentic Community Engagement

As children generally attend school near their own home, community, in the educative sense, refers to local students, parents, and community engagement (Comer & Haynes, 1991). Ideally, community engagement, in these instances, would be what Anderson (1998) describes as "authentic" participation. Anderson maintains that five criteria are essential to initiate "authenticity" in exchanges of communication. These are:

- Broad inclusion;
- Relevant participation;
- Authentic local conditions and processes;
- Coherence between means and ends of participation; and
- Focus on broader structural inequities (Anderson, 1998, p. 587).

In the context of a school/community partnership:

Broad inclusion entails inviting participation from all members of the school community. This includes all students, parents and staff as well as relevant members of the wider community. This inclusion encourages "democratic citizenry" (Anderson, 1998, p. 575), which is regardless of ethnic, religious, physical, behavioural or socio-economic differences.

Relevant participation means keeping it real. The programs and experiences of children and families in a low socio-economic school need to be relevant to their situation. There should be purposefully timed and planned events and activities. These events and activities should be geared to those families' needs and wants. Intentionally planning for parental leadership opportunities is a component of relevant participation.

Authentic local conditions and processes involves working within that local context. This includes utilisation of social capital, through locating resources, networking with contacts, respecting diversity and familiarisation with the way the locals do it. Social capital is discussed in chapter 2.

Coherence between means and ends of participation involves keeping the aim of the project/initiative in sight. Some questions maintaining coherence between means and ends include: Is the aim of the project/initiative achievable? Is it relevant and sustainable? Is it inclusive and fair? Is it necessary?

Focus on broader structural inequities means advocating for social justice and "redistributive justice for disenfranchised groups" (Anderson, 1998, p. 575). Socially just advocacy entails ensuring that there are equitable conditions and expectations for everyone. This is regardless of age, gender, nationality, religion or socio-economic circumstance.

As Anderson puts it, "authenticity, then, is concerned with both an authentic process and an authentic product" (Anderson, 1998, p. 576).

Because schools need to reconfigure themselves from places that remain apart from families, how they can embrace the notion of becoming family-friendly spaces through family/school partnerships is discussed next.

1.2.3 Alternative Learning Communities and Family/School Partnerships

Family/school partnerships are a vital means of engaging families more deeply in their children's education.   Engaging families rather than excluding them, is necessary, because "the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life" (Henderson & Mapp, 2000, p. 7).

Whilst the documented mutual benefits of family/school collaboration are many (Epstein, 1991, 2011; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005), researchers are calling for more than increased parental involvement. Rather, they want schools to focus on deeper parent engagement (Auerbach, 2012). Engaging parents, schools and the wider community, may be achieved through collaborating in a rich deposit of human resources. These human resources are referred to as cultural congruence or funds of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1994).   This rich deposit of resources, whilst unique to that community, is always available to be shared with other communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Teachers must work at creating a community of learners or a family in their classrooms and help students to envision community building as a

lifelong practice, extending beyond the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Schutz, 2006).

Despite being grossly under-resourced, alternative learning communities have made a positive contribution to education. They have formulated programs aimed at supporting socio-economically disadvantaged children and their families to become actively engaged in the learning process. One of the most effective forms of alternative learning curriculums, according to Schutz (2006), is that of the "full service school", which "seems to be a critical method of rooting schools more deeply in their local environments". As a means of advocating for social justice, he maintains that:

> "We need more research on truly community based full service
> schools, to explore ways that schools might teach community
> members how to get home loans, negotiate city bureaucracy,
> acquire health care, link school activities with a range of
> development efforts such as community gardens and low-
> income housing renovation and to learn how to bring scattered,
> isolated successful efforts to scale." (Schutz, 2006, pp. 727—728)

Schutz (2006) states that it is imperative for any school wanting to adopt a family/school partnership model that they first do their research and observe successful partnerships in action. Thus, "teachers and administrators must learn, in concrete ways, how communities can and have been engaged and empowered" (Schutz, 2006, p. 729).

Full service schooling was the original model of family/school/community partnerships that contributed to enhancing family engagement in St Elsewhere's context. Because the reference group looked to other countries for models of family/school/community partnerships it may prove beneficial to research alternative curricula from places such as the USA.

1.2.4 Alternative Curricula from the USA and Australia

Contemporary schools are experimenting with alternative curricula to improve their students' learning experiences. One school that successfully revised its curriculum

is Lapwai Elementary School, Idaho, USA (Parrett, 2005). 84% of its student population are Native Americans, whilst 79% live at or below the poverty level. This school's story recounts the reversal of a history of underachievement and low performance with minority children. This was achieved through various means, including augmented family engagement and participation. Aspects of the school's model of family/school/community partnerships may be replicable in St Elsewhere as it aims to enhance its quality of family engagement.

As an example of an Australian successful community partnerships program, Vinson, (2007, p. 52) recounts the case study of "school as community centre" in Windale, NSW. This school implemented changes at a community level, through restructuring school policies. Some strategies for transformation included the provision of parenting classes, a nutrition program and an exercise/sociability group for some isolated mothers. It included the staged introduction of pre-school aged children into school and the creation of a pre-school. Talented students were identified and provided with academic extension opportunities. There were locally created scholarships, whilst the school recorded some increased involvement by parents in school-based committees. Interestingly, most of these initiatives have been implemented by St Elsewhere's community partnerships program. Some of these initiatives at St Elsewhere have been documented by myself as a participant observer and are discussed in this thesis.

1.3 DEFINING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In low socio-economic areas, parents' engagement in school related aspects of their children's education remains complex and problematic (Anderson, 1998; Crozier, 2000; Mills & Gale, 2002; Schutz, 2006; Vinson et al., 2015). Research has found that family/school/community partnerships may enhance parental and family engagement, which in turn may positively enhance children's learning experiences (Epstein, 1991, 1998; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Epstein, Jansorn, & Sheldon, 2009; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Harcourt, 2015; Sanders & Epstein, 2000). In addition, evidence shows a strong link between intergenerational poverty and low levels of parental engagement in schools (Vinson, 2007; Vinson et al., 2015). This study seeks to contribute to the extant research on the experiences

of participants in family/school/community partnerships (Epstein et al., 2002; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Specifically, those schools situated in a low SES, culturally diverse context (Cooper, Riehl, & Hasan, 2010). Because St Elsewhere's suburb was previously identified in this paper as an area of extreme socio-economic disadvantage in Australia this school is an ideal contextual area for research.

The research for this study was conducted at St Elsewhere Catholic primary school, which at the time of data collection, was in its sixth year of implementing a community partnerships program. This thesis explores families' and staff perspectives of the CPP's purpose, leadership and sustainability at St Elsewhere.

At the commencement of this study, the community centre staff was transitioning from a participatory/reciprocity process model (formerly a full-service schooling model), into a community linked model of school/community partnerships. This transformation was aimed at revitalising the program, in order enhance efficiency for students and relevance for families that access the school. Many changes occurred at the school during the duration of this study from 2008-2017. This included a complete turnover of community centre staff by 2013, and a total of three principals and five acting principals at the school by 2017. Each of the CC staff and the school principals had their own perspective and vision for the CPP. To compound these changes, by the completion of this thesis in 2017, only two full time teaching staff members remained from the CPP's inception. This entailed many changes and revisions to the program, which enabled rich qualitative data collection. It allowed myself as researcher to compare a variety of participants' experiences which were observed over the nine years of the study.

At St Elsewhere Catholic primary school, the notion of community partnerships was a newly adopted concept, but has now been in existence for nearly a decade. To study the participants' differing perspectives of the model, I engaged in onsite participant observation and anecdotal data collection at St Elsewhere school over the duration of nine years. I drew on formal data collected through three individual interviews and six focus group interviews held in 2012. This research resulted in many rewrites of community partnerships developments, changes and initiatives over the course of the study. This was to keep the information relevant and updated

in the spirit of a true ethnography. The conduct of the research entailed researching criteria for authentic participation and engagement in a caring CPP, with a view to transformation. This was aimed at forming a rich, thick picture of the St Elsewhere Catholic primary school community linked model of a school/community partnership.

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overarching research question that focuses this study is:

How is care and transformation perceived in a CPP at a disadvantaged Catholic primary school?

To answer this question three sub-questions have been derived. They are:

RQ 1: How do staff and parents perceive care and transformation as purpose for a school-based CPP?

RQ 2: How do staff and parents perceive how power can enable or impede care and transformation in a school-based CPP?

RQ 3: What are staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for a caring and transformative school-based CPP?

1.5   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH - TOWARDS AN INSIGHT OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPANTS IN SCHOOL/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

1.5.1 The Research Design

The focus of this thesis is to explore the perspectives of staff and parents of school/community partnerships. Specifically, it is to explore their perspectives of care and transformation within the school/community partnership at St Elsewhere Catholic primary school.

To determine St Elsewhere's community partnerships program's original purpose and aims, I firstly held one-to-one interviews in early 2012 with three of the original reference group members who had met to establish the CPP. Hereafter, I will refer to them as visionaries because they envisioned the program. They may also be referred to enablers, because their original vision entailed offering support for those whom they perceived would benefit from it. To obtain a cross-section of perspectives of the CPP's purpose I interviewed the founding principal for an educative lens and the

founding parish priest for an ecclesiastic lens. Lastly, I interviewed the chaplain of BCE, who had completed research on child homelessness and its effect on their schooling, for an informed critical theory lens.

From their responses, interwoven with the extensive literature review (chapter 2), I formulated questions to ask two of the central participants identified by the visionaries, that is, the staff and the parents. I generated an overarching research question and three sub questions, which focused the original conduct of the research design. Over the course of my study, I found it necessary to change both my research question and my three sub-questions, no less than four times. I redevised them to reflect the changes in my perspectives towards parental engagement, which I experienced as I broadened my depth of thinking. The most recent questions are found in section 1.4 of this chapter.

I then facilitated three focus groups for staff and three focus groups for parents over several weeks. In these focus groups I asked questions to determine their perspectives of CPPs in general and the CPP at St Elsewhere specifically. I wanted to explore their ideas of appropriate types of leadership for a CPP, with a focus on St Elsewhere's CPP. After initial analysis of their responses I was eventually motivated to read about critical theories of power, which led me to identify instances of tacit interpellation within the CPP (Althuser, 1971).

My third line of questioning involved exploring staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for sustainability of a CPP, and St Elsewhere's CPP specifically. After I interviewed the parents, my personal experience with parental engagement as both a teacher and parent myself, motivated me to write more than a descriptive case study, which was my original intention. I became interested in more than just their perspectives of how they determined the CPP at St Elsewhere demonstrated care for its participants, especially for themselves as parents. I came to a realisation that I was more intrigued by how they perceived transformation of parental engagement through the CPP. I wanted to explore how the CPP could be an empowering and transformational partnership caring *with* the parents, rather than just an enabling partnership caring *for* them. So, after many years of research I

endeavoured to develop a critically reflective ethnography that not only valued staff but celebrated parents, and gave them all a voice.

1.5.2 Thesis Overview

Chapter 1 is ***Introduction*** which has included my contextual background and professional experience as author. There is data describing the demographic context of the focus Catholic primary school, St Elsewhere. The school is in a low SES area, with a high enrolment of LBOTE migrant and refugee families, as well as children with academic and behavioural challenges. Despite research stating that caring and transformational parental engagement can augment student learning, this parental engagement is either not valued or not happening. This is especially in low SES and culturally diverse schools. Therefore, St Elsewhere formed a caring community partnerships program. This program was aimed at transformation of parental engagement, student outcomes and staff teaching, through offering support to address this dissonance.

Chapter 2, ***Literature Review,*** is a review of literature pertaining to family/school/community partnerships, which is underpinned by critical theories of care, power and transformation. Firstly, there is a conceptual model of the literature review. This model introduces the themes of sociocultural responsivity and care, and transformation through participatory democracy. This is followed by a discussion of the ecological systems of family, school and community. Then, historical perspectives of schooling, including the systematic process of excluding parents' involvement in school, are explored. Next, the first theme of sociocultural responsivity and care is investigated. This is achieved through discussing the subtheme of commitment to social justice including responsiveness to socio-economic disadvantage and cultural diversity. There is discussion of subthemes of social capital and leadership influence, including the notions of trust, transparency, power and authority.

The second theme of transformation through participatory democracy is then explored through the subtheme of transformative ecological co-production and engagement. Other subthemes include shared decision making which incorporates mutual dialogue and the reciprocal empowerment model. Lastly, the notions of sustainability and continuous improvement are explored.

Chapter 3, ***Research Design: Towards a Conceptual Framework of Critical Care,*** discusses the methodology for the eventual construction of this critically reflective ethnography. It includes descriptions of a framework for data collection, composition of staff and parent focus groups, interview protocol, limitations and delimitations and ethical considerations. I initially held three one-to-one interviews with three visionaries who had founded the community partnerships program to determine its purpose and aims. Together with a literature review, these interviews gleaned further topics to discuss in focus group interviews. Three focus groups were held with staff, followed by three focus group interviews with parents. Because of my experience as both a teacher and parent at the focus Catholic primary school, I tried to be vigilant that my questioning techniques remained objective, rather than subjective. It is true that no-one so close to the case study can remain authentically neutral and this was a limitation that I admitted to in this study.

Chapter 4 is called ***Purpose: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives on care and transformation as purpose for a CPP***. It covers the visionaries' original purpose for the community partnership program, whilst it explores parents' and staffs' perspectives of the notions of care and transformation. These notions pertain to general CPPs, and specifically in St Elsewhere's CPP. It was found that because participants could benefit from support, the original purpose of the CPP was firstly, to support students in a caring manner, through meeting needs. Next it was to transform their lives by enhancing their educational experience. Secondly, the CPP's purpose was to support families in a caring manner, by linking them to school and the wider community, and increase chances of transformational parental engagement. The third purpose of the CPP was to support staff in a caring manner, then develop and transform staff interactions with students and families. Staff perceived that student and family support should firstly be provided, before community development could take place. However, parents had the converse view, that community and relationship building should occur before needs could be authentically met through the provision of support. Thus, a question arose of whether St Elsewhere's CPP is a truly an empowering, transformational partnership caring *with* the parents, or merely an enabling partnership caring *for* the parents.

Chapter 5 is called ***Power: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives of how power can enable or impede care and transformation in a CPP.*** It discusses how power and differing leadership styles of those in authority in a parish based Catholic primary school, specifically principals and priests, constructively or adversely impact care and transformation within a CPP. The notions of parental leadership and parents as authentic, purposeful partners in St Elsewhere's CPP are investigated. Because St Elsewhere is a Catholic, parish primary school it must operate within the auspices of both the BCE and the Catholic Church. Thus, contextual examples of school or church based interpellation are explored.

Chapter 6 is called ***Possibility: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for a caring and transformative CPP.*** It covers sustainability and future possibilities of St Elsewhere's CPP. Various strategies for sustainability, devised by visionaries, parents and staff are discussed. The possibility of the CPP's aim of caring and transformational parental engagement through building community is explored. Lastly, some examples are given of ways in which this aim can be met.

Chapter 7 is called ***Discussion of an Ethnography of a CD Informed Parent Engagement program in a Disadvantaged School.*** It aims to answer questions that have arisen throughout this study regarding whether the original purpose of the CPP has been validated. Other questions include whether the care expended on students, families and staff was wanted, invited, welcomed, appreciated, utilised and acted upon. It discusses whether the partnership was working *with* the parents or merely *for* the parents. Chapter 7 also discusses how leadership style and power through school and church interpellation has impacted the CPP. This leads to the question of whether the aim of transformation in parental engagement is truly possible and how it can be attained. These findings are discussed through the lens of how sociocultural responsivity and care, as well as transformation through participatory democracy have been utilised. This is through the implementation of Epstein's (2002) framework for six types of parental involvement, Auerbach's (2010) model for authentic school leadership by principals who value parental engagement, and Anderson's (1998) critical questions about authentic participation.

In conclusion, this thesis determines and offers justification for these recommendations and findings. First, that the quantity of parental engagement is not as important as the quality. Second, that principals can and do have an impact on staff perspectives of parental interactions and engagement. They must examine their motives for wanting a CPP, whilst consulting with parents before and throughout its implementation. Third, that preservice and in-service teachers engage in ongoing professional development about best practice for parental engagement. Fourth, that a possible framework for marginalised, low SES, culturally diverse schools aiming to enhance their quality of parental engagement is a personalised model of contextualised sensitive care (my term) which is revealed in this chapter. Fifth, that whilst St Elsewhere's CPP is an enabling CPP caring *for* the parents, it is working towards becoming an empowering and transformational CPP caring *with* the parents. I conclude that for a school aspiring to develop an authentic CPP, it is not enough to only excel at sociocultural responsivity and care. It must also embrace transformational parental engagement through participatory democracy.

1.5.3 Summary of Thesis Introduction

In this section, I have introduced myself as a woman passionate about social justice and authentic parental engagement. I have outlined my choices leading to professional experience as a teacher of socio-economically disadvantaged children for nearly 40 years. Contextual references are made to the focus school, referred to as St Elsewhere, a Catholic parish school, situated in a low SES inner city suburb. St Elsewhere operates under the auspices of the Brisbane Catholic education office, which has stated that it has a preferential option for the poor. Moreover, residents living in St Elsewhere's suburb are poor by government standards, if they are unable to participate fully in ordinary everyday activities.

It was acknowledged that caring and transformational parental engagement is rarely happening or valued in low SES or culturally diverse schools, due to several possible factors (which will be discussed further in this thesis). Whilst St Elsewhere embraced and celebrated itself as a multicultural school of difference, it admitted that students, staff and parents may benefit from support, before effective learning could take

place. The school undertook research which indicated that positive outcomes could occur from increased community funding and participation. It recognised the efficacy of parental engagement in children's learning experiences. Thus, it decided to address the issue of lack of parental engagement. In 2006, St Elsewhere trialled a community development program, which incorporated a caring and enabling family/school/community partnerships program.   This program was aimed at transformation of parental engagement, students' learning, and staff teaching and interactions with families.

Chapter 2:   CHAPTER 2:   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

This literature review explores the characteristics of family/school/community partnerships that care enough to authentically engage families (Anderson, 1998; Auerbach, 2007; Griffin & Steen, 2010; Harcourt, 2015).   This would be achieved through improved, purposeful and transformational parental involvement (Barbour et al., 2011; Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Hornby, 2011). A school's viability and sustainability could be ensured through communal shared values and visions, and utilisation of its social capital (Bottrell & Goodwin, 2011; Coleman, 1988; Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk, & Mulford, 2000).

Family/school/community partnerships are connections between and within schools and the wider community's members, organisations and businesses. These are forged directly or indirectly, to promote students' and families' social, emotional, physical and intellectual development (Epstein, 1988, 1995; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).   The vision and direction of school based community partnerships are influenced by the trust, transparency, authenticity and power of the principal and leadership team (Auerbach, 2010; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Cooper, Riehl, & Hasan, 2010; Theoharis, 2010). Purposeful family engagement may be strengthened by the depth of a school's internal and external relationships.   This would entail co-ordinated utilisation of communal resources (Dryfoos, 1999; Lane & Dorfman, 1997; Miller, 1995; Newmann & Sconzert, 2000; Schorr, 1997).

Schools are acknowledging that there are many concerning issues to be faced (especially in disadvantaged areas). These include schools being geared to the middle classes (Crozier, 2000) and students' home contexts causing disengagement from learning (Dethlefs, 2004a, 2004b, 2006). The high number of minority children facing discipline or removal from the classroom (Noguera, 2003), combined with the negative impacts of teacher mobility and teacher transience (Mills & Gale, 2003, 2004a) are issues of concern. These issues are compounded by teachers' lower expectations of student performance (Mills & Gale, 2005), student

underachievement (Mills & Gale, 2011), and shifting financial, civic and cultural circumstances (Mills & Gale, 2008).

Researchers have found that the benefits of family/school/community partnerships are varied. These include improvements in student attendance, achievement and behaviour (Epstein, 1991; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Other benefits include fostering educational resilience and empowerment of students (Bryan, 2005; Bryan & Henry, 2008).

Traditionally schools have not valued parental involvement because it can be problematic linking schools to families and the wider community. This is due to barriers including societal issues of class, economics and politics (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978; Vinson, 2007; Vinson et al., 2015). Compounding societal issues as a barrier to student success is that of affirming, valuing and utilising cultural diversity (Cooper, 2007, 2009; DeGaetano, 2007; Fields-Smith, 2006; Gates & Smothermon, 2006; Giroux, 2005; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001).

One strategy for viewing all parents (despite their background) from a strengths-based lens is that of acknowledging them as sources of social capital and funds of knowledge (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Gonzalez, 2005; Noguera, 2001; Rogers, 2006). Some researchers questioned parents on their motivations for parental involvement as a means of determining how to increase their purposeful participation (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mills & Gale, 2004b; Sheldon, 2002).

Historical perspectives of schooling and education in Australia and worldwide provide some insight into reasons for the gradual, but systemic exclusion of parents from their children's schools (Ely, 1978; Henry, Knight, Lingard, & Taylor, 1988; Johnson, 1976; Petitt, 1980; Tyack, 1974).

Contemporary schools are beginning to realise the importance of parental engagement, especially in low socio-economic and culturally diverse communities. They are actively seeking socially just strategies to purposefully involve them in as partners in student success (Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2008; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Grootenboer & Hardy, 2015; Watson et al., 2016). Researchers call for school communities to transform the way they currently operate (Auerbach, 2012). They should do this through humanising education and caring for students and families

and through leadership which advocates for social justice (hooks, 1994a; Epstein, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1998; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 1995, 2005; Theoharis, 2007, 2009, 2010). The overarching research question to emerge from the literature is, *"How is care and transformation perceived in a CPP at a disadvantaged Catholic primary school?"*

2.2   CONCEPTUAL MODEL

A diagrammatic representation of the literature is illustrated in Figure 2.1. The conceptual model incorporates the two major themes emerging from the scholarly literature which are: sociocultural responsivity and care, and transformation through participatory democracy. It is from within these themes pertaining to the notion of family/school/community partnerships that the research questions emerged.

INTEGRATING CARE AND TRANSFORMATION
IN A FAMILY, SCHOOL / COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY
• Shared Decision Making
• Mutual Dialogue
• Reciprical Empowerment
• Sustainability & Continuous Improvement
• Ecological Co-Production & Engagement

SCHOOL
FAMILY
COMMUNITY

SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSIVITY & CARE
• Social Capital
• Leadership Influence
• Social Justice

Figure 2.1 – Conceptual Model for Family/School/Community Partnerships

At the core of a child's life are the micro and macro ecological systems of family, then school and then community. These are placed with the child as the centre of the conceptual model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although family is a child's first circle of influence (Epstein, 2001), families today are impacted by multifaceted issues. These issues include deep and unrelenting socio-economic disadvantage and sociocultural diversity (McClelland, 2000; McLachlan, Gillfillan & Gordon, 2013; Stanley,

Richardson, & Prior, 2005). Research has found that these issues can no longer be ignored because they can be problematic for students and learning (Cooper, 2009; Harding & Szukalska, 2000; Knaus, 2009; Vinson, 2007; Vinson et al., 2015).

Therefore, caring schools are aiming for family/school/community revitalisation and renewal (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). This may be achieved through building sociocultural bridges aimed at enhancing social cohesion and inclusion. Through utilising neighbourhood agency to promote ecological co-production (Antrop-Gonzalez & DeJesus, 2006; Bottrell & Goodwin, 2011; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Whilst the benefits of family/school/community partnerships are many (Barbour et al., 2011; Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2008; Dryfoos, 1999; Epstein, 2001), issues remain that require addressing to ensure that these partnerships are relevant, viable and sustainable (Crozier, 2000; Edgar, 2001; Schutz, 2006).

Whilst school is an early sphere of influence in a child's life (Epstein, 2001), the concepts of education and schools' roles within it are influenced by historical perspectives (Johnson, 1976; Sharp, 1980). Other influences include expectations of various stakeholders or participants (Crozier, 2000; Trafford, 1993). Although socially just contemporary schools aim to demonstrate both sociocultural responsivity and care, this can be challenging (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noddings, 2005, 1992; Rivera-McCutcheon, 2012; Theoharis, 2010; Watson et al., 2016).

It is possible to implement family-centred partnerships focussed on improving types of parent and community involvement. These include schools focussed on promoting, utilising and valuing family social capital through culturally responsive family engagement (Grant & Ray, 2013; Moll et al., 1992; Newmann & Sconzert, 2000; Parrett, 2005). A major impact on any family/school/community partnership is the trust, transparency, power and authenticity of its principal and leadership (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Duncan, 1990; Theoharis, 2009).

Transformation of and within authentic partnerships is possible when participatory democracy is established. This becomes reality through collaborative leadership based on shared decision making, mutual dialogue and shared responsibility (Anderson, 1998; Auerbach, 2010; Cooper et al., 2010; Epstein, 2010). Furthermore, a reciprocal empowerment model of school based community partnerships is committed to sustainability and continuous improvement through research and data

collection (Mills & Gale, 2004c; Sanders & Epstein, 2000). Because it is beneficial to explore how children and families relate to schools and communities, the ecological systems of family, school and community are discussed in the following section.

2.2.1 Ecological Systems: family, school and community

In the ecology of the human environment, children develop and function as they experience different influences from key adults with whom they build relationships. The ecological system of firstly family, with the child as the centre of their world, is a major influence on children's development, functioning and quality of relationships with others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2001; Grant & Ray, 2013). Whilst this study aims to explore the perspectives of families engaging with family/school/community partnerships, defining what comprises a family is open to debate.

In the 2006 Australian census, for statistical purposes, family is defined as:

> "Two or more persons, one of whom is at least fifteen years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household. The basis of a family is formed by identifying the presence of a couple relationship, lone parent-child relationship or other blood relationship. Some households will, therefore, contain more than one family" (ABS, 2006).

The traditional image of the self-sufficient, nuclear family is being eclipsed and a more open-ended, local, supportive community network is emerging as another typology of family (Arthur & Bailey, 2000). This typology of family is not so new at all when it is defined in the context of Indigenous and African-American families' collective care and the caring community theory (Antrop-Gonzales & DeJesus, 2006; Cooper, 2009).

The second influence in a child's life is school, most commonly defined as a place designated for learning. The range of institutions covered by the term varies from country to country. A school could consist of students in one or more grades or other identifiable groups and who are organised to be given instruction of a defined type.

Whilst schools primarily exist for education, a school's formal and informal curricula are directly impacted by the cultural norms and values of its wider community (Antrop-Gonzales & DeJesus, 2006; Epstein, 2001).

Because education at its best is a process of transforming society, it should lead to the positive reconstruction of the social order. Schools and teachers can be advocates for social justice concerned with confronting daily inequalities and inequities (Trafford, 1993). Schools should "advocate, lead, and keep at the centre of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalising conditions in [our country]" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 222). Education should purposefully work at improving living conditions and political situations for communities. (Antrop-Gonzales & DeJesus, 2006). Questions need to be asked about who or what is the driving force behind any educational policy and who are the winners and losers in the policy's priorities and their subsequent effects (Gillborn, 2005).

Community is not linked to geographic boundaries, but refers more to the kinds of social interactions and interactive relationships which can occur within or beyond these boundaries (Nettles, 1991). In seeking to enhance communities it is preferable to ask those communities to have input into what their needs and wants are, then to provide them with the financial assistance to achieve those aims (Woodhead & McGrath, 1988). In educational contexts, schools are building culturally additive learning communities. These learning communities highlight the practice of hard caring and raised academic expectations that reflect an ethic of critical care (Antrop-Gonzalez & DeJesus, 2006). They respect families as funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

However, not all schools are finding that purposefully engaging parents is easy or even desirable. To understand contemporary perspectives of parental engagement it is beneficial to explore historical perspectives of parental involvement in schooling. Some historical perspectives of schooling which influenced Australian trends will now be discussed.

2.2.2   Historical Perspectives

One reason that public, free, compulsory and secular mass schooling emerged in the nineteenth century was as a response to evolving capitalist economies and social formations (Henry et al., 1988).   Although Australia did not become fully industrialised until well into the twentieth century, the development of capitalism meant a shift from a family-based economy to a more organised "rational" economic system. This system operated outside and separated from the family unit, requiring a "gendered division of labour" (Henry et al., 1988). With the separation of family from work, skills were not traditionally passed from parent to child within the family or local community context. There arose the need for schools to teach these skills (Johnson, 1976; Sharp, 1980).

In Australia, schooling was influenced by the country's existence as a British colony (Ely, 1978; Henry et al., 1988). Education was promoted as a right for working people aimed at improving their personal and social lives. It was also a means of contributing to an economy that needed a workforce with basic literacy and numeracy skills (Sullivan, 1974). In the nineteenth century, the lower classes were mainly viewed with a combination of suspicion and paternalism by the colonial gentry. Working class people rejected the state-provided education system with its moralistic curriculum, partly because educators in colonial Australia remained faithful to the English example of minimising the importance of communal life in schooling (Henry et al., 1988).

In Australia, churches ran schools until the 1870's, with state aid to Church schools being progressively withdrawn between 1872 and 1893. Catholic schools became dependent on religious orders to provide an education within the Catholic system (Dixon, 2005). Because nineteenth century religious brothers and sisters, as well as lay educators, viewed education as a means of providing moral enlightenment and instilling proper attitudes and habits in children, they felt justified in minimising the role of parents in their children's education (Henry et al., 1988; Pettitt, 1980).

Victoria was the first Australian State to introduce a parliamentary Education Act in 1872. In this act, it was recommended that parents, especially uneducated ones, be virtually entirely excluded from the schooling process. Because the day-to-day business of earning a living and supporting a family was a challenging task for

Australian parents of the time, they eventually left the responsibility of educating their children to those that they considered the experts, that is, school teachers (Pettitt, 1980).

In the 1970s there was a growing demand for community involvement, parental engagement and shared decision-making in Australian schools. In March 1973, the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), put a submission to the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission. In the submission, the council expressed the need for parental involvement in the education process. There was especially a call for parental involvement in those areas with large concentrations of disadvantaged people such as migrants, single-parent families and working mothers. The school was considered as a community resource, whose facilities should be opened to all people for cultural, educational and recreational activities. Recommendations from the 1973 Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, (Karmel Report), gave Australian parents a unique chance in history to be involved in shaping their children's future. This was to be through parental freedom to challenge previous traditional notions, beliefs and codes of behaviour.

International researchers reflected the trends of Australian educators in highlighting the need for a return to a close link between school, home and the wider community, to maximize students' opportunities for learning (Epstein, 1995; Springate and Stegelin, 1999). In Britain, the Plowden Report emphasized the importance of a warm partnership between school and home (Woodhead & McGrath, 1988). Although the pressures between the school and the wider community working together had become an issue in the 1960s (Masotti, 1967), schools attempted to liaise with the wider community from the 1960s and onwards.

In acknowledging that a good education is vital for children's future success, there was a call for adequate financial resourcing in schools that were most involved in educating Australia's poorest 20 to 25 percent of children (Landt & King, 1996). Rich learning environments and safer stimulating neighbourhoods for all children were deemed a necessity. In response to this, schools were portrayed as "funds of knowledge" and a real force for low socio-economic areas lacking adequate resources to offer quality educational opportunities for their students (Landt & King, 1996). By

2005 researchers in Australia still found gross socio-economic inequities in Australia. Australian society was impeding the progress of schools and their students, rather than enhancing them (Stanley et al., 2005).

Eventually school leaders realised that they needed to develop internal and external linkages with the wider community to remain viable and sustainable (Davies, 2002; Lane & Dorfman, 1997). These linkages assisted schools in achieving excellence at what they did (Arthur & Bailey, 2000). Planning for children's education was to be based on a sense of collective responsibility and child-centred. Ideally, it was to be a collaborative effort between parents, professionals and community members. It would give rise to the adoption of varying forms of family/school/community partnerships (Berger, 1997, 1991, 1981; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben Avie, 1996; Epstein, 2001).

The following section discusses the first theme to emerge from the scholarly literature within the notion of school/community partnerships, that of sociocultural responsivity and care.

2.3   THEME ONE: SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSIVITY AND CARE

Schools gradually began to acknowledge that at times families may benefit from support with family functioning, nurturance, social connectedness and parental knowledge to develop strong school and family ties (Epstein, 1988; Gestwicki, 2004). Leadership in schools should familiarise themselves with their communities and work with them in meeting needs (Auerbach, 2012). The time, finances and effort invested in intentionally building caring communities among schools, neighbourhood institutions and their environment could be worthwhile (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996; Epstein, 1995, 2001; Lueder, 2000; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). This is because Griffin & Steen (2010) have found that "schools are better situated to address barriers to learning and teaching and promote positive development when they are integral to the community" (Griffin & Steen, 2010, p. 219). This is especially true for schools in low socio-economic areas because:

> "People who are poor and disadvantaged are victims of a societal
>
> confidence trick. They have been encouraged to believe that a

major goal of schooling is to increase equality, while in reality schools reflect society's intention to maintain the present the present unequal distribution of status and power" (Fitzgerald, 1976, p. 231).

Despite researchers finding that when families are involved, children do better at school, (Chavkin, 2005), many parents have barriers preventing their participation (Hornby, 2011). These include inequitable policies in education regarding accountability and benchmarks that are resulting in the exclusion from schools of a high number of students and families (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). Because schools are "social organisations embedded in the community," they cannot operate without parental accord and backing (Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010, pp. 8—9).

Yet, "in regard to how parents in disadvantaged circumstances connect and relate to schools, what is required above all is genuine parent and community involvement based on a preparedness to think and act in ways that are radically different" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 30). Schools which aim to be socially just through outreach to marginalised families are encouraged to utilise a family/school/community partnership as an important strategy for developing connections and social networks. Shared utilisation of school facilities by families and the wider community is another strategy for social justice, especially in low SES neighbourhoods. This may include operating school property as venues for before and after school care, senior citizens' centres, parent rooms, community hubs, youth recreation halls and arts centres, and day care facilities (Dryfoos, 1999). This shared utilisation of facilities can increase social connectedness for disadvantaged or marginalised families. This could be through building networks between schools, child care centres, churches, banks, parent groups, police, child, youth and family support agencies (Crowson & Boyd, 2001; Dryfoos, 1999).

Trafford (1993) discusses characteristics of schools advocating a just and peace-filled education. These schools may find that this involves practical issues such as assisting those in need, including food and clothing drives. They may engage in volunteering one's time and talents, such as in helping the aged or disabled. Also, in becoming

active in social witness and political involvements which challenge economic and cultural oppression (Trafford, 1993, p. 40).

When low-income families are actively encouraged to engage with their school, the outcomes are not only increased student development and participation, (Chavkin, 2005), but enhanced family functioning, mutual respect, shared responsibility and increased accountability (Comer,1986, 2005; McNeal, 1999; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). Mapp (2003) and Green et al. (2007) questioned parents on their motivations for parental involvement. Before this, in their studies Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) presented a model of parental motivation for school involvement. They found that parental beliefs about involvement could be divided into five areas. Firstly, it was their duty, then it would benefit their child. After that, involvement depended on invitations from the school, the teacher and their child (Hoover-Dempsey& Sandler, 1995).

Lareau (1989, 1987), Mills and Gale (2002), and Smyth et al. (2010), discussed social class, social power and social inequities as a variable in family-school participation, especially for low SES families. Sheldon (2002) cited parental social networks as indicators of their amount and depth of involvement. Lareau (1987) found that middle class parents were more likely to perceive school and home as being interconnected than were low SES parents.

However, low income and culturally diverse families were rarely interviewed about their motives for involvement or non-involvement. In one study, Fields-Smith (2006) reviewed reasons for African American parents choosing to be heavily involved in their children's education. Cooper (2009) specifically discussed heavily involved African American mothers. Mills and Gale (2004c) found that many factors impact on parent participation in disadvantaged schools in regional Australia. Furthermore, Hornby (2011) posited the notion that some professionals may come across as distant for parents. Whilst Auerbach (2012) stated that many low SES and diverse parents could be vulnerable to indications of disparaging and slighting treatment by school staff. Inclusive, intentional, purposeful family engagement is challenging for schools implementing a family/school/community partnership.

Schools may meaningfully assist families through providing parent education, including health and nutrition classes to enhance their children's learning

experiences (Gestwicki, 1994). Other means include creating bridges with parents to learn about how their children are performing in school, to help them at home in meeting their academic desires for their children (Cooper et al., 2010). Schools are encouraged to provide programs that assist with daily parenting such as before and after school care, childcare, or parenting programs at times in which parents can attend. Schools should engage in sourcing people to share skills and talents required by the school to create a resource bank accessible by families and communities e.g. an information technology expert (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Other researchers propose that schools provide a welcoming, aesthetically pleasing convenient centre in which to facilitate parenting programs and to build social connections (Gestwicki, 2004; Grant & Ray, 2013).

Schools should acknowledge that all individuals are different and choose to assist in differing ways. These include making costumes for plays, assisting with homework, serving on the P and F, volunteering in the classroom or making decisions (Barbour et al., 2011). Schools should endeavour to provide culturally responsive teaching and family engagement (Boethel, 2003; Gay, 2000; Grant & Ray, 2013). Research states that schools should facilitate and explicitly teach age appropriate courses for students and families in social and emotional learning (Epstein, 2001). Chrispeels & Rivero (2001) have found that explicitly educating parents in ways to assist their children's learning is beneficial for parental efficacy.

Gestwicki (2004) states that schools which transparently and clearly explain student data with their families, are finding that these parents welcome this information. Other researchers find that parents can identify challenges, offer ideas and work together with staff to solve potential problems and become partners in teaching their children (Endrizzi, 2008; Epstein, 2001). Research has found that "children improve academically when schools include family and community members in establishing full service schools" (Barbour et al., 2011, p. 306). Parents require clear information on ways in which they can best assist their children. This is to ensure that the school and family work together in a reciprocal and beneficial partnership which strengthens school and family ties (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Scribner, Young & Pedoza, 1999; Springate, & Stegelin, 1999).

Because the reality for contemporary families includes increasingly facing financial stresses, some of the outcomes of financial hardship will be discussed in the following section.

2.3.1 Commitment to Social Justice

Crozier (2000) has found that low-income parents are equally as committed and supportive of their children's education as middle-class parents. Yet, contemporary Australian families are finding that parenting is becoming more challenging. This is because Australia's population is comprised of a high proportion of jobless families with children (Stanley et al., 2005).

Poverty negatively affects the life chances of many children. Their unreasonably low living standards prevent their families from affording necessities, and cause families to experience genuine deprivation and hardship (McClelland, 2000; McLachlan et al., 2013). Parents of children living in poverty suffer from labour market inequities such as unemployment, low wages and wage inequalities (Stanley et al., 2005). Moreover, "social anxiety becomes greater when people feel shamed, embarrassed, humiliated, disrespected or diminished in the eyes of others" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 70).

In families with the lowest income in Australia, only 11.5% have both parents employed. Thus, 66% of lowest income families rely on Government income for survival and parenting their children. In March 2014, unemployment increased to 5.3% of the population. Whilst full time employment opportunities were decreased, part time employment positions increased, creating the 3524000 part-time positions available in Australia (ABS, 2014). Moreover, in June 2012, there were 167000 children aged from 0 to14 years living in jobless couple families (ABS, 2013).

Parents in disadvantaged circumstances receive less relief from the constant demands of child rearing, because they are less able to afford baby-sitting or quality child care. They are less likely to be well educated, thereby providing fewer learning opportunities for their children. The level of parental education can affect the home literacy environment. This may negatively impact on the parents' teaching styles, as well as their choice to invest in educational resources (Shonkiff & Phillips, 2000). Financially and socially impoverished families are usually large, with three or more

siblings. The parents tend to discipline harshly, with children experiencing a higher level of corporal punishment than the norm.   There is usually residential instability, with children averaging up to three or four moves to new houses before they have started school (Harding & Szukalska, 2000).

As of 2012, there were 575000 Australian children under 12 years of age who were classed as homeless (ACOSS, 2012). This is because they were either living out of home, with a friend, relative or other person (www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au). Their accommodation varied from improvised dwellings, tents and sleeping out (6%) to supported accommodation for the homeless (20%).   Others were staying temporarily with other households (17%) or boarding houses (17%). The remainder cited other temporary lodging (1%) and staying in "severely" overcrowded dwellings (39%).

Adults' chances of effective parenting are lessened, as greater stress increases the mother's irritability and reduces her feelings of warmth and responsiveness towards her children (Harding & Szukalska, 2000).   Socio-economic disadvantage continues to impact detrimentally on children's educational experiences (Vinson et al., 2015). The children most likely to be disadvantaged in Australia are those with unemployed parents, sole parents, those with disabilities, Indigenous children and migrants and refugees (McClelland, 2000).

In June 2012, there were 961000 sole parent families which comprised 15% of all families. Of these 780000 were single mother families (ABS, 2013). Children living in low income families presented a challenge for educators in the 1990s as they were more likely to leave school early, have truancy issues, experience literacy and numeracy difficulties and receive a lower quality education than children from wealthier families (Landt & King, 1996).   These difficulties are being experienced decades later by families living in low socio-economic areas and who are more likely to be public housing tenants (ACOSS, 2012; Vinson et al., 2015).

These statistics force us as educators, to acknowledge and respond to the multi-varied needs of the children we are educating. The first research question to emerge from the literature is, "*How do staff and parents perceive care and transformation as*

purpose for a school-based CPP?" Why we must respond in a caring and sensitive manner is explored in the following section.

2.3.2 Caring as responsiveness to socio-economic disadvantage and cultural diversity

"Talking about poverty in capability terms enables us to make the conceptual bridge to education-education is after all fundamentally about enhancing and expanding human capabilities and opportunities…The focus then is on what people can do rather than on what they can buy or acquire materially" (Smyth et al., 2010, pp. 18—19).

As caring educators, we can no longer ignore the previous statistics when analysing student performances. But the reality is that:

"Most media and political commentators and analysts who discuss differences in students' learning performances (and they delight in producing comparative league tables of these things) do so at highly abstract, aggregate and descriptive levels that have been evacuated of all complexity and then end up with glossed-over simplistic solutions for curriculum, school organisation, assessment, treatment of teachers and teaching methods. The problem with these approaches is that they assume that if all children are provided with similar in-school experiences then all will benefit similarly. Differential student performances are invariably explained away in terms of inconsistency of educational treatment" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 19).

Nevertheless, schools are beginning to acknowledge that:

"The education of young people is everybody's business and depends for its success on the whole-hearted support and cooperation of parents, students, teachers and a broader cross

section of society. Policies which are developed at arm's length from the very people they are designed to serve are unlikely to have a positive impact on schooling" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 179).

The previous section's statistics highlight the need for schools to change their focus to becoming relational schools which concentrate on the wellbeing of the staff, the students and their families.

"Relational schools place relationships at the centre of all that they do. They challenge entrenched inequalities and invest in resources that enable students, [staff and families] to have fulfilling and rewarding experiences at school (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 199).

One way to become a relational school is to engage in family/school/community partnerships. This is because Epstein (2001) has found that these partnerships may assist schools to become more inclusive and equitable, with the aim of assisting all students to experience success at school and in later life.

Despite findings that schools can address barriers to learning and teaching through positive community interactions (Griffin & Steen, 2010), they have persisted in only paying lip-service to the notion of authentic family engagement (Anderson, 1998). Crozier (2000) has found that schools have denied families the chance of meaningful participation, partly due to negative attitudes towards parents, stereo-typing and unintentional discriminatory practices. This is because parents themselves are perceived by schools as not caring enough to become involved in their children's schooling (Cooper, 2009; Smyth et al., 2010). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) stated that all parents have the same expectation of teachers regarding their children as individuals, and want them to teach and care for their children as such.

Caring, traditionally viewed as a feminine notion, has been perceived as a natural response. It was believed to require minimal thought or training. As caring is limited in its breadth by the number cared for, it engendered minimal respect. This was because when caring was compared to the masculine ethics of universal love, it was considered trivial. Noddings (1984) claims that her description of caring as a feminine ethic does not speak for all women, nor does it exclude all men. It can be

argued that "universal love is an illusion," because authentic care exists on an individual or personal level (Noddings, 1984, p. 85). This includes ethical care, which has traditionally been discussed in the "language of the father." Father language includes terms such as principles, propositions, justification, fairness and justice. It is used to discuss ethical care rather than the "language of the mother". Mother language includes notions of human caring, memory of caring and being cared for (Noddings, 1984, p. 1). In Noddings (1984) arguing that the mother's voice has been silenced, she has shifted the moral argument from one in which care is an outcome of moral behaviour, to one in which care *is* the moral behaviour, because it is the right thing to do.

Theoretical discourse surrounding care in education highlights a possible limitation of Noddings' ethic of care. This limitation is that it is positioned within Anglocentric paradigms. Cooper (2009) argues that these Anglocentric paradigms exclude the "moral reasoning, care traditions, educational experiences and mothering" of non-white disadvantaged mothers (Cooper, 2009, p. 390). Cooper (2009) describes these non-white mothers as women who "remain tied to a dichotomy that constructs them as lacking educational values and care," rather than as those who "display traditional concern with both individual care and collective uplift … personal nurturing of others … and broader efforts to disrupt unequal power relations" (Cooper, 2009, p. 384).

Antrop-Gonzales & DeJesus (2006) argue that within a school-based context, teacher caring theory assumes that student outcomes are related to teacher care as "individual responsibility". They state that caring community theory acknowledges school and community obligations to provide care for students whose lives may lack care as "collective responsibility". Their definition of difference theory is one that is culturally sensitive, recognising diverse, social, ethnic, class and gender definitions of caring as "inclusive responsibility" (Antrop-Gonzales & DeJesus, 2006, p. 410).

Furthermore, when referring to parental engagement in schools, Rivera-McCutcheon's (2012), framework for six categories on behaviours on care theory and caring school environments suggests valuing parents as resources for schools. This is complemented by Epstein's (2002) framework for parental participation, through offering specific strategies to incorporate purposeful parental engagement. One possible limitation of both these frameworks is that they could be utilised as universal

and homogenous guidelines for all parents, regardless of socio-economic or sociocultural circumstances.

Cooper (2009) specifically discusses how caring is defined in African- American parental involvement, citing activist indicators which most white families would rarely, if ever, need to utilise. These include advocating for children's interests and needs, whilst confronting perceived inequitable educators. They include engaging in organised reformational protests, and choosing alternative schools over ones with unsatisfactory teachers, resources and policies.

Whilst caring has been touted as a feminine ethic, androcentric viewpoints have dominated all critical thinking (see Crawford & Marbeeck, 1989, p. 477). Accordingly, whilst caring for their families, women of all colours became aware that males considered their female gender positioned them as second-class citizens. Thus, arose the area of critical feminist theory (Collins, 2001). Those males included not only white supremacists, but white and black male chauvinists, who (though presenting as well-meaning), were tacitly ignorant of the changing times. hooks' (1989) universality of feminism as both men and women working together to "eradicate patriarchal domination" is echoed by Connell's (2010) argument for a "global equity agenda" (Connell, 2010, p. 605; hooks, 1989, p. 27).

Education must be reconfigured from post-colonial or colonial power/knowledge systems heavily guided by white perspectives and patriarchal, Greco-Roman views. They must be reconfigured as schools which are not solely Eurocentric (McLaren, 2007). Revolutionary pedagogy is a process in which youth actively advocate for the entire displacement of class society. This is so education is not perceived as merely teaching how to become an effective worker in the workplace. On the contrary, education should raise awareness that just because someone does not express dissatisfaction with workplace conditions, (or is unaware of them), this does not ensure the absence of corruption (McLaren, 2007).

Generating the need for revolutionary pedagogy and culturally relevant theory is US legal scholarship known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). This "offers a way of conducting research that speaks against current objectifications of race, not just a way of interpreting it" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 602). CRT encompasses the social construction thesis which proposes that the concept of race is a man-made ideology.

This ideology is based on the usefulness of the subordinate group to the dominant culture of the time. It challenges discrimination which is purely based on physical appearance, whilst discounting significant qualities, such as pleasant personality, high intelligence, or moral behaviour (Leonardo, 2002). As Leonardo (2013) posits, "we all create race, and race creates us all" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 609).

Gillborn (2007) states that because CRT is not so much a theory, as a perspective, there is no widely recognised anti-racist framework. There is a danger that new researchers will spend valuable time arguing their own viewpoint, rather than dealing with the problem.

CRT is an outcome of critical legal studies which resulted from the notion that US law could be viewed from the lens that racism is pervasive, exclusionary and complex, in fact, almost the 'norm' (Gillborn, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Nearly all constitutional laws could be perceived as promoting apartheid and encoded to favour white, heterosexist, Christian supremacist males (Leonardo, 2004). Ladson-Billings (2009) argues that legal language persists as "a discourse that [continues] to perpetuate hierarchies-male over female, rich over poor, Whites over Blacks and other people of colour" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 87). This notion seems to be validated in our everyday language. Ladson-Billings (2009) cites that white youth are described in respectable terms as school achievement, middle-classness, beauty, maleness, intelligence and science. Whereas assumptions about descriptors of blackness in black youth include gangs, welfare recipients, basketball players, and the underclass. The notion of "race" itself is complicated, because:

> "Thinking of race strictly as an ideological concept denies the reality of racialised society and its impact on people and their everyday lives [but] thinking of race solely as an objective condition denies the problematic aspects of race-how to decide who fits into which racial classifications" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9).

Further compounding the issue of race as a socially constructed identity is differential racialisation, where whites consider themselves as superior because of their whiteness. This includes the policy of white Australians which resulted in forcibly

kidnapping mixed blood children and retraining them as servants of white families (the Stolen Generations). Despite a formal apology, Australian schools persist in refusing to adopt an abolitionist pedagogy of engaging whiteness while simultaneously working to dismantle it (Leonardo, 2002, 2004).

Exposing the sanitised and white-washed version of history is difficult when possibly many white people, myself included, have no awareness of or refuse to acknowledge, whiteness as a construction. Therefore, governments do not admit that that we need to review educational policies in the light of the fact that even well-intentioned actions can have racist consequences (Gillborn, 2005). As white teachers whose ideology and beliefs guide our actions (Cooper, 2009), we wish to help by not placing rigorous demands on our students. We tend to place disproportionate numbers of black students in low ranked groups for literacy and numeracy (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Watson et al., 2016).

One powerful tool for change in racism is giving people a voice through storytelling (Gillborn, 2007). Leonardo (2004) argues that story-telling is a tool to overcome our tendency to overlook or deny what happened. Sometimes difficult moral dilemmas and counter discourses force us to face counter hegemonic racial understandings. But, we, as the cultural majority, opt to believe and act on whichever true or not colour-blind story has least impact on us. So, "critical discourse on the continuity between past and present institutional arrangements, and the problems of colour-blind discourses are forsaken for 'correct' forms of knowledge" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 144).

As well as hegemonic racial understandings, in educational pedagogy there is the inequity of governments expecting learning outcomes to meet benchmarks in an "increasingly standardised curriculum". This is rather than acknowledging that everybody is an individual product of their differing "social contexts of poverty, violence and personal struggle" (Knaus, 2009, p. 138). By expecting everyone to work within Western based epistemologies (Leonardo, 2013), educators "ensure that what we teach is irrelevant to [our students'] daily survival" (Knaus, 2009, p. 139). This is in direct opposition to what we, as educators, profess to do. That is, to care for our students by genuinely listening to them, and equipping them with skills and strategies aimed at building resilience and coping with problems of everyday life (Noddings,

2005). We as educators, as well as our government, must face Vinson's (2007) truth that we can no longer "deny the centrality of limited education and its impact on the acquisition of economic and life skills in the making and sustaining of disadvantage" (Vinson, 2007, p. 96).

Although addressing educational inequities includes socially just schools adopting a policy of intentional, purposeful family engagement, it should not merely be as an add-on or a discrete program. It should be interwoven throughout the school within its instructional program, planning and management, and other aspects of school-life. This is so that the school is truly a place which embraces social connectedness and promotes social justice through community development (Miller, 1995; Theoharis, 2010). The school becomes a "family friendly" environment in the spirit of Reggio Emilia with attractive areas, intriguing displays of children's work, including photos and classrooms with "couches and stuffed chairs, plants and soft lighting" to settle students and welcome parents (Gestwicki, 2004, p. 226; Harcourt, 2015). These schools are aware that parents want to belong, to have teacher contact and to be informed about their child and the school. Parents want to be invited to help and mostly they want teachers to "love their children" (Gestwicki, 2004, p. 227). Family/school partnerships that incorporate activities focussing on family education should provide detailed literature to increase parents' knowledge. This includes handbooks on parental involvement, parent and teacher expectations and high aspirations (Gestwicki, 2004). These schools should facilitate parent-student workshops in reading literacy and parent leadership training (Grant & Ray, 2013).

Whilst family activities should be geared to families' needs, interests and literacy levels, these activities should cater for various family structures including grandparents, teenage parents and single parents. This is despite participation in these activities sometimes being costly (Gestwicki, 2004). As a cost reducing measure, the most effective trainers for parents are other parents because they feel comfortable talking with them and can relate to them (Grant & Ray, 2013).

Effective family school partnerships may need intervention programs, including family support services aimed at strengthening families to enhance their children's development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Partnerships could be a key to providing relief from the multi-varied stresses of poverty when relevant (Boon & Lewthwaite,

2016). It is vital for schools to develop a deep understanding, appreciation and knowledge of their families' home lives and circumstances (Epstein, 2001). Culturally responsive family engagement is one pathway to mutual respect between staff and parents, as it "acknowledges different beliefs about education, parenting practices, religions, communication styles, and family values" (Grant & Ray, 2013, p. 22). Schools may be unaware of the variety of ways to achieve all these aims for parents, so they may collaboratively design a framework, embedding a policy supporting family engagement practices such as the following:

2.3.3 Epstein's Framework for the six types of School/Family/Community Involvement interactions in Parental Engagement

The six types are:

1. Parenting – schools assist families in awareness of and knowledge about child development. Schools also provide resources enabling families to enrich their home environments, thereby enhancing their child's learning experiences (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

2. Communicating – schools provide detailed, personalised, appropriate, two-way contact about school events and functions. Schools also share academic, personal development and progress of students. Schools develop insight of successes or challenges within the home environment (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Griffin & Steen, 2010).

3. Volunteering – schools and families organise and participate in activities and programs initiated by school personnel (e.g. P and F) or those generated by community members. These are aimed at supporting students and school programs such as service-learning projects, Big Brothers/ Big Sisters programs, or school wide positive behaviour assemblies (Barbour et al., 2011).

4. Learning at home – schools provide information to parents and families about school procedures such as homework expectations and NAPLAN testing. This is to assist them in supplementing their children's learning (Grant & Ray, 2013).

5. Decision making – schools invite and include all parents, families and community members from diverse backgrounds who show an interest to become representatives and leaders. These could be on school committees, forums and reference groups (Barbour et al., 2011; Gestwicki, 2004).

6. Collaborating with the community – schools and families identify and integrate resources, services and other assets from the community. This is to help meet the needs of all school stakeholders (Auerbach, 2010; Bryan & Henry, 2008)

(Adapted from Epstein et al., 2002 – Epstein's parent involvement framework)

2.3.4 Social capital

A challenge for schools wishing to nurture a family/school partnership is to reframe their traditional belief of education as teaching individual students, to the core belief that schools exist to serve families and the community (Bryan & Henry, 2008). This is particularly pertinent for schools in low socio-economic areas. As a response, some schools have tried to reconfigure their purpose from being individual student places of learning to becoming family learning centres (Gestwicki, 2004).

In changing from the early industrial model of schooling with fixed times and fixed classes, coupled with inflexible catering for diverse needs of families, these schools have endeavoured to intentionally become more caring and flexible (Cooper et al., 2010; Epstein, 2001). They have advocated the return to a system of the local community's sharing and management of school resources and learning processes (Dryfoos, 1999). This capacity building of human resources and expertise, coupled with the sharing of knowledge and skills is known as banking social capital (Coleman, 1988; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Family social capital draws on interfamilial relationships and resources. These include parents' educational backgrounds, parenting styles, parental philosophies and family cultural values (Grant & Ray, 2013). In a school context, community social capital consists of the relationships "between parents, between children and adults, and between parents and staff in the wider school community" (Epstein & Sanders, 2006, p. 112).

Teachers can draw on this social capital as they utilise "students' home resources" and concede that parents and the surrounding community are rich funds of knowledge willing to share their wealth of untapped information and experience (Endrizzi, 2008, p. 32; Moll et al., 1992; Springate & Stegelin, 1999). Hence:

> "Where schools see themselves as a part of the community, there is a greater likelihood of creating the cultural settings that will bring parents into the educational lives of their children. This is a two-fold process. Schools are significant neighbourhood assets with the resources to promote civic engagement and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of local communities. Equally, communities have funds of knowledge that can enhance student engagement and school retention" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 204).

Social capital acknowledges that no matter their level of education, parents, relatives, grandparents, business and community people have all had different life experiences. They have something of value to give or say for the benefit of others' reciprocal learning. (Epstein, 2001; Grant & Ray, 2013; Noguera, 2001).

Teachers learn new perspectives of these children as their parents are invited into classrooms to "talk about their unique family" (Gestwicki, 2004, p. 493). In turn, parents perceive themselves as family supports and resources, and learn to not always expect to look to the teacher for information (Endrizzi, 2008; Grant & Ray, 2013). As equally involved participants in shared conversations aimed at problem solving and increasing each other's knowledge, parents and teachers positively impact the school's body of documented reciprocal learning (Cooper et al., 2010, Harcourt, 2015).

Creating and sustaining social capital may further positively impact on a family/school/community partnership, by facilitating the school community's social, civic and economic development. Close partnerships that are carefully nurtured assist communities to manage change. Change is an integral quality of resilience, a quality necessary for contemporary living (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Lueder, 2000).

Family/ school/community partnerships enable the community to have a sense of ownership of the entire program. Local culture and culturally relevant care is deeply embedded in its belief system (Grant & Ray, 2013; Watson et al., 2016). The values of collaboration, trust, partnering and interdependence are held to be absolutes (Barbour et al., 2011; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cooper, 2009; Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Because a leaders' style can positively or negatively impact a CPP, the notion of leadership influence is discussed in the following section.

2.3.5   Leadership Influence

Successful, sustainable family/school partnerships which are vision-driven depend on committed and collaborative team leadership (Auerbach, 2010; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). These partnerships are led by leaders who hold a strengths-in-difference based perspective of diverse families (Cooper et al., 2010). Leaders must encourage staff to reconfigure their perspective of parent involvement (PI) as consisting of merely parent education. It must be reconfigured to a whole school approach that acknowledges PI from a strengths-based foundation (Bryan & Henry, 2008).

As leaders and advocates for social justice, principals can develop a school philosophy that acknowledges, affirms and celebrates diversity.   This is achieved through culturally responsive teaching by staff who invite input and involvement from people of differing backgrounds, interests and lifestyles (Cooper et al., 2010; Grant & Ray, 2013; Watson et al., 2016). Cooper (2005, 2010) states that leadership is an equitable issue in forming educational policies and emphasises the crucial role the principal plays in creating inclusive schools.   Leadership differs from management, in that it makes the followers want to achieve ambitious goals, rather than simply directing people and expecting them to perform (Duncan, 1990).

Italian communist writer and leader, Antonio Gramsci, actively worked against top-down leadership and hegemony and favoured progressive hegemony. This progressive hegemony was one in which the common people were invited, not forced, to negotiate and embrace innovative ideas in a spirit of reciprocity and a sharing of their "folklore of philosophy" (Baldacchino, 2011, p. 582; Swanson, 2009, p. 338).

In a school context, principals can positively or negatively impact the success of a community partnerships program (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). In fact, Althuser (1971) has stated that whilst churches and schools are ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), operating principally by ideology and repression, education has now supplanted the church as the dominant ISA. Despite schools touting social justice, schools as ISAs encourage exploitative practices like interpellation. Interpellation is a practice in which people are conditioned into willingly accepting without question a certain role or value, because they think they don't have a choice to act otherwise (Althuser, 1971). Today school is a place of clearly defined leadership roles, which are restricted to those deemed fit through training and capability. Parents, regardless of how willing or able, are tacitly discouraged to challenge this status quo.

However, principals who want to intentionally build caring partnerships adopt a collaborative and moral leadership process (Cooper et al., 2010; Sergiovanni, 1992). This is a relational approach based on building trust and mutual respect between school staff and families (Crozier, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Warren et al., 2009). This is multi-level leadership for equity and excellence (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). It is founded on the principles of shared responsibility, collective organising, informed decision making, and a partnership between the area supervisor, school principal, staff and parents (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Leaders committed to participatory democracy invite others, including parents, to collaboratively make decisions about policies, whilst creating a shared vision for the future (Barbour et al., 2011; Crozier, 2000; Gestwicki, 2004).

Principals should work to minimise cross-agency competition which arises when government agencies and community welfare groups with differing viewpoints and motivations attempt to work together. This is because, when including a cross section of community stakeholders, there may be a distrust of cross-agency competition leading to an avoidance of input into the task. There may be sociocultural inequities between service providers and recipients (White & Whelage, 1995).

It is the principal's responsibility to avoid the possible misuse of power dynamics existing between teachers who have differing goals and agendas to parents. Principals and partnership leaders should encourage parents unable or unwilling to

participate due to current life contexts, class, ethnicity or gender (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This is because:

> "Parents who believe that the way they bring up their children
> will have considerable impact on their development are much
> more likely to be positive about PI than parents who believe they
> can have little impact on their children's development" (Hornby
> & Lafaele, 2011, p. 40).

Ultimately, it is the principal's role to ensure that all families feel they are listened to (Gestwicki, 2004). Theoharis (2007, 2010) emphatically tasks the principal with the responsibility to develop a resistant stance against injustice. One way to achieve this is for the principal to ensure that their personalised communication approach assists in creating "a warm environment for parents, teachers and students" (Griffin & Steen, 2010, p. 222).

Auerbach (2010) states that school principals in both elementary and secondary schools in the US can be classed as one of four types. These types can be transferred to primary and secondary school principals in Australia. Of the four, the first actively works at barring parents, the next two profess to welcome parents, but only one authentically engages parents in participatory democracy. These types are outlined in Auerbach's (2010) continuum.

2.3.6   Auerbach's (2010) Continuum of four principal leadership types

1. Leadership preventing partnerships - the school is described as a type of fortress and adopts a protective model of home-school relations which prevents outside influences from impacting on the school. This includes parents, who are discouraged from involvement in their children's education.

2. Leadership for nominal partnerships - the school expends minimal effort to involve parents. However, it expends more effort to keep parents' involvement to a limited and controlled level.

3. Leadership for traditional partnerships - the school's partnerships are aimed at raising the achievement of students. It focuses on two-way

communication and more varied involvement, but may still be a service-centred model which revolves around the school agenda. The school has some discussion about creating a welcoming school climate, as well as having open door policies for families and the wider community. But these are rarely fully or authentically implemented. Parents and the wider community are not invited to become involved in decision making.

4. Leadership for authentic partnerships - the school is inspired by Anderson's model (1998) of authentic participation and aims for social justice, democratic participation, cultural responsiveness, and a reciprocal empowerment model of partnership. Moreover, "leaders here see family engagement as being worthwhile in itself, and they have a more collaborative leadership style" (Auerbach, 2010, p. 735).

It appears that principals who adopt a policy of leadership for authentic partnerships would be the most likely to welcome purposeful parental engagement. The second research question to emerge from the literature is, "*How do staff and parents perceive how power can enable or impede care and transformation in a school-based CPP?*" Partnerships which aim for transformation of parental engagement can only do so when parents are included as democratic participants. The notion of transformation through participatory democracy is explored in the following section.

2.4 THEME TWO: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

"Amidst the neo-liberal discourse of individualism, competition and marketisation, there exists another long-standing discourse in public education which places social justice, equity and the public good to the forefront of education policy" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 187).

Some schools are adopting liberating pedagogies in the tradition of Freire (1970). This is:

"Because many parents and students experience schools as hierarchical institutions where power is exercised in a unilateral manner, [whilst] the real challenge is to democratise the

decision-making processes and to promote the notion of relational power. Unless parents and students have ownership and pride in their schools, little will change for the better" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 104).

For a school wishing to adopt a transformative parental engagement program, the most beneficial leadership style is shared or collaborative leadership (Auerbach, 2010; Horvat et al., 2010). This is led by the principal and shared leadership team with a whole school strengths-based approach (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Collaborative leaders are visionary, effective communicators who intentionally build caring communities (Epstein, 2001) in an environment of participatory democracy (Crozier, 2000).

Because collaborative leaders "see family engagement as being worthwhile in itself, they plan meaningful, rather than token activities with families" (Auerbach, 2010, p. 235). They create authentic leadership opportunities for parents, colleagues and community members (Anderson, 1998).

In recent years there has been a transformative shift in thinking about leadership for parental engagement. This shift has moved towards moral leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992) in which schools are described as being loving (Jeynes, 2010; Scheurich, 1998) places of connectedness with challenging pedagogies that are thorough and fun (Smyth et al., 2010). This has caused a paradigm shift towards reculturing schools as places with heart (Sergiovanni, 1992). Yet, "reculturing schools is an ongoing, unfinished process; new waves of families, community groups, faculty, and staff must be constantly welcomed into partnership, enculturated in its norms, and empowered to further shape it" (Auerbach, 2012, p. 46).

Because authentic partnerships are a dynamic process, schools must recognise there is no one right way of family engagement as each community has unique needs. Connections are best built one at a time (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Horvat's (2010) historical case study, examining a 30-year span of leadership and PI in an American school, clearly demonstrated that sustainable, purposeful, and effective family/school partnerships must be long term and cannot be developed overnight (Horvat, Curci & Parlow, 2010). Schools should create clearly defined roles for parents

and family members, whilst devising programs and activities that reach out to all parents, not only rely on parents' self- initiated actions (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Parents have traditionally been invited to participate in activities that benefit the school. These include beautification projects, working bees, donations of school equipment and materials, or volunteering to promote the school through information nights or displays at central community gathering places (Lueder, 2000). There are deeper levels of commitment in which families' experience empowerment, mutual trust and respect as they become engaged in school life (Crozier, 2000) and creating opportunities for scholastic and communal transformation is an empowering exercise (Auerbach, 2012). However, schools are cautioned to avoid "the irony of excluding those being discussed" because "the meanings poverty has to poor people themselves may be very different from the way outsiders see it" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 31). Some empowering parental initiatives include helping to write school policies and participating in decisions about and advocating for the education and well-being of all children (Barbour et al., 2011). Whilst it is not recommended that parents take over the administrative roles of the principal, leadership teams, or administration, "effective parental involvement in cooperative decision-making benefits all" (Gestwicki, 2004, p. 422). Moreover, "if we subscribe to the ideals of a democratic society, our schools must become democratic institutions where people are actively involved in making decisions about the curriculum and purposes of schooling" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 85).

Many schools remain unaware of effective implementation of parental leadership roles in family engagement. This is especially with families of diversity, minority families and low socio-economic families (Boethel, 2003; Chavkin, 1993; Cooper, 2007; Cooper et al., 2010; Gestwicki, 2004; Rogers, 2006). School's attitudes and perceptions of family engagement is proportional to their feelings about the families themselves.

> "The way in which schools' care about children is reflected in the
> way they care about the children's families. If educators view
> children simply as *students,* they are likely to see the family as
> separate from the school … if educators view students as

children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognise their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students, improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, help teachers with their work. The main reason is to help youngsters succeed in school and in later life" (Epstein, 2001, p. 403).

Because schools which partner with participants in a spirit of ecological co-production and engagement are most likely to succeed in a CPP, this notion is discussed in the next section.

2.4.1   Ecological co-production and engagement

Authentic transformation in schools becomes a possibility if educators confront their biases and change their perceptions and expectations of both students and families from a deficit-based lens to a strengths-based one (Watson et al., 2016). This is because "even equity oriented scholars and educators can inadvertently fuel stereotypical notions of [disadvantaged families] by emphasising what they lack instead of stressing what they can contribute" (Cooper, 2009, p .382).

Nurturing family/school partnerships is one means of alleviating the cycle of poverty and promoting students' welfare (Vinson et al., 2015). But governments and schools must reconfigure their traditional concept of only educating individual students, into a transformed one of working with children and families in areas of parenting education and support, child development and parent empowerment (Epstein, 2001; Gestwicki, 2004; Grant & Ray, 2013). However, "there is a clear sense that political and bureaucratic interferences and prescriptors are not helpful and simply result in more accountability and work without the resources to do the job" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 203). Schools need to arm themselves against the "battle between New Right politicians and their conservative supporters' intent on preserving the interests

of capitalism and skilling students for work, and progressive educators, parents and social activists committed to more equitable and democratic conceptions of education" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 163).

Educators and parents should be viewed as partners in this process of valuing students because students who feel valued and that their needs are being met have improved learning outcomes (Barbour et al., 2011; Rivera-McCutcheon, 2012). Schools must integrate higher level parental involvement strategies (Barbour et al., 2011) and dissolve government's "rhetoric about reducing educational disadvantage" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 168). Schools should revise their core beliefs about parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) and concentrate on raising families' self-esteem. This would be through sharing of skills related to parenting, families, life and jobs (Gestwicki, 2004) and increasing people's ability to access health and welfare services (Epstein et al., 2002). Because "parents want to learn" and will come to meetings on parental education if these meetings address their needs (Gestwicki, 2004, p. 413).

Collaboratively bringing together individuals and groups, to advance the goals of family /school engagement and provide opportunities to share experiences, is a critical component of family/school partnerships (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Connections are interactions between members of the wider school community who feel welcomed enough to "linger for conversation" (Gestwicki, 2004, p. 226). These connections are enhanced through the provision of purposefully planned family/centred activities (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002). Whilst engaging families in general activities may not directly enhance student achievement, "the assumption [about students witnessing their families engaging in PI] is that, if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of student, they are more likely to do their best to learn to read, write, calculate, and learn other skills and talents and to remain in school" (Epstein, 2001, p. 404).

There are findings that support the notion of student well-being and academic performance being enhanced when family/school partnerships assist their parents to become familiar with parents of school friends and teachers (Barbour et al., 2011; Grant & Ray, 2013). This could be through family-centred activities including parenting workshops, adult education classes, parent-family incentives and awards.

Also through planned social events, classroom visits, family counselling, and family fun and learning nights (Epstein, 1995; Gestwicki, 2004).

As the transformative process of parental self-efficacy increases, parents may actively choose to share their gifts, interests and talents with schools in other purposeful ways that suit their own personal style (Barbour et al., 2011). These include contacting organisations, developing networks and building connections within the wider community (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Schools may invite skilled parents, families and community members to support students with reading or to promote working with diversity through reciprocal learning (Cooper et al., 2010; Epstein, 2001; Grant & Ray, 2013; Grootenboer & Hardy, 2015). Schools may invite families and community members to act as family/community supports and resources for each other (Grant & Ray, 2013). They may invite community organisations and businesses with proven success records to mentor school administrators (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Other characteristics of transformative parental engagement in a CPP include sharing decisions, mutually dialoguing and adopting a model of engagement which enables reciprocal empowerment. These notions will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.2 Shared Decision Making, Mutual Dialogue and the Reciprocal Empowerment Model

In an effective partnership, participants work collaboratively with each other, whilst keeping personal lines of communication open-ended and two-way (Griffin & Steen, 2010). Opportunities to build trust are enhanced and positive signs of progress are developed, as purposeful interactions between children and adults form a foundation of respect (Endrizzi, 2008; Gestwicki, 2004).

The micro politics involved in resolving tensions and identifying the stakeholders, and pursuing a balance between them both, presents challenges for principals learning to work with parents and the community (Murphy & Louis, 1999). Two-way communication is an ongoing, effective, personalised, and two-way dialogical process (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Griffin & Steen, 2010). This process among leaders, teachers, parents, students, and others sends a message that all families are important in a family/school partnership (Endrizzi, 2008; Griffin & Steen, 2010). Although major topics of communication are the school community's purpose,

shared vision and goals, these discussions should always remain focussed on student success (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Finding time to develop mutually respectful two-way communication, whilst creating an environment in which everyone feels they have a voice is challenging for schools working with today's diverse families (Crozier, 2000; Endrizzi, 2008; Gestwicki, 2004).

A move from a top-down form of leadership to a transformative one shared and embedded in the school community, has parents working in teams with school personnel, as policy makers and advisors (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Gestwicki, 2004). Authentic parental engagement (Anderson, 1998), is embedded within a generative community of practice (Cooper et al., 2010). This is because in the reciprocal empowerment model of partnerships "parents and community members can and do work toward leadership roles in a collaborative effort" (Barbour et al., 2011, p. 303). Purposeful ways in which parents can demonstrate leadership qualities in a school context include working with the curriculum, instruction, schedules, resource allocation, student services, school leadership and extra-curricular programs (Epstein, 2001). They include making decisions, setting guidelines, developing plans, implementing activities where there is a home/school overlap and legal issues (Barbour et al., 2011). Parents can demonstrate leadership when planning and administering open houses, social events, family-school nights, transition nights and other school events (Gestwicki, 2004). Parents can participate in developing a strong, inclusive parent organisation to intentionally create a caring school community (Epstein, 2001; Horvat et al., 2010).

Parents may also provide outreach to engage all parents and support and assist them with school related matters. Parents may convene groups of parents and teachers in homes to share each other's stories (Epstein, 2001). Parents could organise and conduct home visits, community walks and other collaborative activities between families and staff (Epstein, 2001) and facilitate workshops and parental courses (Gestwicki, 2004; Grant & Ray, 2013).

Other ways for parents to demonstrate their readiness for leadership roles include participating in teachers' professional development related to parental engagement (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Parents may plan and provide training for school personnel to create a warm environment for parents, teachers and students (Griffin

& Steen, 2010) and plan and provide training for volunteers who work in the school (Barbour et al., 2011). Parents can advocate on behalf of the school and families with persons of influence, community groups and organisations (Bryan & Henry, 2008). In addition, parents could connect school staff, students, and families to community resources (Grant & Ray, 2013).

This transformational process whereby parents are valued as partners in their children's education is only possible if staff are adequately prepared in both their preservice and in-service training. "Educators want and need specific preparation about the knowledge, attitudes and skills it takes to enhance the involvement of diverse families in their children's education" (Chavkin, 2005, p. 16). Researchers (Chavkin, 2005; Chavkin & Williams, 1984; Williams & Chavkin, 1989) are calling for policies to create a link between preservice and in-service teaching. This could occur through preservice teachers being able to experience hands-on learning with local family involvement programs. This experience is to be treated with as much preparation and respect as would time spent in practical classroom experience (Chavkin & Williams, 1984). Intentional creation of opportunities to cultivate and hone teachers' skills in working with parents is crucial (Chavkin & Williams, 1984). This is because "professionals need to develop empathy with parents. They should try to see the child's situation from the parents' point of view" (Hornby, 2011, p .7). Teachers need to be valued for their intrinsic role as educators who value social justice. As Chavkin (2005) and Hornby (2011) contend, closer attention needs to be paid to teachers' core values about working with parents. This is because teachers are partners in restructuring and reculturing schools to work more equitably with students (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). The sustainability of authentic CPPs depends on continuous improvement. So, how this may be realised is discussed in the following section.

2.4.3 Sustainability and Continuous Improvement

Although theoretically, governments agree that contemporary society's overriding priority is meeting social need, rather than the increase of their profit margin, welfare organisations call for an intrinsic restructure of society to enable authentic social equality. Therefore, federal, state and local level governments should implement

strategies supporting families in building social capital, through strengthening their capacity to function effectively and sustainably (Harding & Szukalska, 2000; Vinson et al., 2015). For a partnership to be sustainable, the principal should commit to continuous improvement, through ongoing data collection, analysis and collaborative research aimed at the partnership's consolidation (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Mills & Gale, 2004c). This data is utilised to guide the partnership through discussions and implementation of parent surveys (Endrizzi, 2008; Gestwicki, 2004). All families should be given access to these data findings to develop strategies in assisting with their children's learning and development (Barbour et al., 2011). Each person's clearly defined roles and instructions from leaders aids them in being purposeful contributors to the partnership (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006).

In a school context, an intrinsic restructure of school community, resulting in a recultured school incorporates family/school partnerships purposefully engaging all participants (Auerbach, 2012). This would enhance its viability, sustainability and success (Cooper et al., 2010; Epstein, 2001; Griffin & Steen, 2010). These partnerships aim to create a transformative, nurturing and positive environment and a warm, welcoming climate for all students, staff and parents (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Gestwicki, 2004). The third research question to emerge from the literature is, *"What are staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for a caring and transformative school-based CPP?"*

2.5 CONCLUSION

There is a growing body of research into strategies for viable, sustainable family/school/community partnerships and collaborations (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Gestwicki, 2004). There is research into how family/school/community partnerships impact positively or negatively on parental engagement in low socio-economic or diverse schools (Cooper et al., 2010; Crozier, 2000; Schutz, 2006). This review has focused on two primary themes which have emerged from a critical analysis of the literature.

These two themes are firstly, sociocultural responsivity and care, followed by transformation through participatory democracy. Within the theme of sociocultural responsivity and care, the notions of social justice (Theoharis, 2010), social capital

(Coleman, 1998; Noguera, 2001) and leadership influence (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014) are discussed. In the discourse on school/community partnerships in low socio-economic and/or culturally diverse contexts, the ethics of care and caring for the participants (Noddings, 1994) is discussed. Researchers are calling for a transference toward greater parental engagement that entails caring *with* parents, rather than mere parental involvement and caring *for* parents (Auerbach, 2012).

Some of the literature on authentic school/family partnerships (Anderson, 1998) refers to establishing frameworks for effective parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2002). These frameworks embed the concepts of parental social capital (McNeal, 1999), reciprocal learning (Cooper et al., 2010), and parental self-efficacy (Crozier et al., 2010). Frameworks such as Epstein's (2002) framework for parental involvement are geared to the general population. Whilst Cooper (2009) discusses specific indicators for African American mothers to show culturally relevant care for their children through participatory advocacy, this notion differs radically from the white, middle class perception of a caring mother.

The benefits of community investment and strengths-based partnering (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Grant & Ray, 2013), in intentionally creating caring communities (Epstein, 2001) are deliberated. These are formed on a foundation of respect (Endrizzi, 2008) and promote equitable and socially just parental engagement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Theoharis, 2006).

There are recommendations for culturally responsive family engagement (Grant & Ray, 2013) and extending personal invitations to ensure that all families are involved in the shared celebration of their uniqueness and diversity (Endrizzi, 2008; Gestwicki, 2004).

Whilst principals' perceptions of families and PI are integral to the success of a family/school/community partnership (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014), they are challenged to introduce multiple structural changes aimed at increasing parents' voices and options (Cooper et al, 2010; Crozier, 2000). These will embed opportunities for parental success (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001) and family empowerment (Grant & Ray, 2013).

Because authentic partnerships engage parents in purposeful ways such as leadership roles, the second theme is transformation through participatory

democracy. In a school context within this review, transformation refers not only to the partnership's programs, but to the ways in which participants engage with the partnership. Within this theme the notions of shared decision making, mutual dialogue and reciprocal empowerment (Auerbach, 2010) are discussed. There are references to ecological co-production and engagement (Barbour et al., 2011) and sustainability and continuous improvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006).

Schools are reculturing themselves to be moral and loving (Jeynes, 2010; Sergiovanni, 1992; Scheurich, 1998). There is a definite link between shared collaborative leadership, which involves parents and the community in participatory democracy (Barbour et al., 2011; Crozier, 2000) and the success of family/school/community partnerships (Epstein, 2001). This is validated by a continuum of leadership for school family partnerships (Auerbach, 2010) and other studies which affirm the centrality of committed principals and leaders in partnerships (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Furthermore, the research calls for principals and school leaders to implement continuous data driven planning and research, as well as embedding family/school/community partnerships in pedagogical practice to ensure sustainability of partnerships (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006).

More critical research needs to be undertaken into participants' perspectives of sociocultural responsivity and caring in Australian family/school/community partnerships (especially in low socio-economic and culturally diverse contexts). The research should focus on participants' perspectives of transformation through participatory democracy within these partnerships.

This study highlights the personalising experiences of St Elsewhere's multi-ethnic, low SES families and the community partnerships program that was established to care for them. This study explores characteristics of transformational family/school partnerships which care *with* the parents, rather than enabling partnerships which merely care *for* the parents. Whilst an often-disregarded aspect of care in schools is that of caring with parents enough to value their transformational engagement, it is to this area that the current study seeks to contribute.

Chapter 3: CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CRITICAL CARE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will introduce the research design of the thesis. The chapter demonstrates how the research design explores the issue of school/community partnerships in a low SES school community. The focal case study site, St Elsewhere Catholic primary school is situated in an area that is designated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as one of the 10 most disadvantaged areas in Australia (www.censusdata.gov.au). This urban area is situated in south-eastern Queensland, in a city south of Brisbane. The city comprises more than 150 distinct languages and cultures. Many of these families face challenges in their parenting. These challenges include low incomes, high unemployment, substance abuse and transient housing.

I was interested in exploring whether staff and parents viewed the partnership and its leadership from differing perspectives and why. Maxwell (1998) discusses the need for researchers to be aware that their goals, which include "motives, desires, and purposes … [will] inevitably shape the descriptions, interpretations, and theories [they] create in [their] research" (Maxwell. 1998, p. 219).

An overview of the research protocol is outlined below. The following chapter will then expand on this protocol.

Table 3.1 – Research Protocol

Activity	Description
Research Question How is care and transformation perceived in a community development program at a disadvantaged Catholic primary school?	Explore the impact of School/Community partnerships on participants in low socio-economic areas
Research Paradigm and Method	Ethnography
Case Selection Process	Community Partnerships Program within St Elsewhere Primary School
Case Access	On-site study
Research Instrument	Researcher as the primary research instrument in the application of research methods
Boundary Device	Community Partnerships Program Allocated Timeframe
Research Techniques	Participant observation Semi-structured one on one interviews Focus Groups
Data Management	Balance of observation/participatory action

Adapted from Klein & Myers (1999, p. 80)

3.2 THE STUDY DESIGN

The case site chosen for the research study is a Catholic education office parish primary school. It is referred to with the pseudonym St Elsewhere Catholic primary school. The school is situated in south-east Queensland, Australia. At the commencement of the study it was a prep to year seven school. There was a high proportion of disadvantaged families due to both multicultural and low socio-economic contexts. During the analysis stage, the school converted to a prep to year six school, in alignment with federal government legislation.

The school is currently in the process of implementing a community development program. This community development program, known as the St Elsewhere community partnerships program incorporates a community centre and community garden. It is the implementation of the St Elsewhere community partnerships program within the school which makes up the focal case site.

An overarching research question was devised to guide the study and minor research questions were devised to support this ethnography of participants' perspectives.

Table 3.2 - Research Questions

Research Question

How is care and transformation perceived in a CPP at a disadvantaged Catholic primary school?

RQ1 How do those participating in a school-based CPP understand and experience care for students, parents and staff?	Individual Interviews Focus Group interviews
RQ2 How do issues of power impact understandings and experiences of care and transformation in a school-based CPP?	Individual Interviews Focus Group Interviews
RQ3 What are the possibilities for care and transformation in parental engagement through a school-based CPP?	Individual Interviews Focus Group Interviews

The overarching research question is:

> *How is care and transformation perceived in a community development program at a disadvantaged Catholic primary school?*

The three sub questions that focus the conduct of the research are:

> RQ1: *How do staff and parents perceive care and transformation as purpose for a school-based CPP?*

> RQ2: *How do staff and parents perceive how power can enable or impede care and transformation in a school-based CPP?*

> RQ3: *What are staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for a caring and transformative school-based CPP?*

3.3   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual or theoretical framework presents a philosophical basis which justifies, directs and structures the research design. All educational research is conducted within a framework of theoretical assumptions. These assumptions are both recognised by research audiences and are well-grounded in the relevant literature (Creswell, 2003).

Research designs are generated from a multifaceted understanding of the research purpose and its consequent research questions (Crotty, 1998).

In formulating a theoretical framework, any knowledge claims brought to the study need to be evaluated. Strategies of inquiry must be considered and specific methods to be used should be identified. Creswell (2003) contends that there is a need for a framework that merges all three approaches to this research. According to Crotty (1998) the four primary elements of research design are firstly epistemology, including subjectivism, objectivism, constructionism etc. Secondly theoretical perspective, including positivism and post positivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry etc. Thirdly methodology, including experimental research, survey research, ethnography, case study etc.   Fourthly methods, including questionnaire, interview, focus group etc.

Maxwell's (1998) work proposes another way of formulating what he terms a conceptual framework.   This conceptual framework focuses on what the researcher feels is happening within the events that he or she is studying and to develop a speculative theory about those events.   This is because a theoretical perspective is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it (Crotty, 1998). Data gathering and scrutiny, along with theory advancement and adaptation, usually take place together.   They occur at the same time as expanding and refocusing of the research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity risks. Each component impacts on the other. So, Maxwell (1998) contends that the researcher "may reconsider or modify any design decision … in response to new developments or to changes in some other aspect of the design" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 215).

The appropriate qualitative perspective that was adopted for this study was an interactive model of design. It is a broader, less restrictive concept of a design than a traditional one that tends to be linked in a linear or cyclic sequence. An

interactive design "consists of the components of a research study [as well as how they] may affect and be affected by one another. It does not presuppose any particular order for these components, or any necessary directionality of influence" (Maxwell, 1998, pp. 215—216).

3.4   PARADIGM - ETHNOGRAPHY

A paradigm "refers to a set of very general philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world (ontology)" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 224), while epistemology is the study of how knowledge is generated and acknowledged as valid. An epistemology presents a way of understanding and explaining *how* we know *what* we know (Crotty, 2003). People do not exist solely in isolated worlds, since many variables shape a person's attitudes and perceptions (Candy, 1989; Creswell, 2003). Despite having the same experiences, humans construct meaning in differing, individualised ways (Crotty, 1998).

Qualitative research generally focuses on a small number of participants and contexts, whilst "preserv[ing] the individuality of each of these in their analysis … They are able to understand how events, actions and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which these occur". As this was "a qualitative study interested in physical events and behavior taking place, [and] how participants make sense of these, [whilst exploring] how their understandings influence their behaviour" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 221), ethnography was the suitable paradigm for this study.

This ethnography differs from "evidence-based research" which is "thinly veiled in the service of elite vested self-interests" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 2). Rather, it is the "rigorous, robust, authentic, well-documented ethnographic account" that Smyth & McInerney (2013) describe as one that will "restore the political balance and that [is] unashamedly *with* and *for* … those groups in society whose interests, voices and perspectives are silenced, excluded, marginalised, expunged or totally denied" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, pp. 2—3).

I feel privileged to align myself with a team of "researchers who see [ourselves] as having an advocacy role when it comes to representing the lives and experiences of oppressed groups". I am effectively "taking a stand for the subjects of [our]

research who are treated unjustly" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 3). In preference to:

> "Being restricted to narrow, functionalist explanations, [my] approach is avowedly expansive rather than domesticated…[with] a fundamental and unswerving commitment to re-assembling, reconstructing, and portraying accounts of social life in ways that honour its inherent complexity-rather than purporting to render it down to fragments, 'bottom lines', 'recommendations' or meaningless metrics" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 3).

Advocacy ethnography (Smyth & McInerney, 2013) as socially critical research was selected as the appropriate paradigm to study the community development program being implemented at the school. This is because of the need to "confront and challenge the constructed myths and expose the cruel fallacies implicit in 'deficit thinking' [sometimes] applied to … [the culturally diverse backgrounds of the participants]" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 3). Culture "is everything having to do with human behaviour and belief" (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch, 1993, p. 5). Culture "includes a study of language, rituals, structures, life stages, interactions, and communication" (Creswell, 2008, p. 493). Participants' culturally diverse backgrounds may have offered critically informed insights into their differing aspirations for and expectations of, the program. While most are linked by a common low socio-economic demographic, this is often compounded by generational poverty, social isolation and marginalisation (Vinson et al., 2015). The participants may have constructed meaning in contradictory, personal ways (Creswell, 2003).

An exploration of the varying multiple, subjective perspectives and meaningful social actions (Neuman, 2006) of members of the school community, included the staff, the families of the students and the wider community. This has proven beneficial in this study.

Researching from a critical perspective the form of leadership deemed most appropriate in this situation benefitted this study. "At a somewhat more specific level, a paradigm that is relative to qualitative research [is] … critical theory"

(Maxwell, 1998, p. 223). This theoretical perspective was utilised because it focused on deeply exploring an understanding of the participants' perception of what was happening, in the context of the school and the implementation of the school's community development program. Consideration was given to the multiple realities of the participants and the differing perspectives and constructed meanings of the people involved in the research, based on their personal understandings of reality. These constructed meanings were deeply personal, as well as environmentally and experientially contextual (Blumer, 1969). Furthermore, I agree with Maxwell (1998) that the four major sources of the conceptual framework for my study are experience, prior theory and research, pilot studies, and thought experiments (Maxwell, 1998, p. 228).

Hoey (2014) contends that:

> "Interest has grown within anthropology for considering the close relationship between personal history, motivation, and the particulars of ethnographic fieldwork … Personal and professional experiences, together with historical context, lead individual researchers to their own particular methodological and theoretical approaches. This too is an important, even if unacknowledged, source [of data]" (Hoey, 2014, p. 3).

My personal involvement and experiential knowledge as researcher was a major factor to consider. This is because, as the researcher, I chose to actively become a participant in the study, to make a personal analysis of what I discovered, shaped by my own experiences and history (Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 1998). Utilising personal "experience in [my] research can provide [me] with a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 225). In this study, the line of delineation between facts and interpretation were less clear for both myself as the researcher and for the participants. Any actions contributing to the study could have been influenced by my feelings and value judgements.

A potential ethnographer needs to be wary of taking for granted what has become too familiar, especially those people who work within their own cultures or communities (Hoey, 2014). The utilisation of existing theory and research to

formulate a literature review was another major source for constructing my conceptual framework. These include published work, unpublished papers and dissertations. Use of literature can "show how your work will address an important need or unanswered question … it can [also] inform your decisions about methods [and] be a source of data that you can use to test or modify your theories (Maxwell, 1998, p. 226). Hoey (2014, p. 5) argues that:

> "Doing an ethnography is not … like doing a research based
> on books or articles … typically referred to as 'secondary'
> research … [He states, that because ethnographers] jot
> down noteworthy observations and impressions [to] turn
> the events of the moment into an *account* that can be
> consulted (and again) later, ethnographic fieldwork is
> primary research".

Pilot studies can specifically focus on the researcher's own concerns and theories [and can provide the researcher] "with an understanding of the *meaning* that these phenomena and events have for the actors who are involved in them, and the perspectives that inform their actions" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 227). Lastly, Maxwell (1998) contends that, "thought experiments draw on both theory and experience to answer, 'what if' questions, to seek out the logical implications of various properties of the phenomena you want to study" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 227).

3.5   ETHNOGRAPHY AS EPISTEMOLOGY

Methodological pluralism (Jessor, 1996) is an outcome of the broader universal perspective of the researcher's journey in gaining knowledge and understanding in a post positivist era. Not all ethnographies are similar or have like qualities. They may in fact be so unalike that they display a wide diversity in epistemological details (Becker, 1996, p. 57). Because I "discovered" things about the participants in this study through constant interface with them, such as talking, listening and observing, this is a "naturalistic" ethnography. Becker, (1996) attests that epistemology in qualitative research "focus on questions to be answered, rather than procedures to be followed" (Becker, 1996, p. 66). These questions include "Who are the people involved in the act in question? What were their relations before, during and after the event? What are their relations to [each other]? How

did this start? Then what happened? And then?"   As these questions are being answered, it is important for the researcher to be there to see the connections between people's interactions.   The researcher must keep writing about everything that they see and hear "and keep on doing that until they know for sure that they will never use data on certain subjects" (Becker, 1996, p. 56).

Ethnography's epistemology maintains the importance of rigorously and completely exploring participants' perspectives of their actual everyday world. This can be problematic because we "cannot insulate them from the consequences of their actions … they have to take the rap for what they do, just as they ordinarily do in everyday life" (Becker, 1996, p. 62).

One primary epistemological fact for ethnographers is that when they discuss people's actions, they are describing what they witnessed them do under the usual conditions. Ethnographers "are seeing the 'real world' of everyday life, not some version of it created at their urging and for their benefit" (Becker, 1996, p. 63). This "being there" ensures the ethnographer produces "work that is based on careful, close-up observation of a wide variety of matters that bear on the question under investigation" (Becker, 1996, p. 69). Whilst producing this work of "true ethnography" (Shweder, 1996) the researcher "aims to represent otherness in such a way that 'we', who are outside the relevant situation, can imagine what it is like to be in it" (Shweder, 1996, p. 18).

Because of the context, prior experiences and current demographics of the families and students at the focus school, I felt that applying elements of critical inquiry to the analysis of staff and parents' responses would enable me to better critique and comprehend them.   The use of critical inquiry in qualitative analysis enables one to probe more deeply and more relevantly into issues of concern. This is rather than merely providing the facts without any empathy or understanding of their causes and effects.   Critical inquiry delves deeply into culturally and historically situated interpretations, through critiquing and researching for social change. Madison (2005) argues that authentic ethnography involves exploring "theoretical conceptualisations of domesticity, power and subjugation" (Madison, 2005, p. 2). Madison (2005) contends that:

> "Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility
>
> to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a

particular lived domain [augmented by] a compelling sense

of duty, and commitment based on principles of human

freedom and well-being [as well as] a compassion for the

suffering of living beings" (Madison, 2005, p. 4).

Having made a commitment to operate within the fieldwork required for a true ethnography, the researcher must admit that "evidence is inseparable from an ethics of deep listening and engagement (both affectively messy and analytically precise) in representing a social world that is guided by the critical and moral question: So what?" (Madison, 2005, p. xi).

Because, as the researcher, I dared to ask, "So what?" about a relatively small school's community partnership program, several researchers from diverse fields of critical theory (including Noddings (2005) and her ethic of care in education), have been employed to assist me in attempting to answer this question. My journey towards choosing to employ critical inquiry is discussed in section 3.7.5 of this chapter.

3.6   METHODOLOGY- ETHNOGRAPHY

A methodology is, "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 outcomes" (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). The research methodology chosen as most appropriate for the purposes of this study is ethnography.

Hoey (2014, p. 1) defines ethnography as "both a qualitative research process and method (one *conducts* an ethnography) and product (the *outcome* of this process is an ethnography) whose aim is cultural interpretation." I decided that my method of study would entail conducting an ethnographic study, resulting with an outcome of the process being an ethnography. "[Moreover] ethnographers generate understandings of culture through representation of … an *emic* perspective … 'the insider's view'. The emphasis is thus on allowing critical categories and meanings to *emerge* from the ethnographic encounter rather than importing these from existing models" (Hoey, 2014, p. 2).

Hoey (2014) goes on to state that:

"To develop an understanding of what is like to live in a

setting, the researcher must become both a *participant* in

the life of the setting while also maintaining the stance of an *observer,* someone who … describes the experience with a measure of … 'detachment' … Typically ethnographers spend many months or even years in the places where they conduct their research often forming lasting bonds with people" (Hoey, 2014, p. 2).

Telling stories about what it means to be human is a common element among cultural anthropologists. Whilst they explicitly observe, imagine possibilities and describe other people they are implicitly engaging on a journey of self- discovery (Hoey, 2014). "Good ethnography recognises the transformative nature of fieldwork where as we search for answers to questions about people we may find ourselves in the stories of others" (Hoey, 2014, p. 3).

There should be recognition that ethnography is a reciprocal venture that exists because of the linking of lives between the ethnographer and the participants (Hoey, 2014). Madison (2005), argues that authentic ethnography, "takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo,* [and] unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (Madison, 2005, p. 5). As Madison (2005) recommends, my ethnography attempted to:

"Articulate and identify hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath appearances; guide judgements and evaluations emanating from [participants'] discontent; direct … attention to the critical expressions within different interpretive communities (Madison, 2005, p. 5).

To reiterate, I chose ethnography as my methodology because it involves conducting an in-depth exploration of one aspect of a problem in a bounded system. These may be an activity, an event, a process or an individual. It may explore a case or multiple cases which are studied over time. The study involves meticulous, extensive data collection which draws on multiple sources of context rich information (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998). It is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (Stake, 2005). A thorough ethnography is achieved by carefully monitoring, reconstructing and analysing the

cases under study, whilst incorporating the views of the "actors" involved (Zonabend, 1992).

Ethnography was deemed the appropriate methodology for this study because I aimed to explore, in depth, the community partnerships program being implemented at St Elsewhere Catholic primary school. I wanted to explore its influence on key participants. In doing so, I hoped to discover whose interests are being served by the community partnerships program and how.

3.7   THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

3.7.1   The Research Content

Data gathering is an integral component of ethnography methodology. The researcher's choice of data collection methods should be governed by research ethics (Bassey, 1999). There are six primary sources of evidence for data collection in case study protocols which are transferable to ethnography protocols. These include documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artefacts (Yin, 1994). The data collection methods which were utilised in this ethnography are individual one-on-one in depth interviews, focus group interviews and informal, ongoing participant observation. Through these data collection methods, a "thick description" of the community partnerships program was obtained (Stake, 2005).

The data was subjective due to the personal testimony of the participants, whilst answers to questions posed in individual interviews and focus group interviews were descriptive, interpretative, biased and suffused with feeling (Stake, 2005). This proved to be beneficial to the study because, in these specifics lie the vigour, strains and distinctiveness (Stake, 2005) of the case (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 - Stages for Data Collection (Matrix Example)

Data Collection Techniques		
Exploratory Phase	Step 1	Meet with various stakeholders: visionaries, principal, specialist teaching team, classroom teachers, support staff, administrative staff, community centre staff & parents to invite them to become part of the case study
Individual in- depth interviews **Focus Groups** **Ongoing data collection, distillation and analysis**	Step 2a	Individual in-depth interviews with key reference group members (visionaries) about original purpose of the community partnership, its leadership and future sustainability
	Step 2b	Analyse responses for trends and patterns-use these to inform staff and parent questions
	Step 2c	Begin participant observation and anecdotal note taking
	Step 3a	Focus group interviews with staff
	Step 3b	Analyse staff responses for trends and patterns
	Step 4a	Focus group interviews with parents
	Step 4b	Analyse parent responses for trends and patterns
	Step 4c	Continue participant observation and anecdotal note taking
Documentary and Final Analysis	Step 5	Re-analysis and distillation of staff responses to inform findings relating to research questions
	Step 6	Re-analysis and distillation of parent responses to inform findings related to research questions
	Step 7	Final analysis

Adapted from McLaughlin, J. PhD Thesis (2002)

3.7.2   Anticipated Problems

The value of studying a single event has been questioned because of the difficulty for researchers to cross-check information. Bassey (1981) has stated that, "The responsibility of a case study is more important than its generalisability" (Bassey, 1981, p. 85). This can also apply to an ethnography.

I anticipated that several people who were approached would decline to be interviewed for several reasons. There were varying reasons given for non-participation in the study, including time constraints. Of interest, were those who declined to participate because they felt that they did not know enough about school/community partnerships in general. They perceived a lack of knowledge

about the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere. This included a teaching staff member who declined to participate in the study because she was unaware of any partnerships program at the school. Reasons for non-participation by ancillary staff members were varied. Most stated that they did not have enough knowledge of the community development program's purpose or everyday workings. Of these, three ancillary staff, who were parents at the school, opted to join in the parents' focus groups as they felt they could answer the questions in a non-threatening environment (rather than with teaching staff whom they deemed to be too academic for them).

This was an interesting finding for me as researcher, because the school maintains that it actively encouraged parental participation through a variety of means. These included employing parents as school officers in the administration department, as well as in the classroom, and utilising parents as volunteers in the community partnerships program. Other parents were encouraged to volunteer their services in various capacities throughout the school.

The interaction gap between teaching staff and parents is very wide in this low socio-economic area. This is even if the parents are employed by the school or actively engaged in it in some manner. What all the parents seem to hold in common is that the teaching staff remains unapproachable because they are perceived by the parents as "better than us in some way" (quote from an anecdotal conversation). This could prove to be an interesting new research area. However, it is beyond the confines of this study.

To obtain a rich, thick cross-section of parental input I approached the English as a second language (ESL) teacher. I asked her for assistance with including African and Burmese families in the study. After having decided to enlist the ESL teacher's help in asking some African and Burmese parents to participate in a focus group interview, I requested assistance of interpreters. This was because both the ESL teacher and I felt that the parents might be more likely to participate if they were able to talk in a familiar language. I anticipated that the Burmese parents would speak about the community garden and the multicultural cooking classes held on community days once a week at the school. My reasoning was because most of the Burmese families at the school were introduced to the school through the gardening project of the community partnerships program. I anticipated that the

African families would talk about their parish connections and the free school bus provided by BCE. Unfortunately for this study, no Burmese or African families opted to be interviewed. It remained unclear to me whether parents were enabled to understand what was required of them, as I was not included in the process of approaching parents to participate.

3.7.3 Access, ethics, recruitment and informed consent

As Maxwell (1998, p. 216) states, "ethical concerns should be involved in every aspect of design". Adhering to a strict code of ethics is a reminder that researchers are visitors in the private lives of the participants in the study. Therefore, research manners must be exemplary (Stake, 2005). Due to the personal, subjective nature of ethnographic research, certain ethical issues emerge. In the participants' case these issues pertain to matters of:

a. Maintaining the participants' rights to privacy;

b. Ensuring the confidentiality of their input;

c. Guaranteeing their safeguard from harm;

d. Obtaining their informed consent, and

e. Facilitating the participants' sense of ownership of the data (Bassey, 1999).

As a staff member at the school at the time of data collection, I obtained access to the community centre daily. Whilst full-time teaching as Indigenous studies teacher, I wrote a program for Indigenous mums to communicate in standard Australian English with their preschool children. This aim was realised through an Indigenous mum facilitating a playgroup one morning a week for nearly a year. Later, my working week comprised two days a week as ESL teacher at St Elsewhere. I was also employed as a community development worker on one day per week for a term in St Elsewhere's CC. I obtained crucial insider information through my participant observations of varying initiatives within the community partnerships program. These included the gardening, breakfast club, homework club, and Happy Kids playgroup, the Gem Friends' social group and shared class/community lunches, amongst others.

Ethical clearance to conduct research was sought and granted from all pertinent authorities, including the Australian Catholic University and Brisbane Catholic Education Office. Data gathering methods and its analysis were in accordance with the policies of the Australian Catholic University's research project's ethics committee and Brisbane Catholic education office's guidelines for research. Informed consent in writing was obtained from school authorities, system authorities and participants within the case school itself. Provision for safe archiving of raw data and analysis material was secured in locked filing cabinets in the supervisor's office at the university. Five supervisors and acting supervisors, as well as five separate co-supervisors from two separate campuses in differing states were involved in this research project. The raw data was transferred from the Queensland campus to a New South Wales campus. Stringent safety and anonymity provisions were applied and adhered to in all cases.

Having obtained prior permission from the previous two principals to conduct the study in this school, I approached the then current school principal for permission to continue to conduct the research onsite at her school. After obtaining her permission I sent out a preliminary email to all staff ($N = 42$). The email explained the purpose of the study and stated that time would kindly be provided by the principal in a staff meeting for teaching staff to complete the consent forms to participate in the study. Other ancillary staff received their consent forms in their pigeon holes. I stated in the email that staff were under no obligation to participate in this study and could withdraw at any time. This was reiterated in written form on a formal consent sheet. I then asked if any staff declined to participate in the study that they could return the blank permission forms. These could be returned either personally or anonymously via my pigeon hole. Parents were personally approached by myself and asked to participate in the study. Most parents, whom I personally knew as a teacher of their children, or as a past parent of the school, agreed to participate and signed almost identical consent forms as the staff.

As a researcher and the author of this paper, I offered detailed explanations and consultations with participants before I began any data collection. To remain ethical in this case study, all participants signed an informed consent form which included language that will guarantee them certain rights. Upon signing the form,

the participants agreed to be involved in the study and acknowledged that their rights were protected (Creswell, 2008). These signed forms are being kept by my current supervisor in a locked cabinet within the university.

3.7.4 Participants

The participants who were invited to join in the case study included three of the program's founding members including a past principal, the parish priest and the BCE chaplain – the visionaries. Staff included the then current principal, administration staff, members of the specialist teaching team, classroom and library teaching staff. There were ancillary staff of the school including office staff, school officers and others. The CC staff were also invited to participate in the study because they were a vital component of the community partnerships program being researched. Unfortunately, only informal conversations and observations were obtained from the original community centre staff. This was despite them being enthusiastic about their program and willing to share their ideas and insights anecdotally with me. The newly-employed community development worker declined to be interviewed in a focus group, citing lack of time and insufficient knowledge of the program.

To obtain a broader perspective of the community partnerships program, I deliberately chose parents involved in various aspects of it. I invited members of the P and F and the Indigenous parents' forum. I approached members of the Happy Kids playgroup and CC volunteers. I also invited St Elsewhere's parish members and parents not affiliated with these groups to be included as participants in a focus group context. I estimated that a third of the invited participants would agree to participate and, therefore, the numbers would become much more manageable (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 - Total number of participants in one-on-one interviews and focus groups

Data gathering strategy	Participants			Number of participants
	Staff	Parents	Reference Group	
Initial reference group interview (Visionaries) (V1, V2, V3)	0	0	3	3
Staff Focus Group 1(SFG1)	6	0	0	6
Staff Focus Group 2(SFG2)	4	0	0	4
Staff Focus Group 3(SFG3)	2	0	0	2
Parent Focus Group 1(PFG1)	0	3	0	3
Parent Focus Group 2 (PFG2)	0	3	0	3
Parent Focus Group 3 (PFG3)	0	2	0	2

3.7.5   Data Collection – Participant Observation

Observation "is the process of gathering first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site" (Creswell, 2008, p. 643). Observing people as they interact with each other is a valuable source of data as the researcher can take informative field notes during an observation (Creswell, 2008). Hoey (2014, p. 2) states that, "long-term engagement in the field setting or place where the ethnography takes place is called participant observation".

With the participants' permission, I hoped to be able to observe the rich day-to-day interactions that would occur, as they arose, and chronicle these in anecdotal notes. Immediately after recording these anecdotal notes, I began to look for patterns. Hoey (2014) encourages the ethnographer to search for consistencies or relationships in people's actions or words that are patterned or that seem to appear as a ritual. He contends that rituals occur in diverse places. These include churches, football stadiums, town meetings, college classrooms, bathrooms, bedrooms and indeed, everywhere.   Because I was so well-known at the research site, I anticipated that my presence would cause minimal, if any, disruption to the authentic everyday workings of the school and the community centre. This indeed proved to be the case.

I notarised the daily workings of the community partnerships program over several years. This occurred throughout the changes of leadership of both the school and

the program. This lengthy time in the field helped me to "literally discover [my] purpose through … participant observations … [thus reinforcing the concept that] ethnographic research [is] 'emergent' or 'from the ground up'" (Hoey, 2014, p. 5). To this end I was continually writing and rewriting, especially in the preliminary stages when I was writing about anything and everything to do with the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere. I wrote about who was involved, how they were involved, what they said and how they said it, and whether their words aligned with their actions.

I was endeavouring to paint a descriptive picture, full of rich detail about participants' challenges or concerns and their beliefs and principles which guide their actions. Also, I wanted to record defining details about where they lived, worked and socialised. I was concerned whether these people whom I was describing would be able to recognise themselves in my descriptions and whether I would be considered an insider or an outsider by the key players (Hoey, 2014). To keep people's identities secret I adopted the habit of writing only initials instead of names when recording observations. I wrote up the notes immediately after an event rather than during it, to ensure that I did not disrupt what was occurring and so that I could fully participate in the experience. In this way I ensured that I was considered an insider by the participants.

I was particularly interested in documenting the experiences of the parents who were encouraged to engage in the program through accepting or creating leadership opportunities in the partnership. They facilitated by taking on differing roles in the classroom and the community centre.   I was researching a contemporary phenomenon in a certain context and endeavoured to honour each individual perspective of the participants within my analysis and interpretation. This was with a view to attaining a global perspective of the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere Catholic primary school.

3.7.6   Data Collection - One-to-one Interviews

The interview protocol is "a form designed by the researcher that contains instructions for the process of the interview, the questions to be asked, and space to take notes on responses from the interviewee" (Creswell, 2008, p. 641). Outlined in Appendix one is the interview protocol which was utilised in the one-

to-one interviews with the visionaries from the original reference group. Interviews "occur when researchers ask one or more participants, general open-ended questions and record their answers" (Creswell, 2008, p. 641).

Inviting open-ended responses to a question allows the participant to create the options for responding (Creswell, 2008). One-to-one interviews "are the data collection processes in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time" (Creswell, 2008, p. 643). Hoey (2014, p. 2) contends that "the emphasis is on allowing the person or persons being interviewed to answer without being limited by pre-defined choices".

As a researcher, I wanted to interview several of the original reference group who had envisioned the community partnerships program. My goal was firstly to elicit the original purpose of the partnership. Next, I wanted to determine those participants whom the visionaries perceived would benefit from support. I wanted to explore the type of leadership the visionaries had felt would best fit the partnership. So, I interviewed three members of the original reference group – the visionaries. In doing so, I hoped to gain contextual insights into the original purpose of the partnership.

The first of these three visionaries comprised the partnership's founding principal. I interviewed her by phone conference, whilst taping the conversation, from the community centre during school hours. She was a valuable source of information relating to the sustainability of Catholic schools in low SES areas.

The second visionary was the parish priest. He was particularly interested in supporting African refugee families who had recently settled in the area. Some of these families were finding it difficult to assimilate to the Australian way of life. I taped my interview with him, held by phone conference from the community centre during school hours.

The third visionary was the chaplain of BCE, whose primary focus was marginalised children. I discussed this paper with him in person at my home, then followed up with a recorded interview in the conference room at my university. He was genuinely interested in parental engagement in low SES schools.

The three visionaries' responses proved to be a rich, thick source of data from which I eventually wrote chapter four - purpose. After examining their responses

for trends and patterns, I referred to the scholarly literature. Then I used those sources to devise the focus group questions for the staff and parents.

3.7.7   Data Collection - Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews involve the researcher "convening a small group of people - typically four to six people - who can answer the questions asked … and recording their comments about the questions" (Creswell, 2008, p. 640). Sometimes being in a like-minded group of people is less threatening for participants than an individual interview so I chose to utilise focus group interviews for staff and parent participants.

These focus group protocols differed from the individual interview protocols as they were formulated from the scholarly literature and visionaries' individual interview responses.   Analyses of responses from the one-to-one interviews elicited initial patterns. These patterns, along with the literature, facilitated my formulation of questions for the focus groups.

Focus groups are especially important as a data gathering strategy because they can be a non-invasive, relatively stress-free means for participants to answer questions. Sometimes a participant's answers may stimulate more discussion and steer the conversation into different territory than previously visited.   Utilising focus groups proved to be a rich and valuable means for data gathering. This study involved six focus groups. These groups included three staff focus groups. Each staff focus group comprised members of the leadership team, teaching staff, ancillary staff, support staff and specialist teachers. There were also three parent focus groups.

 Firstly, I will discuss the parent focus groups. Hereafter, for the purposes of this research, all participants in parent focus groups will be referred to as parents. As there are a high proportion of low literacy families and multicultural ESL families at St Elsewhere, I opted to conduct parent focus group interviews with open-ended questions. From these invited participants who agreed to be included in the study, I aimed to gather a significant amount of data within the focus groups, (see Table 3.5 in data gathering strategies). Next, I wanted to explore how and if the partnership was achieving its original aims. Lastly, I wanted to discover how

much it had developed and grown over the years and ideas for future possibilities for the CPP.

Three focus groups were held with parents over a few weeks. I attempted to purposefully obtain a fair cross section of parents. Focus groups were comprised of both long-term parents and parents new to the school that year. I included aunties, grandparents and carers. Parents who participated attended Happy Kids playgroup, the P and F, the Indigenous parents' forum and the community centre cooking group. Those parents who considered the community centre as their school base, as well as voluntary and paid school officers in the school participated. Through these forums, various multicultural groups including Indigenous, Pacific Islander and Caucasian families were included. There were families of children verified with special needs, learning and behavioural challenges, and the mother of a verified gifted and talented child. The parents were drawn from a broad cross-section of socio-economic circumstances including those in the paid workforce, as well as those receiving unemployment benefits and carer's payments.

To assist those families who had literacy or reading English issues, I answered questions about clarification of meaning and endeavoured not to influence individual opinions in any way. The parent questions in the focus groups comprised a modified version of the staff questions. They employed similar content in a simplified, contextual version.

Originally, it was intended that the parent focus groups be held in the community centre during school hours. As the weather was hot, I decided to move the meetings to the staff room where there was air conditioning. The meetings were held after school, so there were no unnecessary time restrictions. Parents were given as long as they liked to think through their answers. Mothers with babies or very young children arranged for partners or friends to care for them. Older children played outside or completed homework in the adjoining library.

Three focus groups were held with staff over a few weeks. An attempt was made by myself to purposefully obtain a fair cross section of staff. Focus groups were comprised of both administration as well as support staff and teaching staff. Hereafter, for the purposes of this research, all participants in staff focus groups will be referred to as staff. The then current principal, the curriculum

development teacher and the pastoral care worker agreed to participate from the administration sector. Support staff who agreed to participate included the librarian, the support teacher (inclusive education), an ESL teacher and the support teacher (numeracy). Classroom staff from both the infant and primary sections and a school officer working in the prep room were included.

The first two meetings were held in the school library and were informally situated around a hexagonal table. The table's shape was purposefully chosen to develop a feeling of camaraderie, so that conversation would flow freely and honestly. Wine, soft drinks and cheese were offered as an incentive for staff to attend. These meetings were held after school on two consecutive Monday afternoons, so there were no unnecessary time restrictions. Staff were given as long as they liked to think through their answers.

The third meeting was rushed, as participants were under a time constraint. It was held during school hours in the school meeting room, at the conference table situated in the administration building. Because the meeting was held during school hours, only water was offered as a beverage. The difference between the relaxed, informal atmosphere of the previous two focus group meetings and this meeting was marked in its stilted and rushed answers. It seemed to me as if the first two groups aimed for honesty in their answers. Whereas the third group aimed for political correctness in their answers. Perhaps the fact that there were only two participants in this group constrained the honest responses of the other participant. Perhaps one may have felt a little intimidated. Certainly, her body language seemed a little wary. She deferred to the other participant, to allow her to speak first on quite a few questions. I felt that the higher number of participants in the previous two staff focus groups contributed to the depth of the answers given. As no staff members brought any children to these meetings there was no need to arrange baby-sitting.

3.8 APPROACHES TO DATA ANALYSIS

3.8.1 Transcription

All three visionaries were given bound copies of their own transcripts for feedback. I made it known at each focus group that participants were more than welcome to read the transcripts of their own interviews. If asked to do so by a participant,

all transcripts and reports of each interview were shown as soon as possible to that interviewee. The information was only included in the report in a form approved of by those interviewees who read them.

All data from the study was treated in a way that protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. This was achieved using coding. Each of the participants was coded with a pseudonym denoting their position, such as visionary (V), staff (S), or parent (P). They were then coded with a notation denoting in which primary data source they had been referred to (see table 3.5).

Table 3.5 – Primary Data Source Coding

Primary Data Source Coding		
Visionary Interview One: (V1)	Staff Focus Group One: (SFG1)	Parent Focus Group One: (PFG1)
Visionary Interview Two: (V2)	Staff Focus Group Two: (SFG2)	Parent Focus Group Two: (PFG2)
Visionary Interview Three: (V3)	Staff Focus Group Three: (SFG3)	Parent Focus Group Three: (PFG3)

If I wished to refer to participant 1 in the first staff focus group, he or she would be coded as SFG1.1. The codes and all data were safely stored in accordance with the guidelines of BCE and the Australian Catholic University. Access to the data was restricted only to those people authorised by myself and my supervisor.

Inclusion of a participant's details in the case record meant that the researcher may cite the evidence in the case report. The case report required the agreement of the school principal before it could be made public (Bassey, 1999). The then current principal never asked to read my thesis, but wished me well with it early in the study. Whilst knowing that I was writing it for publication, I took this to mean that she agreed with its publication. To minimise risk to the well-being of participants in the case, issues of observation and reportage were discussed in advance (Stake, 2005). The relatively small number of interviewees who requested it received a preliminary draft of the transcript and analysis, revealing how they are presented, quoted and interpreted (Stake, 2005).

There was a genuine effort made to avoid overly probing of sensitive issues that could have offended or hurt participants if revealed (Stake, 2005). The rich, thick data in the transcripts did contain some potentially contentious material which was revealed by participants and has been included in data analyses. Despite being offered the opportunity, not all participants expressed a wish to read their transcripts or the finished analyses. Four participants read many versions over the years, including my definitive version. As three were teaching staff (including a school officer) and one was a parent, I felt that their input and suggestions constituted a fair cross section of participant feedback. Another parent who had declined to be interviewed assisted with transcriptions and formatting on every version of my thesis, including my final one. She offered vital feedback on my research as well.

3.8.2   Organisation of Data

Data analysis is a diverse process which occurs concurrently and repeatedly with data collection, data interpretation and report writing (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Tesch, 1990). Data analysis procedures denote information in matrices and identify the coding processes to be utilised in the reduction of information to patterns, themes and categories (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Tesch, 1990). Effective data analysis looks at the original interpretation, but it goes a step further by taking it out of its context and recontextualises the data in terms of the researcher's own representations of experiences of the phenomena (Tesch, 1990). Data collection methods entailed the utilisation of individual one-on-one in-depth qualitative interviews with three of the visionaries. These people were among the group which originally determined that there was a need for a community partnerships program. They first envisioned what a partnership program should look like at St Elsewhere. The visionaries were asked several questions pertaining to their perspective of the purpose and formation of the community linked model of partnership at St Elsewhere. These questions were: "What were the community partnership's programs and aims?" "How did you envisage parents would experience the program?" "How did the parents experience the program?" "What were the hindering and enhancing factors for their engagement with the school community?" "How did you envisage teachers would experience the

program?" "How did the teachers experience the program?"" What were the hindering and enhancing factors for their engagement with the school community?" "What type of leadership do you envisage is needed to sustain the community development program?"

The rich, thick data obtained from the visionaries was analysed for emerging themes, trends and patterns. These proved to be a valuable tool for formulating the focus group questions for staff and parents.

The two overarching themes which emerged from analyses of the visionaries' data were community development and leadership qualities. Staff and parents were asked to comment on these two themes by referring to the sub themes underlying each theme. The sub themes in community development were community development model versus social service model, meeting needs of students, meeting needs of staff, meeting needs of parents, community centre, and sustainability. The sub themes in leadership qualities were proactive, trust, two-way dialogue, shared leadership, accessibility, knowledge of the local community and strong presence.

3.8.3 Approaches to Analysing Spoken Discourse

Data analysis identifies the coding procedure to be used to reduce information to themes or categories (Tesch, 1990, pp. 142—145). Categorisation and themes may emerge from constant comparative content analysis of data. Themes may be generated from the literature review. There may be themes embedded in the instrument questions from one-on-one interviews or focus group interviews. Themes may also be embedded in the research questions. Or themes may be found from a combination of any of the above.

The data analysis undertaken in this research was a combination of all the above components to manage the transcripts and field notes. As soon as they were recorded, the audio-tapes of all individual interviews and focus group interviews were transcribed as primary sources. These primary sources included transcripts of interviews with three of the reference group members who had envisioned the original community partnerships program. These formed the basis for narrative style portraits. Narrative portraits "preserve the natural speech rhythms, the choice of words, and the colloquialisms of the person being interviewed" because

empowering research "should be motivated by genuine compassion and regard for those whose cries often go unheard" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 6).

Other primary sources included transcripts of the three staff focus groups and the three parent focus groups which formed the basis for dialogic portraits. Dialogic portraits are crafted from transcripts of group discussions between the researcher and participants. They involve "multiple voices, a range of perspectives, complex and varied storylines. [Moreover] the encounter provides some direction and structure to the conversation, as well as space within which informants can shape it and put their inflection on it" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 7). My last primary source was field notes, participant observations and reflections. These formed the basis of my school/community portraits and "provide[d] readers with a geographical and cultural orientation to the local community and /or school and a context with which to understand the substantive research questions" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 8).

Throughout the ethnography, I made detailed anecdotal field notes in notebooks regarding my participant observations of the day to day experiences in the community partnerships program. These community partnerships experiences, noted over several years, have been recorded in chapter one of this paper and support the data chapters. They have been utilised for rich, thick descriptions which are discussed in the concluding chapter.

Furthermore, I followed Smyth & McInerney's (2013, p. 8) four step "discerning, deliberative and creative process of crafting narrative portraits" when working with transcripts. I initially read the transcripts to get to know the participants and the materialising storyline. Then I did a more concentrated reading and noted participants' ideas, concerns, and distinct perceptions. Next, I chose content, edited transcripts and began to construct portraits. Finally, I shaped a storyline with suitable descriptions and concise interpretation.

These transcripts were then coded into themes and sub themes in scrapbook form. In the spirit of a true ethnography, the themes and sub themes developed and changed as I kept writing. These themes and sub themes were heavily influenced by my participant observation. Smyth & McInerney (2013) allege that "crafting portraits is an inherently political process for there is never a single story to be told or a simple answer to the research questions. Ultimately it is the researcher's

perspective, experiences, and ideological beliefs that influence the construction of the portrait" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 8).

3.8.4 Categories/Themes

A scrap-booking process was incorporated to assist with categorising the data. Steps undertaken whilst coding the data (Tesch, 1990, pp. 142—145) incorporated first and second order interpretations. The use of an open coding process during the first order interpretation enabled a richer understanding of the research problem.

This initial process involved firstly critically reading the information, then selecting one document to reveal its underlying meaning and identifying emergent themes. This crucial phase of the data analysis process provided a means by which I could identify in the primary data sources (i.e. transcripts of interviews and participant observation field notes) ways in which the participants defined their perspectives of school/community partnerships.

After repeating this step for several documents, similar emerging topics were clustered together in codes and categories. Revisiting the data through a second order interpretation enabled the identification of the relationships between codes and categories. Many over-arching topics emerged which were re-analysed, with a view to identifying possible new emergent codes and patterns. Topics were then remodelled as emerging themes and sub-themes. Then similar themes were clustered together to reduce their number. Next, themes were diagrammatised and then codes were alphabetised to finalise abbreviations.

At this stage, preliminary analysis of thematic data was performed and recoding of existing data was done. Within an ethnography, one continually writes, even up to the presentation of the thesis if necessary (Hoey, 2014). I have been continuously formulating themes within chapters, revisiting them and revising them as required. This included rewriting entire chapters. During my final rewrite, I endeavoured to ensure that the identified over-arching themes represented the ways in which the parents and staff of one primary school construct their perspectives of caring and transformational school/community partnership programs (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Description of Data Analysis - Matrix Example
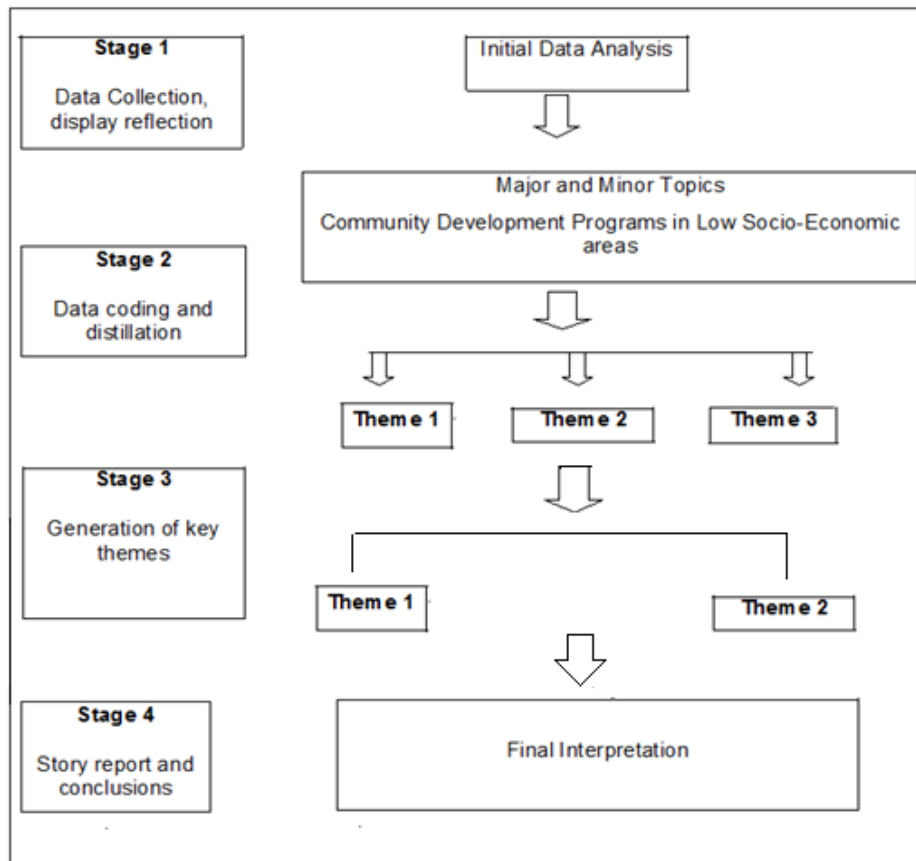
Through a process of distillation, three community partnership themes initially emerged from an analysis of the staff and parents' focus group transcripts. These themes were encouraging inclusion, building community, and supporting families, students and staff. There were also three leadership themes which were sharing decisions, building trust, and becoming proactive.

As I wrote more, I underwent the process of having five principal supervisors. Each supervisor presented with their own views on how I should approach my case study, which eventually became a critical ethnography. In time these themes seemed inadequate for encapsulating, analysing and discussing what I was trying to say. After doing some critical reading I again rewrote my research questions and sub questions, revising the themes to align with my new questions. My journey towards critically reflective research is discussed in the next section.

3.9   CRITICAL THEORY AND THEME DEVELOPMENT

3.9.1   Conceptual Framework

Initially I wanted to explore how staff and parents perceived the purpose of the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere. Analysing this through a critical

lens caused me to question whether the caring aspect of the CPP's purpose was enough for parental engagement, so I wanted to explore staff and parents' thoughts on leadership for the CPP.

After some critical theory immersion, I became intrigued by exploring how the participants perceived people in power could impact a CPP. I initially wanted to discuss staff and parents' ideas for future possibilities for sustainability of the CPP. Approaching this through a critical theory lens caused me to question whether ensuring the CPP's sustainability through expansion and the provision of more programs was enough. Or was it more imperative to question the quality of parental engagement versus quantity. Other questions that arose surrounded the value of an enabling CPP caring *for* the parents versus an empowering and transformational CPP caring *with* the parents. Suddenly, it became more important to question whether this transformational CPP was possible and if so, how?

As I engaged more in critical theory I became aware that my original research questions had been restrained by my limited thought processes. I rewrote them several times till I finally felt they were indicative of what I truly wanted to find out. As a result, I felt that my entire thesis needed to undergo a transformation. I started with changing my methodology from a case study undertaken to report the facts. I changed it to a critical ethnography which utilised many more hitherto avoided anecdotal observations. These observations had been left out of my original case study because I felt that they were too confronting and may portray some participants in a less than flattering light. But, critical theory tells the story, warts and all. It has an aim of social justice for the participants. In this case, I began to realise that the participants in most need of social justice were the parents.

I began to ask questions. "What truly was the purpose of this CPP?" "Had the visionaries examined their motives in implementing a CPP beyond that of providing support and increasing engagement?" "Were others aware of the interpellation being displayed by school and church authority leaders?" "Could this CPP move beyond being an enabling one caring *for* the parents?" "If so, how could it become an empowering and transformational one caring *with* the parents?"

I then became aware of the glaring limitations of my data chapters, which were initially called visionaries, staff and parents' findings. These chapters were meant to shine a light on St Elsewhere's CPP in the spirit of a socially just ethnography. They were written to highlight the voices of the participants in a critically reflective manner. In doing they would expose issues of tacit power that could both enable or impede the purpose of the CPP. Finally, they would end on a positive note for the future and offer hope for an authentic CPP.

My fourth principal supervisor encouraged me to read more widely. My third co-supervisor (who became my fifth and final principal supervisor) introduced me to relevant areas of critical theory. These included white patriarchy, hegemony, andro-Christo centrism, feminism, care ethics and transformation. In the spirit of continuously writing an ethnography critical theory was incorporated in my literature review. This added depth and meaning to my focus on family/school/community partnerships. In turn the critical theory readings transformed the entire focus of my thesis.

The data chapters were rewritten with the two themes of sociocultural care and responsivity, and transformation through participatory democracy in all three chapters. These themes were to be the continuous thread throughout, linking each chapter to the next. The themes were taken directly from my newly revised literature review.

The visionary findings chapter was reconceptualised to become the purpose chapter. It was retitled *Purpose: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives on care and transformation as purpose for a CPP.*

The staff findings chapter was reconceptualised as the power chapter and was retitled *Power: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives of how power can enable or impede care and transformation in a CPP.*

Finally, the parent findings chapter became the possibility chapter entitled *Possibility: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives on future possibilities for a caring and transformative CPP.*

These data chapters all led me to the conclusion that schools could draw on existing frameworks and typologies for parental engagement. Most of these are limited to a certain type of parent in a certain context. Schools would need to develop their own individualised framework for parental engagement and could

draw on my own framework of contextualised sensitive care (see table 7.1 in chapter 7).

3.9.2 Justifying claims in qualitative research - Holistic Insight

A typical characteristic of ethnographies is that, like case studies, they strive towards a holistic insight of cultural systems of action.   These cultural systems of action are the sets of interconnected activities engaged in by the participants in a communal situation (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991).

As a research paradigm and methodology, ethnology is well suited to producing context-dependent knowledge. Ethnology is ideal when the researcher can be in sustained proximity to the phenomenon being studied (Flyvberg, 2004).   This continued nearness results in a personal connection with the activities and procedures of the case. It gives insight to the researcher, regarding what is vital about the case within its own world through "thick description" (Stake, 2005, p. 450).

Generalisations can often be based on a single critical case. Flyvberg states, "If this is valid for this case, then it applies to all cases" (Flyvberg, 2004, p. 230).   The objective of any ethnography is to permit it to be diverse entities to different people. Rather than compressing the data, the researcher should make available the complete narratives to be read in their entirety (Flyvberg, 2004).

3.10 VALIDITY

3.10.1 Triangulation

Triangulation "is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g. a principal and a student), types of data (e.g. observational field notes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g. documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell; 2008, p. 648). Triangulation aids in identifying the multiple, differing realities within which people live (Stake, 2005). Systematic recording of data requires notation of the date, time, place and participants in interviews, focus groups and observations. Ideally, not too much data should be collected to analyse it as it comes in (Bassey, 1999).

3.10.2 Trustworthiness

Ensuring the trustworthiness of the research is an imperative component of the study. The trustworthiness issues that need to be addressed in any valid and authentic research include the credibility and transferability of a study. It is important to address issues of dependability and confirmability of the study.

3.10.3 Credibility

Credibility is essentially defined as the honesty of the data. There are four major factors in determining the credibility of the research. The researcher should initially engage in a prolonged period of extensive data gathering. Next have long-lasting, intensive interface with the participants. Thirdly, the researcher should employ numerous data gathering methods (Gilham, 2000). Lastly, the researcher should involve the participants in the analysis of emerging data through member checking and shared reflection (Merriam, 1998).

As researcher, I have taught from early years to high school for nearly 40 years. This includes approximately 27 years of education at the focus Catholic primary school. I have been involved two years there as a parent, so have already met the criteria of long-lasting, intensive interface with the participants. The one-on-one interviews occurred early in the study to inform the questions for the focus groups. These focus groups were held over two separate months in the following year. The informal participation observation period was comprised of nearly nine years which constituted a prolonged period of extensive data gathering from various participants.

As researcher, I employed numerous data gathering methods such as focus groups, individual one-on-one interviews and participant observation. These are outlined in the section entitled data gathering strategies. Furthermore, the participants were invited to be involved in the analysis of emerging data through constant member checking and shared reflection. Some participants took up this offer, others declined. As author, I feel that this study encountered minimal difficulty in meeting the stringent criteria for credibility.

3.10.4 Transferability

To ensure the transferability of the research to another context the researcher engages in a detailed analysis of the interview transcripts and observation notes. Attention to these should result in a thick description that is transferable to varied contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The broad and thick description of this ethnography will allow readers to make decisions regarding the transferability to another context. This ethnography involves research that applies to the focal case site.

Studies in enhancing parental engagement through the implementation of school/community partnerships, are currently very topical in contemporary educational circles. I believe this study will be a valuable contribution to the implementation of future school/community partnerships, regardless of participants' socio-economic or cultural status. This is due to the shared enhancing and hindering factors of school communities.

3.10.5 Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability of the findings. Dependability can be ensured through a comprehensive audit trail that entails straightforward trackability of data and development of findings. Throughout the study there is a thorough and transparent process of revealing patterns and drawing conclusions (Richards, 2005). This research was thoroughly and comprehensively recorded, to ensure that data could be tracked in a straightforward manner. As researcher, I endeavoured to ensure transparency of the process of revealing patterns and drawing conclusions, through ongoing consultation with several my peers. These weekly discussions held over many years, and proof readings of my chapters, culminated in the straightforward development of authentic findings.

3.10.6 Confirmability

Confirmability entails embedding the basis of the data and findings in events, rather than in the researcher's constructions. An approach to guarantee confirmability is a detailed audit trail. In this ethnography, I endeavoured to ensure the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the data, as well as its analyses and interpretation. I had prolonged contact with many of the participants over many

years and constantly monitored and documented any emerging issues. I used triangulation, through corroborating evidence from different individuals such as the principal and a teacher, or a teacher and a parent, as well as diverse types of data such as observational field notes and interviews. Finally, I used different methods of data collection such as participant observation and interviews. Therefore, triangulation was a strategy to determine the accuracy or credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2008).

As researcher, I endeavoured to systematically test the emerging story or working hypotheses against the evidence. I also utilised the process of member checking, whereby each participant in the study was given the opportunity to check the accuracy of their input in both the interviews and the focus groups (Creswell, 2008).

Most of the participants declined the offer to read through their transcripts. Two staff members and a parent agreed to read both their transcripts and the completed chapters. Another parent who had declined to be interviewed was included in anecdotal observations as she was a very active participant in the partnership at the time of the study. She read every chapter as it was written. All four-people offered verbal feedback over several years for the complete duration of the study. They were crucial assistants in keeping me honest and impartial as they knew how close I was to the study. They were aware of my vested interest as both a staff member and a past parent and offered insightful, realistic constructive criticism of my work. They encouraged me at all stages through to completion as they felt it was an important story to tell.

3.10.7 Confidentiality

A contemporary researcher needs to be informed of the fact that he/she is dealing with personal and potentially sensitive data. To be fully informed regarding my responsibilities in adhering to a code of practice in this area I consulted the Australian Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act) on the Internet. The Act defines personal information as "information or an opinion, whether true or not. And whether recorded in a material form or not, about an identified individual, or an individual who is reasonably identifiable." As researcher, I have strived to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants which was honoured by using

pseudonyms. I ensured that there was no withholding of benefits (such as offering inducements to participate to one person but not the other). There was also no imposing of disadvantages (such as threatening to reveal private conversations) on participants.

3.10.8 Limitations

It was anticipated that only a proportion of the individuals approached to participate in the research study would agree to do so. This proved to be the case for several school officers and teaching staff as well as a small number of parents. They felt that they did not know enough about the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere to offer an informed opinion on it. A small number agreed to participate in a focus group interview. In this interview, they shared their ideas on what they perceived as being characteristics of an ideal school/community partnership and how these characteristics related to St Elsewhere.

3.10.9 Reflexivity and Insider Status

There are ethical issues involving the researcher's care in reporting (Bassey, 1999). Madison (2005) points out that:

> "Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subject … This 'new' or postcolonial ethnography is the move to contextualise our own positionality, thereby making it accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgement and evaluation … we take ethical responsibility for our own subjectivity and political perspective, resisting the trap of gratuitous self-centredness or of presenting an interpretation as though it has no 'self', as though it is not accountable for its consequences and effects. Doing fieldwork is a personal experience. Our intuition, senses, and emotions … are powerfully woven into and inseparable from the process" (Madison, 2005, pp. 8—9).

The researcher must aim to minimise the impact or influence that she imposes on the study. This is achieved when she comes to an awareness of her own beliefs or principles which have been based on conjectures arising from her own personal history. She should effectively incorporate suitable techniques of data collection and analysis, whilst ensuring authenticity of the research objectives, questions and design (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). Throughout the study I endeavoured to remain aware of my role in the school and the subjectivity I would be imposing on the study (Gilham, 2005).

This subjectivity:

> "*In relation to others* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others. We are [always aware that we are] subjects in dialogue with others … Dialogue moves from ethnographic *present* to ethnographic *presence* by opening the passageways for readers and audiences to experience and grasp the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by others' voices, bodies, histories and yearnings" (Madison, 2005, pp. 10—11).

Because I employed advocacy ethnography I remained aware that this "actively denies that it is possible to do social research in ways that are allegedly neutral, objectivist, detached, and that amount to being a fly on the wall" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 4). As researcher, I was aware that I was the principal instrument for data collection and analysis. My prior experience, areas of interest and accumulated wisdom directed the advancement of the study (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Punch, 1998). In truth, no researcher begins a study with an empty mind. "We all carry theories of one kind or another and those theories are worked on and shaped as a result of our field experiences, and in turn our encounters with the field are shaped by the theories we bring to our research" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 4).

No analysis of data is unbiased and impartial (Charmaz, 2005). This is especially true for myself, due to my long-standing involvement with both the school and the parish over many years. This involvement was in several capacities such as teaching, volunteering, parenting and serving on committees (including the Parish

Council and P and F).   I felt that the personal connections I had with many of the school families and the parishioners made me a more receptive listener.   It encouraged participants to trust me as they shared their feelings and perspectives more openly than if I was a stranger to them.   I carried with me "a willingness to be continually surprised [and] to remain mightily suspicious of any agenda that smacks of foreclosure" (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 4).   This has enabled the collection of a richly imbued, honestly portrayed perspective of parents and staff in St Elsewhere's community partnerships program.

Chapter 4: CHAPTER 4: PURPOSE: AN EXPLORATION OF STAFF AND PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON CARE AND TRANSFORMATION AS PURPOSE FOR A CPP

4.1 INTRODUCTION

St Elsewhere's CPP was implemented as a caring response to research conducted in Catholic secondary and primary schools. This research found that education was compromised for marginalised students living out of home or in disadvantaged home contexts (see 1.1.3 in chapter 1). A Catholic school in a low SES area had been closed by Brisbane Catholic education office due to declining enrolments, and St Elsewhere enrolled most of these children. This resulted in high numbers of students who may have benefitted from support. These students included those who were 60 to 70% marginalised, and had ESL, or behavioural and learning difficulties.

Research had indicated that positive outcomes could occur from increased community funding. So, BCE acted on its statement that it had a preferential option to educate its disadvantaged children. It released extra funds to St Elsewhere for student support.

A reference group of visionaries met to discuss implementing a full-service schooling model of CPP at St Elsewhere. It was hoped that a CPP would support young children and their parents. It was also hoped that the CPP would assist teachers with teaching students and liaising with their parents.

St Elsewhere was a low SES parish based Josephite Catholic school so values based on caring in Catholic social justice teaching provided impetus for the project. Because St Elsewhere already had a guidance counsellor and school pastoral worker, the reference group members argued for a transformational CPP based on a community development model, rather than a social service model.

As a researcher, I was interested in discovering how staff and parents perceived the CPP and what they felt was its purpose. This was because as Indigenous studies teacher, I worked closely with the community development workers on special projects. I knew that many staff and parents did not have any contact with them at

all. This was made evident to me on the day a long-term school officer stated that she felt the community centre had been established as a means of giving another new school officer a job. I became intrigued as to why she would think this way because I had felt the CPP was a great initiative. I believed that the community partnerships program had been introduced to the school without any prior consultation with all participants. So, I perceived that many staff and parents were unaware of what the visionaries' original purpose for the CPP was.

This chapter will explore how care and transformation are perceived as providing the purpose for a school-based CPP. To answer this question this chapter presents staff and parents' findings of the purpose of a partnership program at St Elsewhere Catholic primary school in south east Queensland. Theme one is sociocultural responsivity and care with subthemes supporting disadvantaged students and disadvantaged families, and staff in Catholic schools, inclusion and diversity, and community centres. Theme two is transformation through participatory democracy, with subthemes engaging students, connecting families, developing staff, and community development.

These themes and subthemes emerging from participants' transcripts, together with supporting evidence, provided insight into perspectives of care and transformation as the original purpose of the community partnership at St Elsewhere.

4.2   PURPOSE OF ST ELSEWHERE'S COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

BCE stated that its schools existed to teach, challenge and transform, whilst exercising a preferential option for the poor and marginalised. However, it closed a low SES Catholic school because enrolments dropped below 80. St Elsewhere absorbed most of that school's population (Catholic Leader, November 7, 2004). The visionaries (comprised of school, BCE and university staff) asked why schools in disadvantaged areas were not sustainable. To ground the partnership in collegial discourse and research, they studied full service schooling models in Australia and overseas, (including New York and Chicago). The aim was to find a caring partnership model that linked families to community services, whilst maintaining a focus on student learning. The founding principal was a quiet, deeply thoughtful person who

engaged in critical research on supporting disadvantaged schools within Australia and overseas.

> V1: A school in Ballarat [and the US] … had adopted a full-service schooling model … The two models emerged. [The first was] the one stop shop where you would bring health agencies … or social workers into the school …The other was the community linked model [which was] our preference … [This was] based on knowing that the wealth of services [were] already operating within the [local] community and also that we could … maintain our focus on student learning as our priority. (V1 L 86-92)

Some visionaries wanted to employ a social worker, rather than a community development worker (CDW). This was due to the families' identified needs and visionaries' lack of knowledge about ideologies of community development (CD). A CDW was employed, whose research into transformational principles of shared dialogue and reciprocity assisted their understanding of CD. Then a community partnerships program (CPP) was established between BCE, the parish, the deanery and the wider community. This CPP was aimed at supporting students, staff and families.

Caring for and welcoming parents to school, through providing opportunities to share their skills, was perceived as minimising their social isolation. It would augment students' learning as parents became engaged with the school. The CPP began simply with people requesting somewhere to grow a garden. It was granted a three-year budget from BCE, with the area supervisor managing the funds. The CPP perceived that sharing its story with other school communities was a means of sustainability.

Though the CPP was perceived by visionaries as overseeing everything in the school as its heart, the CC was perceived as its hub. The school's Mary MacKillop spirituality and Catholic parish connections symbolised its caring and inclusiveness. This inclusiveness was a notion where differences were recognised, nurtured and utilised to transform individuals and benefit the school community. The visionaries perceived that understanding one's local community and families' home contexts was imperative for a caring CPP. This was reiterated by the parents who favoured a form

of place-based education. This is one in which "our perception of the world - what we see and what we value - are greatly influenced by the places we inhabit … the local becomes a point of entry into the regional and global community" (Smyth et al., 2010, pp. 97—98).

> P4: If they don't know the community they can't help with the community. So, having knowledge of what is happening in the area … is really important for a leader … So they can work that into the program and know what areas people need help with. (PFG 2.1 L174-177)

> P2: Well you have to know what is going on in your community, [and] who is running it, [and] where you can access certain resources from. Because otherwise, if you don't know, how can you translate it to any other person in the community? (PFG1.2 L126-128)

The partnership's core purpose was to provide supportive care for students, staff and families as a response to perceived needs. How parents and staff perceived that this was implemented will be discussed in the next section.

4.3 THEME ONE: SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSIVITY AND CARE
The CPP was developed as a caring response to visionaries' concerns that St Elsewhere had a moral responsibility to provide support for the diverse school families. As a Josephite Catholic parish school they were mindful of their patron saint's exhortation, "Never see a need without doing something about it" (St Mary of the Cross, MacKillop).

This staff member was very experienced and had been teaching in both the state system and the Catholic system for nearly 40 years. As a deeply committed Catholic she was highly regarded by the parents and staff who valued her opinions on their children. Residing ten minutes away from the school immersed her the contextual circumstances of the families. She as "teacher demonstrate[d] an empathetic

relationship with the local community coupled with a commitment to its future development and well-being" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 100).

> S12: In such a low socio-economic area we … struggle with moving away from a social service model because of the high needs of the families … We're certainly trying to teach them how to provide for themselves. But they're needs in the same time. I mean with the lunches … for [students] and breakfasts. Rather than seeing students come hungry, there just has to be some provision. (SFG3.2 L 39-44)

This principal was in her second year at St Elsewhere at the time of data collection and she was the third principal to oversee the partnership. So, she was very aware of the responsibility entailed in working within a Josephite ethos in a low SES school.

> S11: I just come back to the purpose as … carrying the light of the sisters who founded this school … Rightly or wrongly there is a need here and we are doing something about it … That's why it's here … not at Bardon or Kenmore or Coorparoo … So I don't walk away from that. (SFG3.1 L153-157)

The school acknowledged that it could not provide a caring, holistic Catholic education in marginalised areas to students from complicated home contexts on its own. It required a team approach to achieve its aim of caring for students, parents and staff.

> V1: The community development program came as a response to providing Catholic education in our marginalised areas within the … Archdiocese …There was great concern … from the leadership within Catholic education … stemming from … research that V3 was undertaking in regard to those children and students within our Catholic schools. [They were] primary and secondary [students] deemed to be … out of home, marginalised children who were struggling with mainstream curriculum. (V1 L 6-15)

BCE declared in its Strategic Renewal Framework for Catholic schooling, 2007- 2011, that its vision statement for Catholic education aimed to teach, challenge and transform, whilst its priority area, E5, states that "schools plan for improved access for financially disadvantaged families". BCE established schools in low SES areas to demonstrate "Catholic values of respect for human dignity and preferential option for poor and oppressed people." Disadvantaged schools were struggling with viability and sustainability, so St Elsewhere's principal posed a critically engaged question, highlighting the disjunction between what Catholic education stated was its mission and reality. Sustainability should be factored into decision making about how schools maintain numbers to remain viable, which is both a systems and schools issue.

> V1: So, the question was there, "If Catholic education['s] … mission is to [show] a preferential option for the poor and marginalised, why is it that … schools in our most disadvantaged areas were no longer sustainable?" [Experts in] the area of student support [approached] me in 2004 [during] my first year as principal at St Elsewhere's [when] the decision had been made about the closure of [a local Catholic primary school]. [We asked], "What did we need to do as a system to provide sustainable Catholic education in areas such as [our local area]?"
> (V1 L 18-30)

The Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA Index of disadvantages):

> "Measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantages based on a range of census characteristics … This index is derived from attributes that reflect disadvantage such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations A higher score on the index means a lower level of disadvantage [and conversely] a lower score means a higher level of disadvantage" (www.profile.id.com.au/logan).

The area in which the school was closed scored 837.1 on the SEIFA scale. Whilst St Elsewhere's area scored 796.7 on the SEIFA scale in 2014. Both areas scored low on

the index of relative socio-economic disadvantage (IRSED). This index indicated areas of low income and high unemployment. There was low educational attainment and many residents working in unskilled occupations. Other indicators were poor English proficiency, single parent families, and residents paying low rent (www.profile.id.com.au/logan). As a means of pacification, parents from the closing school were given the choice by BCE for their children to enter the public or independent school sector. Most parents, including myself, chose to enrol our children at St Elsewhere. We felt that St Elsewhere could provide the emotional and academic support our children needed. How parents and staff perceived St Elsewhere's community partnerships program delivered support for students, families and staff is discussed in the following section.

4.3.1 Supporting Disadvantaged Students, Disadvantaged Families and Staff

Certain St Elsewhere families experienced isolation or marginalisation. These included those identifying as migrants and refugees, Indigenous, low income earners and/or substance abusers. The vision statement for Catholic education's E4 priority was to ensure that schools establish "documented processes and practices that support and enhance the skills of parents and carers to support their children's learning" (Strategic Renewal Framework for Catholic Schooling, 2007 - 2011). It was perceived that for St Elsewhere's context, supporting parents, staff and students may be achieved through the establishment of a community partnerships program.

> S6: For our school, I would say [the purpose of the community partnership] is support for families, staff and students. (SFG1.6 L 103,104)

> P3: New parents to the area and new families [are made to] feel welcome, particularly when they do not have a very good family network [or] family support. It's a good place to come and get help and catch up with friends and things like that. (PFG1.3 L 50-52)

This very involved parent worked at the school as a school officer in upper grades. She had several children, both currently attending the school and as past students.

Actively participating in all aspects of school and parish life, she generously shared her culinary and artistic skills among staff, students and families alike.

> P6: This area is a lower income [area]. So when families feel that they can come here [for] the lunches on Wednesday … to them it's a big deal … It makes [everyone] feel included. (PFG2.3 L 60-64)

This parent was a dedicated prep school officer at St Elsewhere. A deeply committed non-Catholic Christian, she appreciated the personal attention given to her child and all other children thanks to the partnership.

> P8: Homework club is just fantastic, because it not only supports the child, it supports families … [Because] those families do not have to sit down with the child during the week to do the homework … It is done in a school environment which is fun as opposed to a classroom setting. (PFG3.2 L 60-63)

Staff appeared to feel that specifically helping parents in a variety of ways was a core purpose of the partnership. This early years teacher's bubbly personality and creative teaching style made her a popular person with students, staff and families. She was always smiling and joking with everybody, which was a useful strategy for coping in such a high needs context.

> S7: I think it's helping [the parents and] being a helper. [Just] listen[ing] to them [and helping them] to investigate … [and] learn new skills. [Also helping] them settle in to the area wherever they may be living. (SFG2.1 L 72-74)

This deeply caring teacher was a mother of older children herself. Being a mother assisted her in empathetically relating to the families and whatever their needs were at the time.

> S8: Knowing that this area has a high needs level, I feel that the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere was put in place to help address some of these needs … Not just to help, but to encourage participation from parents, carers or groups.

That's an area that is quite lacking here at the school … Encouraging those relationships helps bring in those families or groups to access their talents or gifts to help the school. [It's also] for them to be able to get help and support. (SFG2.2 L 202-207)

Parents perceived that the partnership was more than a support mechanism. Rather, it was a means of serving the participants in the school community. This perception of the program - from a differing lens to many (but not all) staff - underpinned the parents' optimism and enthusiasm about the partnership and St Elsewhere in general. In fact, it was refreshing to listen to the parents' perspectives and opinions. It was during their focus groups that I initially began to question just how much help these parents actually needed and whether enabling them through the partnership was limiting their capacity. I asked myself a critical question, "Would the partnership be better utilised through empowering parents as their own leaders?"

P8: I don't know why it got started in the first place, but [I believe] it was to serve the community. To bring the parish … school … parents … children and those surrounding them together in a way that accommodated many interests. Because we have adults coming in and reading with children … doing gardening and … cooking … There [are] so many things people are able to offer [skills] but do not have a platform to offer it through. That's what the partnership has offered … a platform to bring those gifts, or talents or interests that people have in a way to serve others. (PFG 3.2 L 123-130)

Quiet and well-spoken and very respected by the parents who had elected her as P and F co-president, this parent listened carefully to previous responses. She then offered her opinion on St Elsewhere's purpose for its partnership. She perceived that the partnership was established for participants to serve the wider community.

P4: The purpose is to bring together the community in the area … into St Elsewhere … so that everyone can look after each other.

We look after the families [who] bring their children to the school and the church and [we] work together. (PFG2.1 L 324-327)

This parent enjoyed coming to the school purely for its social aspect. She admitted that she had lived an insulated life in her suburb but that she loved how multicultural it had become. Before becoming part of St Elsewhere's P and F and other aspects of the partnership, she mainly stayed at home. She has spoken openly and candidly to myself about how she felt so alive because the school's partnership had given her a purpose in life. She was rarely without a smile or a joke to share and could found helping at nearly every function or get together.

P2: In my point of view it's just to get everyone together so everyone can meet each other … You can always meet someone different at St Elsewhere and … find out different stuff that is going on … You meet people from all interesting types of backgrounds … (She pauses here and smiles). It's a very broad-minded school. (PFG1.2 L 202-205)

As a means of delivering perceived support for parents the visionaries employed a community development worker. His role was to liaise with families and ascertain their needs. It was perceived that a caring CDW would act as a liaison between school, parents and the wider community. This would be by sourcing additional funding to create playgroups and women's groups and by establishing English classes and cooking classes for parents and school-community members. Another means of support was employing bilingual school officers.   It was also envisaged that the CDW's parent liaison role would provide support for the principal, freeing her to deal with other administrative issues.

V1: In those early days … it was [great] having someone to support me …   as principal [in] connect[ing] with and support[ing] families in need … Knowing that someone with a background in community development work, [although] my thinking back then would have been in social work, was that they

would have … knowledge of the [community] agencies [to] connect with and support our families. (V1 L 70-75)

Staff indicated that supporting families in a caring manner is a multifaceted process, involving both physical and emotional dimensions of care. It is a strenuous endeavour, involving commitment and determination.

> S2: There are so many ways to support families. It could be in a physical sense or emotional sense, so that is really a big undertaking [in] supporting families and whatever needs they present with. (SFG1.2 L 61-63)

Whilst genuinely wanting to support families in a caring manner, staff perceived that parents required help with almost all areas of daily life. They saw the partnership as a welcoming means of encouraging and enabling parents to engage with the school.

> S8: I guess following on from that I would see social [support]. But it could also be academic [or] emotional [and] knowledge of financial support if that was needed. [Knowing] what avenues to go [to]. There's lots of avenues there and lots of areas where people do need support or can offer support. (SFG2.2 L 75-78)

> S12: The other big purpose … in this low socio-economic area [is that] so many parents are scared of school and have … a negative attitude towards school [because they] didn't have good experiences at school themselves. So, it's got a more sort of welcoming function to … draw in parents that might not otherwise feel comfortable in a school. There's a place where they can go and sit and chat and … have coffee and it doesn't have all the connotations that a school has. (SGF3.2 L 168-173)

It was acknowledged that knowledge of the families' needs is imperative to provide family support. Both parents and staff concurred that a school based CPP's purpose was to provide relevant, effective and timely social, emotional, physical and intellectual nurture for participants. This support and care would be for all participants based on their needs.

P6: At the end of the day everything has a purpose and I think it's just about the wider community and … making everyone aware [of it]. In an ideal world we would be considerate of everyone and it's just trying to help it [achieve] peace and harmony. I think that's what's it's about. (PFG2.3 L 341-345)

Whilst the parents spoke in personalising terms of people's needs, staff tended to generalise about the community. At times the community was almost spoken about as if it was 'the other' by staff, rather than staff being a vital part of that community.

P3: The knowledge also has to be relevant … You need to know what people in the community are struggling with [as well as] what problems they have and what … they really [do] well at. (PFG1:3 L 133-135)

S8: How best to spread the word? So if you know that you have a more oral based community then that's the tack you will take. Or perhaps in conjunction with the written word … You need to know who's out there, be it businesses or services or … the population. (SFG2.2 L144-147)

S7: I was just thinking … about the demographics and what is actually in the community. Is it a low SES area [or] a different type of area with these families there? What is the community? You need to research who is living there and what are their needs … Even [the] relationship with the local government, be it council state or … federal. Who are the representatives? What can they do to help and … be part of the community partnership? (SFG2.1 L148-154)

In contrast to staff, parents felt that supporting families firstly involved establishing connections with them, in order to ascertain their needs. Then after relationships were built, taking the time to determine how the CPP could address those needs. Parents acknowledged that directing families to relevant government services for financial support, food or housing was supporting them. They also advocated

increasing parents' self-worth through upskilling families to access these services themselves.

An interesting point was made by one parent about coming to the school to feel safe. The parent's statement about a feeling of safety could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, many of the refugee families had escaped horrendous conditions in their homelands and may have perceived St Elsewhere as an extension of the welcoming haven offered to them in Australia. As no refugee parents were interviewed in the focus groups, this parent may have been alluding to the school being a safe place for those experiencing domestic or family violence in their home contexts. This was a fair assumption owing to the area in which St Elsewhere was located (see 1.1.3 in chapter 1 for sociocultural context of the local area).

> P1: To bring everybody together so all the parents can be friends
> and … get to know each other [and] can use the community
> centre when they want to … They know that they can come here
> and be safe and … have people to talk to. (PFG1.1 L 216-219)

Another parent mentioned the possibility of the partnership offering counselling. This past parent of the school and current grandmother had told me that she had been a victim of abuse as a child. She stated that this fact made her hyper-vigilant and protective of her own children and grand-child. She volunteered at the school and had volunteered with refugees through the Society of St Vincent de Paul migrants and refugees committee.

> P7: Being open to communicating with families and seeing what
> their needs may be and if there was any way the partnership
> could address those needs or assist in any way [such as]
> counselling. (PFG3.1 L 36-38, 43)

The CPP aimed at supporting teachers, through caring for them emotionally and in their pedagogy. The CPP employed non-teaching professional staff to support the teachers in engaging their students in learning. Teachers were unfamiliar with the discipline of community development. So, there was a need for professional development in this area before it could be effectively utilised.

V3: Teachers were going to need … education in [the area of] community development … We wanted the teachers to realise that there was another support within the school … [This was] the two workers … and [a] centre [which would be] working directly with [them to liaise with students and parents] to complement the work of the teacher. (V3 L 93-99)

The cultural development worker had been employed to liaise with staff in alternative curriculum areas because of his artistic and horticultural skills. In recent years he has been replaced with a classroom teacher. Many teachers missed the opportunity to create alternative programs with the previous cultural development worker's caring and committed input. This past teacher and past parent, who was now a member of the leadership team, preferred the traditional curriculum input of a trained teacher to assist with students. Her view was a divergent perspective from the visionaries' original purpose of the CPP. Their vision was to employ non-teaching staff to support teachers in alternative ways of knowing and learning for students.

S3: One thing [which] has added to the strength of community partnerships this year was having J. who is … an experienced teacher, to be able to work in the community centre … as a cultural development worker. [He works] with teachers to develop programs for students who are on the margins. (SFG1.3 L 216-219)

The cultural development worker was employed to assist staff with programs for all students. Many staff perceived that his role was limited to working with marginalised or behaviourally challenged students. Because of this limited view, it is unclear whether staff primarily perceived the CPP as providing an alternative method of behaviour management for students. Or whether they realised that this was only a minor part of its purpose. These teachers were extremely experienced and appreciated the benefits of having a community partnerships program to support its students and staff.

S1: Having the community partnerships here is so valuable … The two different roles [of] the community worker and the cultural worker working with teachers and providing that support has [also] been valuable … The community partnerships [being linked] with our behaviour learning … is really important … We've come a long way and … it's important to keep that tie going. (SFG1.1 L 76-81)

S7: Support for students [entails] kids being given time out and sometimes [using] their skills. You know there might not be a lot of time in the classroom [so] it gives them some sort of responsibility and ownership of what they're learning. It's also an avenue for them to express themselves and to show what they can do if it's not academic … Building relationships is the key phrase there. (SFG2.1 L 86-88, 95-97)

Furthermore, staff and parent perceptions of the CPP as being limited to the community centre may have been reinforced by the provision of alternative enrichment programs in the CC. These included cooking, animal care, the arts and gardening. These non-academic programs were partly aimed at engaging disengaged and/or behaviourally challenging students. One teacher stated to me anecdotally that behaviourally challenging students seemed to be separated from other students, and "rewarded with a visit to the community centre".

S1: The cooking program has been fantastic … [So have] the garden projects. [They have assisted] here [in] supporting the staff and students with children who find normal learning within a classroom very difficult … Those [children] with challenging behaviours [have] a place … to go. (SFG1.1 L 70-73a)

P3: I agree it's a place where students can go, especially if they are having difficulties. [It] doesn't matter whether it's with school work or social things … or emotional problems. It's a place where they can go and chill out that's still at school, but it's not really part of school. (PFG1.3 L74-77)

Because the partnership was established as a means of supporting participants through minimising barriers to learning, potential barriers to learning are discussed in the following section.

4.3.2 Barriers to Learning

The parents' perception of St Elsewhere as a caring and welcoming place was as an important ideal for the visionaries and staff. This would take time because the parental perception of feeling unwelcome at school was deeply entrenched. These perceptions were due to factors such as negative experiences in their own school days and differing cultural protocols regarding schools. There were parental perceptions of schools professing to have a caring parental open-door policy, but actively discouraging them from authentic participation. The visionaries required finding a way to eliminate these barriers. They required an examination of their own motives for the partnership, to effect lasting change in the parents' perspectives of the school. Staff engaged in reflective practice about why the partnership was established.

> V3: I think the hindering factors were … that the parents did not perceive that the school was a place that they could be [in. Or] that they could walk on and off and [have] ownership of the place. … Building up their confidence … familiarity and … their sense of welcome … helped to overcome that … major hindering factor. (V3 L 68-72)

A BCE researcher of marginalised children was invited to become a visionary in the reference team (Dethlefs, 2004, 2006). The aim was to utilise his research and caring expertise to enable the dismantling of barriers to learning for St Elsewhere's children.

> V2: We looked at children who were struggling and we found [an] excellent [researcher who was] putting out a program, "Making Room for us and for Little People" … After a while we ended up having him over a couple of times to consider how this would implement full service schooling (V2L18-23)

Caring staff vigilantly attempted to dismantle barriers to St Elsewhere's students' learning. This included low level or minimal early years support at home. The visionaries decided that the CPP should have a focus on school readiness.

> V2: Any problems … needed to be found in the first year of school [because the children] had learning difficulties. Very few [had] above average achievement … Nearly 60% of the students had special educational needs and … 50% had learning difficulties in 2004. 80% of the children were below average when they commenced school in year one. [They were] critically disadvantaged. (V2 L 81-84; 93, 94, 96-98)

Although all schools may experience some barriers to learning, St Elsewhere experienced many barriers to learning on a daily basis including absenteeism and compromised family situations.

> V2: Absenteeism was and … still is … a concern … Back in 2005/2006 the principal [and I were] rounding up kids [for] school, literally physically getting them in. There was violence [including] hitting … Sadly, we had to get involved with police at times. [Then we looked at] children who had come from homes that were not as peaceful as they could be. [There was] neglect and the children['s] … self- esteem was quite low. (V2 L 98-103, 70-73)

As St Elsewhere's school community's context is low SES, diverse and multicultural (Chavkin, 1993,) inclusion is held to be an absolute. How staff and parents viewed inclusion within St Elsewhere's community partnerships program is discussed below.

4.3.3 Inclusion and Diversity

St Elsewhere prided itself on its inclusive, open door policy. Yet certain families, sometimes referred to as absent parents, chose to stay away from school because of varying reasons. The aim of inclusion for all families provided another impetus for the establishment of a CPP.

> V3: Initially we thought that bringing parents together was going to assist [them] and help them break out of their isolation. (V3 L 7-9)

> S12: There are some groups that are needier than others … They do a very good job of supporting [them to] feel welcome and know that they have a link with the community partnerships. (SFG3.2 L 63-65)

Staff viewed inclusion through the lens of caring for families enough to invite them to become participatory members of a school community. This school community consisted of diverse cultures, races, religions and ethnicities. Complementing the staff view was the parents' whose aim was to have school as a place in which everybody felt they belonged.

> S4: That would be an important thing for people, especially refugees who have come from other countries … having a place to belong. (SFG1.4 L 33, 34)

> P7: It is very important to be inclusive because that means you are not excluding any particular gender, race or … person. (PFG3.1 L 23,24)

> S12: The inclusivity is very obvious [because] all students… parents [and] families … are invited and [made] welcome [through] the … community partnerships … All the kids in the school feel they … belong with the community centre. Everybody loves an opportunity to get down there … and be part of the gardening program and all those sorts of things. (SFG3.2 L 44-48)

Authentic inclusion was challenging for some parents of diverse ethnicity or demographics. Staff maintained that inclusion in all aspects of their community was everyone's fundament, regardless of personal contexts. One staffs' exhortation of not being left out is a little unclear as to exactly what people could be left out of or excluded from.

S8: Well, inclusive to me just means making sure that everybody is included in whatever's happening. Whether it's in a school … community … workplace [or] wherever. (SFG2.2 L 20-22)

S9: Yeah, just no matter where you come from, no matter what background … or where you live you are allowed to access services and be included. So, you are not left out. (SFG2.3 L 23-25)

The parents appeared to very clear as to how all people could become involved in the partnership.

P2: [The community centre] is non-prejudiced. So, it doesn't matter who you are, where you are from, or what colour you are, you can make good use of it. (PFG1.2 L 96, 97)

The diverse, low socio-economic and multi-ethnic backgrounds of the children and their families provided both a purpose and challenge for the establishment of a CPP devoted to caring.

P3: My understanding is that St Elsewhere reaches out to the community around the school. Particularly the families that have trouble with English. [The CPP] helps the school and community support each other. (PFG1.3 L 16-18)

V1: Our statistics at St Elsewhere were quite alarming … [Approximately] 60-70% of our students [were] students at the margins. Either through being out of home or through their experience as refugees [or experiencing] social disadvantage. (V1 L 45-48)

Many students spoke a range of languages other than English. This presented its own challenges for students and for the English-speaking staff whose role included teaching them to become part of the English speaking school community. This school officer had chosen to participate as a parent, rather than staff member. She had an interesting insight into working with students of multicultural backgrounds.

P6: With so many … cultures and … backgrounds [we should] learn as staff about different cultural beliefs … Like sometimes some signs are not okay to give people … (She gestures with her thumb). It's okay [for us] to give the thumbs up. [But] you don't give them the okay sign, because in Asia it's very disrespectful … When you have parents that can't talk very good English and you get that support, you get a better background understanding of them. (PFG2.3 L 84-90)

V2: In 2005 and 2006 we had 129 students with 23 different languages. (V2 L 85)

When asked about the purpose of the St Elsewhere partnership, this parent replied:

P3: Mainly because there are a lot of ethnic families here. Some of the parents don't speak English well and it's a chance for them to feel included and safe … It's to integrate all the families in the area. (PFG1.3 L 228-231)

Furthermore, students faced challenges whilst learning to speak Standard Australian English (SAE) as a means of feeling part of Australian society. St Elsewhere had the policy of encouraging students to continue speaking with their parents in their first language. This encouraged them to preserve their cultural heritage. SAE is the Australian government mandated vernacular in schools, so the visionaries wanted to support these students in learning English to assist them in functioning in the wider community.

V2: Literacy and homework [were] two areas [that] needed to be looked at. Parents … of the African children from the refugee camps [had] almost negligible [English] …The children … were learning on the job if you will. Just being school kids, they picked it up from the classrooms [and] from the school grounds. (V2 L 29-33)

St Elsewhere welcomed refugee families from many diverse countries. These included African nations such as South Sudan and Burundi as well as Cambodia and Myanmar in the early years of the partnership. Later, families were welcomed from countries such as Sri Lanka, Iraq and Syria. Parents and staff acknowledged that these families required unique care and support to promote their smooth transition into Australian life. They also had the right to preserve their own cultural heritage. This was an innovative perspective in which staff and parents referred to the refugee demographic of families as benefitting from the inclusive ethos of the CPP. When critically analysed, both staff and parents appeared to view refugee families from a strengths-in-difference-based lens. This difference was perceived by both parents and staff as a positive factor of the partnership. This staff member was a passionate advocate of social justice and enthusiastically spoke up for anybody she perceived as needing her support. Her specific gift was simplifying literacy and numeracy and making them interesting for reluctant learners. She was always available to assist any staff member and her skills were a vital asset in a school wishing to work from an alternative curriculum.

> S4: You could target various groups, like … refugee groups that come into the school. Supporting new students, new families, new arrivals … Just communicating with them [or attending to their] physical needs … or … giving them information to [access] the wider community [and] making them feel welcome … Have some programs in place where [everyone can] … feel welcome … and join in with their own cultural group. (SFG1.4 L 64-69)

> P1: [The] community partnership is there for the people who cannot speak English [to] help them speak English. They provide meals for the community … and people can come and eat if they are not well. They have activities such as sewing and knitting groups [and] childcare groups that can involve the whole community … They are here to support those people that need the support. (PFG1.1 L 41-45)

S9: Things like harmony day or our family fun day where you see … all these groups coming in, or parents … wanting to share their gifts or talents and celebrate the community aspect of this school. (SFG2.3 L 222-225)

Because both parents and staff referred to the community centre as being an integral component of the St Elsewhere CPP, their perspectives of community centres and their role in the St Elsewhere CPP will be explored next.

4.3.4 Community Centres

As part of a caring vision for the CPP, two non-teaching staff were employed within the community centre by the community partnerships program. Initially the CDW's general, broadly structured roles were not specifically defined or as clearly delineated. Indeed, the two CDWs were both referred initially referred to as community development workers. This remained until the cultural development worker's role was defined as being limited to school students and staff, and the community development worker's role was broadened to include the wider community. These two roles were both labelled and refined as the program slowly became embedded in everyday school culture

V1: In those early days the purpose and aims were about having non-teaching professional staff working within the school … [S's] role as cultural development worker … originated out of his presence already within the school community … We could see that [his] qualities … skills and expertise [provided] an opportunity [for] teachers [to] enhance the engagement of students with their learning … [M's] role, [was as] the community development worker. {then, I didn't] even have an understanding of what community development was all about. (V1 L 59-70)

 P4: I have seen … M … down in the community centre … helping a family the other day … with a school issue. But it wasn't at our school [because they] have children in another school as well …

He was helping bridge that communication gap … between the parents and the school … So he is there … to help families with things like that [and] multicultural [things] and learning. Helping those who don't speak very good English [and] bridg[ing] that gap as well. (PFG2.1 L 40-48)

A clear definition of the CD Workers' roles and specific job descriptions was necessary for teachers to understand the CPP's purpose and how the CD workers could assist them. Some blurring of the roles existed for several years until the beginning of this study. Initially this clear definition of set prescribed roles was difficult to implement. Regardless of exhibiting some elements of other CPPs, this was a completely ground-breaking program. There was no previous model to entirely emulate, due to the complexity of the diverse cultures within St Elsewhere's context. The founding principal's flexibility and willingness to try innovative ideas were the driving force behind the early days of the CPP.

V1: The newness of it and that we weren't really adopting a model that was happening elsewhere [made it] a lighthouse project … We were cultivating something within the school that none of us had … experience[d] before … For staff a hindering factor was … the unknown of what this was about and … of, "What's my place in it, what's my role within it?" [For the CD Workers] starting afresh it was … a tabula rasa [and came] with a clean slate of, "Well, what do we do and what's the expectations? What's our role description? What was I expecting from them as the principal of the school?" (V1 L 141-149)

St Elsewhere's community partnerships program aimed to support all students, families and staff in a caring and holistic manner. The program was to be embedded as the heart of the school. Staff's perception was that students did not view the CPP in this way. Staff felt that students perceived the community centre as a place to go for students who were misbehaving in class, or to get a meal before NAPLAN testing and to access enrichment activities. Staff perceived that students didn't view the community partnerships program as an ideological model of community

development. Rather that students perceived the community partnerships program as a physical place in the form of the community centre. Furthermore, for students the community centre was an isolated separate entity at the periphery of the school. For students, the community partnerships staff was limited to the CDWs. This was evidenced by responses from staff and parents, who did not mention students interacting with the wider community. While staff omitted specific mention of any educational community partnerships program being fostered between parents and school, they did endeavour to educate their students in a caring and nurturing manner.

> S1: I know children who have been upset who… can go and talk
> to the people in the community centre… There are… programs
> for children who need to be out of the classroom at certain
> times. (SFG1.1 L 73b-75)

Parents perceived that the CPP's hub was the community centre. They appreciated its caring, open-door policy. They perceived this as an improvement to the procedure of students being sent from the classroom to the office for disciplinary measures. Parents expressed appreciation for the community development workers, who built relationships with students by spending time with them. This was almost in a pseudo-parental role.

> P4: Sometimes the kids that are having a bad day … go down to
> the community centre and they hang out there … Their energies
> are focussed … into the garden or [to] help with the kids that are
> struggling a little bit. They have the homework club down there.
> [It] helps those that don't necessarily have the support at home
> with the homework and stuff … Having the garden there … and
> chickens … teaches them life skills as well … [It's] important … as
> … sometimes the parents are working really hard and they want
> to be there but they can't. (PFG2.1 L 92-95, 97-103)

This parent was a past student of the school and her memories of the family atmosphere influenced her choice to send her children to St Elsewhere. She

especially enjoyed all the caring provided by the programs in the partnership because of their relational aspect.

> P5: They're supporting the students through brekkie club … Not [only] the low socio-economic [kids], but that social gathering of [all] children together … My kids have brekkie every Wednesday, but they'll go to social club, I mean brekkie club, for the social aspect … That support, and the homework support … is really important [because] kids learn a lot from that … Those kids who … are just having moments in class where they're feeling uncomfortable … have someone else to talk to [in the CC]. (PFG2.2 L104-112)

Furthermore, parents acknowledged the importance of children discussing their problems and needs with a caring trained adult, such as the CDW, rather than their own parents. This may have been because the neutrality of the CC might have assisted with openness and honesty in conversations. It revealed parents' awareness of problematic home lives and empathy for the people involved. There was no evidence of judgement on the parents' part. There appeared to be merely acceptance of a confronting reality. This mother of very bright students was sympathetic to the plight of other parents.

> P1: I think it's like pastoral care [or] student services. Give the children somewhere to go to talk to somebody … [because] some kids can't talk to parents at home. So, it's good for them to have something here, where they can go and talk to somebody. (PFG 1.1 L 70-72)

Parents appreciated that the CC supported children who had learning and behavioural issues. They indicated awareness that part of the attraction of the CC for students was that they perceived it as being separate to the school. Parents perceived that for students it was neutral territory and for staff it was a welcome initiative.

> P5: I think … they are supporting staff all the time [with] students who [can be] challenging in classrooms or needing [some] chill

out [time. These students have] got somewhere to go [and] someone to talk to … who's on their wavelength. [Someone] they feel comfortable with to say, "Hey, you know what? I'm having a really bad day and this is what is going on." [That person is] not the principal [or] APRE. [But] someone outside the school [who is] getting them more involved in community walks and … playing basketball with them … That's helping the staff out when they say, "By the way, that kid is doing this and this and this." [Staff are] feeling that [the CDWs] can understand where they are coming from. (PFG2.2 L 70-81)

Provision of a community centre was perceived by staff as a caring gesture within the community partnerships program because it was viewed as a parental support network. Staff viewed the community centre as a place for families to socialise, without being directly in a school environment. One staff member used the descriptive "amazing" for the community centre and its staff as they sourced and funded a Burmese interpreter to assist with parent-teacher interviews.

S7: I think that the community centre really does strongly support families … at our school … and it's amazing what they do. Just hearing last week at the staff meeting with M [about] the Burmese families … gives us a way to understand and to know what goes on down there as well. Because we are not often down there for these sorts of activities and sessions … So, it's great to get the feedback [about] what goes on and how much they achieve. (SFG2.1 L 62-69)

The parents' perception of accessibility to the community partnerships program was defined as having unrestricted access to the community centre, resources, teachers and parish. They did not define it as having unrestricted - let alone any - access to the students in classrooms as well. This demonstrated the need for parents in low SES contexts to not only be upskilled "in how to participate in school [but that St Elsewhere] think about what [it expects] from families and communities and respond in ways that serve socially just purposes [and that] parents must be viewed as

partners [with the valued] vital role that they play in education recognised" (Mills & Gale, 2010, p. 119).

> P1: Accessibility means that you have access to the community centre [and] the parish. Children and adults have access to resources [such as] the computers, [the] phone … the teachers … public information within the community [and] the library … You should be able to access a wide range of information (PFG 1.1 L 84-87, 91-93)

> P5: It's people being aware of what we are doing as a community and saying, "Yeah, we have a computer club … brekkie club … and we have homework on this day." That people … can participate [and can] add new things. [Such as] "Okay, there is a free day or a free slot that I can come in and do playgroup". (PFG2.2 L 130-135)

Another aim of the establishment of a CPP at St Elsewhere was supporting teachers. This was partially achieved through the creation of a caring community centre. The CC was realised through repurposing two disused classrooms, which were converted into a meeting space and place for parents. Teachers utilised it as an alternative learning space for students. Perceiving and employing the CC as a concrete manifestation of the partnership inspired genuine dialogue and incidental learning between staff and students.

> V2: [The teachers] talked well of the community centre [and] were really happy with [the partnership] … Everyone said [having] a community development worker was a great asset … because they could relate with [and] give information to that person. [Also] as a result of [mutual dialogue there would be improvements in] this child's education and cultural development. (V2 L 146, 116-121)

Furthermore, it was perceived that a caring relationship was being built between CDW and teaching staff. This process took time, but was crucial for honest collegial sharing of thoughts and ideas.

> V2: Anytime you mention [an issue to the staff, they say], "Oh, we will take it to the community centre, we'll ask… the community development workers." There is already a well-grounded relationship with these community workers. (V2 L 122-125)

Parents felt that the community partnerships program supported staff through providing a community centre which was perceived as somewhere staff could feel welcome and get help with their needs, as required. Whilst parents did not elaborate on what they perceived these staff needs could be, they hinted at emotional needs. They did not reveal their perspective of how staff could be offered opportunities for personal growth through being assisted by the community centre.

> P1: If the teachers wanted to do something with the children within the community, that's what [the CDWs] would be there for. [Such as] if they wanted to go on trips that are within the local community, that's how they would support the teachers [by helping with children]. (PFG1.1 L 58-61)

> P3: I would say that the community centre is a place where it can support the staff. The staff are not just here to do their work and go home … They're also included. (PFG1.3 L 62,63)

There is much evidence to support the findings that St Elsewhere established a community partnerships program that cared *for* its students, staff, and parents. Whether St Elsewhere's partnership was truly authentic in parental engagement depended on how it demonstrated that it cared *with* the parents. So, the notion transformation of parental engagement through participatory democracy will be discussed in the following theme.

4.4 THEME TWO: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The BCE Strategic Renewal Framework for Catholic Schooling, 2007-2011, states that, "We educate for a transformed world in communion, by nurturing the gifts and potential of each person, enacting shared leadership, and exercising a preferential option for the poor and marginalised". Parents viewed supporting students through the transforming lens of educational and socio-emotional support.

> P6: You have students that struggle [with] simple things, like going shopping. [So] I have been helping a group of children with social skills … It helps them [to do] the hands on [stuff]. With me they do one side of it and with Mrs C they do the other. But it's all touching and doing … We all know they're different learners. [So, the] ones that seem to struggle really seem to do … well with their hands. (PFG2.3 L 114-121)

As part of its education for transformation, the partnership aimed to find creative ways to engage students. How parents and staff perceived some of these alternative educational pursuits will be discussed in the following section.

4.4.1 Engaging Students

A variety of experiences were provided for students and families at St Elsewhere aimed at transforming and augmenting the basic mandated national curriculum. The children's continuous improvement and learning took priority, so the visionaries focussed primarily on transforming ways in which children could become more involved and engaged in their schooling. A major part of the success of this initiative was the willingness of the founding principal to explore different options and alternative ways of knowing for the students.

> V1: At the heart of it, it had to be about improving student learning and … I was quite open to what it would look like and how it would operate. (V1 L120-122)

Staff implemented multi-varied ways of learning, offering new experiences for students. It was viewed as a school of difference even before the idea of a community partnerships program evolved.

> V1: [It was] a school initiative … based on [the idea] that we need to do things differently to meet the needs of our kids. We're not sure what that difference looks like. It was yet to be developed through … an experiential approach. [Later came] the community development worker and then the establishment of a community centre. (V1 L 94-99)

The community partnerships program was established as a transformative initiative to support this school of difference. From its inception, St Elsewhere's CPP encouraged older students to interact with younger students. One early years teacher was extremely impressed with how her dinosaurs unit brought students of all ages together. She utilised the services of a parent whose specialty was fossils. This input enriched her classroom teaching and learning immeasurably.

> S7: When we did our dinosaurs unit … all the 6/7s were coming and helping dig the fossils. [They were] these kids that had all this wealth of knowledge [but they weren't] doing units on them in the classroom. [The unit] enabled the school to tap into that and build those relationships with the other children as well … The community centre [organised] them to come and socialise and to interact with the younger ones. [By] get[ting] them involved and show[ing] their leadership it [gave] some sort of responsibility and ownership of what they're learning. (SFG2.1 L 88-95)

Because a core purpose of the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere was enhancing parental engagement through building connections. So, how connecting families through the partnership was perceived by staff and parents is discussed in the following section.

4.4.2 Connecting Families

St Elsewhere's CPP perceived that transforming families' lives was linked to parents increasing their social networks. The community partnership program aimed to not only support parents, but to connect all families with agencies and each other.

Networks were established with wider community groups keen to assist the partnership. As well as government services and welfare groups, these community groups included a university, the local TAFE, and the BCE.

> V1: The purpose and aims originally were based on … "How can we connect families to school?" We were very conscious that the full-service schooling wouldn't be a model where we would bring welfare type agencies into the school … It was more about, "How do we connect our families to the wealth of welfare and support agencies that operate within the [local] community?"
> (V1 L 54-58)

It was acknowledged that relationships between schools and parents were complex and dynamic. The visionaries constantly reflected on best practice for transformational parental connections to augment children's learning. It is unclear whether parents themselves were invited to have insider input into these discussions.

> V1: The purpose and aims to begin with was very much about providing access [for families] to St Elsewhere's school … [So we asked], "How do we … connect these families to our school and therefore, too, improve the learning for children?" (V1 L 49-50, 51-52)

The school started connecting and engaging parents in traditional, albeit, effective ways. Homework club is a natural development from the early days of the partnership in which ESL parents would be tutored by parish volunteers to be able to help their own children with homework. Homework club was originally only one afternoon a week for older children. However, so many younger siblings were either sent by parents or merely wanted to participate, that community centre staff divided them into two manageable groups. It now occurs bi-weekly and has an afternoon devoted to assistance of younger children. Teachers are asked to prepare a copy of their weekly homework and students are helped to complete them. They are assisted by high school volunteers, community centre staff and teachers who volunteer their time. Students are served a healthy afternoon tea, prepared by parent volunteers assisting community centre staff, and settle down to work.

V2: We would get parents … coming … and … parishioners … would help these people learn English and [to] be able to communicate not only in the language but in the cultural sense … After school some of the children would be learning to get their homework done … Today [we are still] having parents learn their English language so they could communicate … Children [are still getting] their homework done. (V2 L 41-47)

The community development worker liaised with families in a caring, non-threatening manner. This was possible because parents viewed him as a non-teaching staff member. It was envisaged that families and groups who would normally avoid school situations would experience transformed lives through approaching him as a culturally sensitive liaison person. A purpose of the community partnerships program was to enhance parental engagement of all parents. This included celebrating their cultural or multi-ethnic heritage. Indeed, the parents themselves showed initiative and leadership capabilities when they approached the community development for somewhere to meet and share food. The community development worker did not just provide a place to meet and eat, but he capitalised on this initial approach. He used this as an opportunity to invite them to share their culture with students in the classrooms. From a critical theory lens, this was an example of contextualised sensitive care for parents which will be discussed in chapter seven (see Table 7.1).

V3: Various ethnic groups … would say … "Our group doesn't have a place to meet … could we come together to do a bit of cooking?" [The CDWs would ask] "When is your national day?" or, "Would somebody from your national group … come and do some cooking and explain … your culture on your national day, in … classrooms?" … That kind of enhancement then started to happen as well. (V3 L 73-78)

S7: You hear of the groups that have been coming in outside of the school [to use] the area and not just related to the school … You can see … from the back window of your classroom … that

they are using the space and getting so much out of it. So, I think

that's a big strength to the community partnership in this area.

(SFG2.1 L 217-221)

It was envisaged that parents would grow in self-confidence as they shared stories of mutual experiences. They would feel empowered to assist each other as needed. This was again an enabling aspect of the visionaries' original purpose for the community partnerships program as it would support some parents to grow in confidence. This confidence would assist them in relating to the agencies or people in positions of power that appeared to control their lives. The visionaries wanted to demystify the concept of power for these families by getting them to network together. This was aimed at assisting these parents to become independent thinkers and actors. From a critical lens, parents would advocate for and support each other.

> V3: [Many children] had been referred to CYMHS (Child and
> Youth Mental Health Services) and some parents … knew it was
> a government agency. [They] thought … "If I take my kids there,
> the government might take them away from me." So … by
> bringing some of those parents together [who had already taken
> children] to CYMHS, with others who were afraid to go [they
> would say] "I've been there and it's been very helpful to my
> children. I would be prepared to go with you." (V3 L 11-18)

Assisting parents to make informed decisions about accessing services may appear to have been based on the premise of a social service model, rather than a community development model. The critical issue was that the intent was for parents to become self-sufficient. It was hoped that parents would become aware that they were empowered to make decisions and act for themselves. This was a cornerstone to principles of transformational community development.

> P7: Knowing which government services to go to for financial
> support, accommodation, [and the provision of] food support
> when necessary. (PFG3.1 L 41, 42)

S8: People need to know where to go to find those people or that support network. [They] need to be made aware … that … "It's okay to come here, you have stuff to offer us in the same way we have things to offer you". That reciprocity can help with accessibility. That also brings in probably availability. (SFG2.2 L 99-105)

A transformative aspect of the community partnerships program for families was its welcoming and relational aspect. This was seen to be equally important by both parents and staff.

P8: I think it's vital that people just feel welcome … Just knowing that you are welcome comes from one person greeting or acknowledging another. And from there you build … communication … and you find out what people need or want and what way you can help them or just be a friend to them. (PFG 3.2 L 74-78)

P7: Being friendly when anyone comes in. Greet them well. Make them feel welcome. (PFG3.1 L 101)

This parent had so much to offer the school in terms of how gifted she was in the arts and her friendly manner. She was a great organiser and had the knack of motivating others to follow her in her endeavours.

P1: My experience [entails] being part of the P and F and being the secretary. [So] I help with things [like] doing the barbecue to raise money [and] checking out signs for the school. I go into the community centre on a Wednesday and have lunch [which is cooked by] L. (L is a very involved volunteer grandfather and self-proclaimed chef). I've met so many different kids and I've made friends with so many different people … What's important to me is … that you can come here and … find out what is going on in your community. (PFG1.1 L 208-214)

Another aspect of a transformative community partnerships program is that of developing staff. This is so that they become familiar with alternative teaching and learning styles that will engage their students and are adequately prepared to work with families in building community-oriented schools. As Smyth et al., state:

> "Community-oriented schools … draw onto the intellectual, cultural, economic and social resources of government and non-government agencies and community organisations in addressing such issues as poverty, racism, homelessness, health initiatives, human rights and the environment. In addition to institutional resources, schools can also access the funds of knowledge that reside within families, neighbourhoods and local communities" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 102).

How staff and parents perceived that St Elsewhere was developing staff to meet these aims is discussed in the following section.

4.4.3 Developing Staff

The community partnerships program was viewed by visionaries as a resource for supporting teachers. The visionaries viewed the teachers as a resource for the CPP through a reciprocal relationship where teachers and CPP helped each other as needed. Teachers were viewed as an asset to the early partnership because their transformational work with marginalised children was highly valued.

The visionaries included the parish priest who was dean of the diocese. In this capacity, he employed an academic to liaise with the school's support teacher (inclusive education). The aim was to ensure that all children were included in the partnership. This was regardless of their level of academic achievement, or physical, social, mental or behavioural issues. The community partnerships program encouraged and enabled all staff to grow in empathy and acceptance of all students and families. This again was an example of the contextualised sensitive care employed by the St Elsewhere CPP.

> V2: So the deanery picked that up under Doctor V. C. She saw
> what she could do and set up a program in the community centre

… with … the lady that took care of learning difficulties. (V2 L 34-38)

Teachers became confident with accessing the community partnerships program to augment all students' education, not just marginalised or disengaged students. They were aware that caring teachers adapt their teaching styles and content to suit the needs of their individual students (Noddings, 2005). The CPP was achieving its aim of supporting students through an alternative curriculum. This in turn was impacting positively on staff perceptions of enhancement of parental and wider community engagement.

> V3: There was one project … with … four or five teachers … and [they] were absolutely thrilled with the input that community development had had … It had kind of opened up their eyes with what else they could do in their classroom [and] fitted in very strongly with curriculum. [It] assisted in the growth and development of their students and of the school community. (V3 L 112-117)

Parents were keen for staff to enable their children to develop a broader world view. This was evidenced by the response given by this parent when asked how a partnership could support students.

> P2: Well, like with excursions and other things to attend the community. People can help the teachers by attending the excursions and letting the children expand their mind with other things other than just in the school. (PFG1.2 L 67-69)

The school was beginning to personalise its area as a place that made parents feel informed and a vital part of the partnership. This was evidenced by the effort put into creating aesthetically pleasing displays for the parents and visitors to the school. This effort had not gone unnoticed by the parents and they were unanimous in their appreciation.

> P2: One thing that I really do like … is all the different art designs on the windows and walls. [They also] … have pictures of the

students reading and … different activities that the children have been doing. Instead of them just sitting in a file, they have them displayed and it gives an insight to the person that has just come into the school what the school is all about. (PFG1.2 L 302-306)

Before her focus group began and again afterwards, this parent expressed appreciation of the fact that I, as a researcher, was willing to ask her opinion of the school's partnership program. She was happy to be involved. Even though she was a new mum to the school, she praised the partnership.

P3: As a new parent, this being my first year here, that's the first thing I saw [on the] first day of school when I walked in and I thought, "Oh, wow! They have put a lot of effort into putting things up and making things look nice!" (PFG1.3 L 313-315)

The visionaries had wanted to employ a community development model of partnerships rather than a social service model. How staff and parents perceived community development versus social service was being implemented at St Elsewhere is discussed in the following section.

4.4.4   Community Development

Parents perceived St Elsewhere as a close community and they expressed appreciation for the community partnerships program's social aspect. This expressed appreciation for the CPP is a prerequisite of authentic caring. They perceived that the CPP assisted with building transformational connections through networking. Most indicated that they preferred a partnership model based on the principles of community development over one based on a social service model.

P5: [Community development is] about people working in a close-knit community like St Elsewhere where the community is the focus. (PFG2.2 L 13-15a)

This parent indicated an awareness of the principles of the reciprocal empowerment model which St Elsewhere was trying to implement in its early years. She referred to a barrier to parental engagement for some parents, which was working off site during

school hours. She felt that she missed out on some vital chances for participation. Now that she was employed as a school officer at St Elsewhere, she felt more connected than if she was merely receiving a newsletter. Despite concerning only, a small number, the tradition of employing parents as school officers was a commendable aspect of the partnership.

> P6: How do you say it without directly saying, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours?" … The community works for us, so we should be working for the community … It is important to know what is happening in the community … Especially when we are working … When I wasn't working here at St Elsewhere [but] working in the city, I would lose track, because the kids were only bringing home a newsletter. I was not seeing [as much] as when I wasn't working. [Then] I was active and knowing what was going on. (PFG2.3 L 184,185, 187-192)

Some parents admitted to a lack of knowledge about the differences between a social service model and a community development model of partnership.

> P8: A community development instead of a social service model? I don't know that I know the difference. (PFG 3.2 L 11,12)

> P7: Community development to me means expanding on services that are available to the community in general and the social service one, I'm not sure [what that is]. (PFG3.1 L 16.17)

Staff members appeared to understand the fundamental difference between the two models. This was that the community development model focussed on building people up and empowering them; rather than merely enabling them through providing handouts.

> S7: To me a social service model would be helping people who might have … a specific need. And they are wanting help … to get that need or access that need. Whereas community development is actually to use the community to develop strengths, as well as helping. (SFG2.1 L 30-33)

A purpose of the CPP was to enhance parental engagement. When applying a critical theory lens, questions arise around the true motive for the CPP's establishment. Was it established primarily to enable and care *for* the parents, rather than to empower and care *with* them? Did parents feel the motive was because visionaries and staff perceived a possible lack in the parents? Or because there was something in the parents that needed fixing? Such as with this parent who felt that part of the CPP's role was to teach a basic skill.

> P2: Learning how to cook in the community centre as well. In certain community centres they have cooking groups and stuff like that which may not happen in other places. That is another good resource that would be excellent for the community.
> (PFG1.2 L 88-90)

As a staff member myself that I was surprised at the school officers' views. I understood that they wanted to participate in the focus groups as parents. Not that this was primarily because they felt inadequate to participate as staff, until they told me. I had originally thought of the community partnerships program as a wonderful initiative for enabling parents to participate more in school life and had never examined my motives beyond that of caring for them. At the time of data collection, I was at the stage in my life where I believed the CPP's main purpose was supporting all those who could benefit from it. I did not think from a critical perspective about what the parents could contribute to the partnership, beyond sharing their skills. I was curious to discover what their thoughts were on the CPP's purpose, but as a staff member, I secretly thought my higher education, enabled me, and yes, entitled me to a higher order of thinking. This in no way diminished my respect for parents as straight forward-thinking people. As a parent myself, I knew that I was my children's first teacher and thus, deserved respect for taking on that role. I was pleasantly surprised to discover this parent's responses showed that she was just as knowledgeable as any staff member. It is interesting to note that this parent indicated a knowledge of ecological systems and described the role that St Elsewhere's CPP played in augmenting the communal aspect of these systems. She was a relief teacher at the school who opted to participate in the focus groups as a

parent, rather than as staff. Was this because she felt more comfortable participating in a group with the parent school officers who were her friends? Or did she feel as the other school officers revealed to me, that she was not as knowledgeable as the teachers? Training to be a teacher whilst working at St Elsewhere as a relief teacher, this parent's responses were deeply thought out and enthusiastically delivered. Her responses reflected the critical reading she had been engaging in.

> P5: I think as life has got really busy and the community has got
> wider … the purpose is to bring us all back together … I talk about
> micro and macros and it's just this Bronfenbrenner theory that I
> have about society … Like St Elsewhere is the base (she pauses
> to take a breath) and then we have the school being the next one
> and then the wider community … It's an ecological theory that
> he has and [he] says that unless we use [relationships] one to
> another then it doesn't work … [This partnership is] interlinking
> and it's going both ways and that's what it should be doing. (She
> nods emphatically as the other participants nod and smile with
> her). (PFG2.2 L 329-337)

This caused me to question whether our CPP was transformational if we didn't firstly tap into all our parents' vast wealth of knowledge. Then, secondly, if we didn't harness that knowledge by purposefully creating meaningful leadership roles for our willing parents within the CPP. Thirdly, if we didn't trust them to carry out those leadership roles without constant interference or suggestions to do it our way. Another early initiative of the partnership was implemented so that parents would feel comfortable in accessing services off the school site. This was one in which wider community groups and organisations were encouraged by visionaries to connect with families. CPP support was both internal (school based) and external (wider community based). It was again an example of caring for the parents by enabling them to interact with services.

> V2: We were looking at engaging families and partnerships with
> community organisations. [The education office] helped us with
> that. So did [the local university] and [local] TAFE. I remember

all these groups coming [and] talking to us. [They were] attempting to look at how critically disadvantaged [our children] were when they commenced school here. (V2 L 89-92)

Parents expressed enthusiasm about becoming involved in the community partnerships program. They offered examples of ways in which they were invited to contribute to the CPP through activities and experiences in daily life. These validated the purpose of the caring CPP.   From a critical perspective, the major transformational aspect of these initiatives was merely that they were enabling this parent to feel she was contributing purposefully to the CPP. Apart from a leadership role in the P and F, she was not entrusted to exhibit leadership qualities in any other way. She was not entrusted to entirely facilitate the afternoon tea program for homework club, let alone facilitate the homework club itself. Both initiatives were overseen by community centre staff.

Even the family fun day was not handed over to its focal participants, the parents, to coordinate and facilitate on their own. Parents were invited to participate in family fun day in prescribed roles given to them as contributors and consumers. All initiatives were overseen by CC staff. At no time were parents asked to form a committee to facilitate the entire family fun day themselves from consultation to deliverance. Was this because they may have done it wrongly or deviated from the community centre staff's vision?

> P2: Yeah, it's been a good experience being part of the P and F, … making the sandwiches … for the homework club and even organising and helping with the family fun day … I've met so many different people that I don't even remember their names (she laughs) … Where do I start? (She laughs again as the other parents nod and smile). Everything is good about it. The community centre, the parish, the school. Having L. down at the community centre to cook on a Wednesday … for about 20-50 people, having homework club for the kids. If they don't have time to do it at home, they can do it here. [Also] being involved

with the tuckshop and getting to know the kids. It's all just great.

(PFG1.2 L 196-199, 234-238)

The partnership's admission that they had to do things differently in order to engage the students was a transformational pedagogy. A strength of the community partnerships program was enhancing student engagement by providing alternative learning activities. It was beneficial for inner city students who were gaining transformative insights in citizenship and ethics. These students were being nurtured in a caring environment and incidental learning opportunities enabled adults like the parish priest to build relationships with them.

V2: The community centre was placed here. [We asked if we] should … have permaculture [and] chooks … small fruit trees … vegetables [and] guinea pigs … We let [the chooks] stay out for a while and I remember one of them dying and there was a great funeral for that … These inner city [children] … had never seen or had to deal with animals or agriculture. [They didn't even know] that food [didn't come] from supermarkets … Only last Saturday, the guinea pigs … got out and I was chasing [them] … They love these little animals and … growing things and feeding the chooks. (V2 L 51-62, 127-130)

The way the partnership was being implemented by the two community development workers was appreciated by the parents. Even though they were not actually being utilised as leaders and facilitators to their fullest capacity, there was always the hope that this transformation of parental engagement would eventually happen. The parents did not appear to realise that they were not actually democratically participating in the partnership. They appreciated the non-formality of the leaders. When asked about the strengths of the partnership, this parent stated:

P3: I would say it's the people, the leadership. I am also a member of a couple of other community centres which are quite clicky and here I don't find that at all. I felt really welcomed here. (I intervene to clarify her point. *So, you feel one of the strengths*

> *[of the partnership] is the way it's being run and the administration of the actual partnership?)* Yeah. (PFG1.3 L 242-247)
>
> P1: [The leadership is] more relaxed. (I prompt her, *Relaxed?*) Well [a] relaxed atmosphere. Everybody is just more approachable. You know when you walk in the school gates, you don't have to worry about talking to anyone because they are so open and honest. (PFG1.1 L 248-252)

Despite the parents feeling that the relaxed atmosphere engendered by the easy-going administration was a strength of the partnership, this feeling was not shared by the principal.

> S11: When I arrived, people came into my office and … I said, "Look, I was talking about community partnerships to various people and they said we don't know what that is. We don't know what those people do." [In fact] over half the staff were saying that to me … I had spent six months here and I still didn't understand what was being done. [People] said to me that was counter community development. Well, I don't have a masters in counter community development. But I do have over 30 years' experience in schools and I know that parents aren't going to come unless we say who we are and what we're on about. (SFG3.1 L 101-106,191-194)

The previous responses highlighted for me the disjunction between what the parents were thinking and what their plans for the partnership were, as opposed to what the administration were thinking and planning. Following is a summary of this chapter in which I conclude that the St Elsewhere CPP excelled at caring *for* the parents through enabling them.   It was still navigating its way around caring *with* the parents through empowering them.

4.5   DISCUSSION OF CARE AND TRANSFORMATION IN ST ELSEWHERE'S CPP

The St Elsewhere CPP was established by the visionaries, in partnership with wider community groups like BCE. It was a sociocultural and caring response to the perceived multi-varied needs of its students, families and staff.

A concrete example of care manifested through the CPP included establishing a community centre for parents to view as their own place and space at school. This was as a response to parents who had approached the school for somewhere to meet and to share their cultural meals. Parents were encouraged to network, connect and share skills with each other. Initially they were encouraged to share their knowledge with classes because the community centre was established for students' and staffs' use in alternative learning experiences.

Other enabling and caring initiatives for families in the CPP included employment of a community development worker to liaise with families. Parents asked for and were given space for a shared community garden. The provision of programs for parents, (including English classes, nutrition and homework help) were evidenced examples of care for parents.

Students were cared for firstly through the provision of a cultural development worker for students to talk with. Secondly through their participation in alternate programs. Thirdly through having the community centre to go as a place to go for respite. Students were cared for through the establishment of homework club and breakfast club.

Staff were cared for by the provision of parents and CC staff to assist on excursions. Also, through a cultural development worker to liaise with on alternative curriculums. Next, through having community centre staff to assist with behaviourally challenged students. Then, through members of the parish being recruited to read with classes. Lastly, through the community development worker liaising on their behalf with families. Thus, St Elsewhere's aim of supporting students, families and staff through enabling and caring *for* them has been achieved.

St Elsewhere's CPP's second aim was enhancing student outcomes. This was to be through transformative parent engagement and staff teaching styles and interactions with families. Achievement of this aim is becoming a reality for students. Student outcomes are improving as parents become more engaged with the school and as

staff learn to adapt inclusive transformational teaching styles which are contextually and culturally relevant.

In the area of transformative parental engagement through participatory democracy most parents are being limited in purposeful and meaningful decision making. When the CPP is analysed through a critical lens, the motive for its establishment becomes unclear. Did the visionaries want to increase or enhance parental engagement? Or both? It is not enough to enable parents to merely participate in school life through provision of authentic care. Because the quantity of parental engagement is not as important as the quality. Parents must be empowered to make their own decisions and act on them. At St Elsewhere, apart from the P and F, parents are not yet being trusted to form their own committees or forums for decision making. They are still not being trusted to facilitate their own programs by themselves without a staff member from the school or the community centre present. This trust is a necessary component for a transformational CPP.

Many staff are limited in leadership opportunities. This impedes transformation of a school-based CPP because all staff need to be involved in shared decision making. Staff should be given opportunities for leadership as part of their professional development.

In the area of parental engagement, authentic transformation will only happen as parents perceive that they are viewed and valued by staff from a strengths-based lens. It is not enough for staff to tell parents that they trust them. This trust needs to be demonstrated through parents being given authentic and meaningful leadership roles within the partnership. St Elsewhere needs to "revitalise grassroots forms of decision making" in a way in which "parents and community members are actively cultivated into the school as a 'rich resource' rather than a deficit" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 205). So parents should be trusted in both their parenting roles and any leadership roles they agree to take on.

Only when and if this development happens, can St Elsewhere change from an enabling partnership that is caring *for* the parents, to an empowering and transformational one that is caring *with* the parents.

Chapter 5: CHAPTER 5: POWER: AN EXPLORATION OF STAFF AND PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF HOW POWER CAN ENABLE OR IMPEDE CARE AND TRANSFORMATION IN A CPP

5.1 INTRODUCTION

St Elsewhere's community partnerships program aimed to nurture a mutually respectful, caring community through building strong, transformational relationships between all participants and the wider community.

The visionaries and staff viewed parents from a supportive, empowering strengths-on-difference based lens. Staff were well-meaning and motivated by a desire to promote change and improve lives for students and parents. The partnership was created because visionaries and staff thought that students and parents could benefit from support.

This is where tacit issues of power come into play. Because the visionaries presumed that there were people who would benefit from support, without consulting those people first, it was primarily an enabling community partnerships program, rather than transformative or empowering. This enabling aspect of the partnership revealed some limiting, albeit well-meaning perspectives of St Elsewhere's community of difference. Furthermore, whereas these limiting perspectives could have been challenged by effective leaders of the CPP such as the community development workers and the principal (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014), staff and parent responses showed minimal evidence of challenge to perceptions. Analysis of the responses and anecdotal notes revealed some tacit notions of power and hegemony which resulted in instances of interpellation. Interestingly, whilst some staff acknowledged that notions of power may have been in play, they didn't appear to be aware that they had the right to challenge them. Some merely expressed nostalgia for the way leadership in the early partnership had been handled and shared between participants. Parent responses revealed little to no awareness of tacit hegemony. They were simply grateful for the community partnerships program, and did not acknowledge that they could be part of its leadership process, except through the P and F group.

This chapter will explore how the issue of power impedes understanding and experiences of care and transformation in a school-based CPP. To answer this question this chapter presents staff and parents' findings. Participants' perspectives of the tacit power and leadership of a partnership program at one Catholic primary school in SE Queensland, Australia are explored within two overarching themes. Theme one is sociocultural responsivity and care, with subthemes commitment to care, puritans and priests, and leadership style. Theme two is transformation through participatory democracy, with sub themes community centre as hub, and parents as partners.

The first theme, sociocultural responsivity and care follows on from chapter four purpose, and discusses in more depth care as a sociocultural response in St Elsewhere's partnership. The question is explored more deeply as to whether the care can be considered as authentic if not all participants have been consulted about the care. Examples of tacit interpellation by both school and church are given, which call into question the motives behind the delivery of care. Were the carers more enablers than empowerers? Staff and parents' perspectives of preferred leadership for a community partnerships program are explored.

The second theme, transformation through participatory democracy, explores the notion of whether a caring community partnerships program for parents is enough. What were the true motives for creating a community centre? Was it to be utilised as a place for parents or was it a means of confining the parents to a space away from the students? Finally, the notion of quality parental engagement versus quantity is discussed through exploring parents as true partners. This brings into question whether a transformational partnership with the parents is possible without engaging them in authentic and purposeful leadership roles. This chapter concludes that an enabling partnership which cares *for* the parents is not as authentic as an empowering and transformational partnership which cares *with* the parents.

5.2   THEME ONE: SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSIVITY AND CARE

The St Elsewhere community partnerships program stated that it aimed to care through providing support for students, families and staff. Noddings (1984) states

that a prerequisite for authentic care is that the care is invited by the one-cared-for. In the case of the CPP at St Elsewhere's, parents weren't invited to have input into why the partnership was established and what its purpose was. This resulted in parents being unsure why the partnership was originally formulated.

Parents revealed how they felt families were being cared for and becoming empowered at St Elsewhere through the community partnerships program. This was by daily serving others, which was a fulfilment of the stated purpose of the partnership.

> P7: I don't know why it got started in the first place, but in my personal opinion it was to serve the community, to bring the parish, the school, the parents, the children and those surrounding them together in a way that accommodated many interests. Because we have adults coming in and reading with children, we have people doing gardening, and … cooking and there [are] so many things people are able to offer but we do not have a platform to offer it through. That's what the partnership has offered … [It] is a platform to bring those gifts … talents or interests that people have, in a way to serve others. (PFG3.1 L 123-130)

The community partnerships program at St Elsewhere came about because of the Catholic Church's commitment to care. So, how being committed to caring looked like at St Elsewhere is discussed in the following section.

5.3 COMMITMENT TO CARE

Caring for others is a Josephite mandate, which historically St Elsewhere took very seriously. Being available to assist with matters as they arise entails a commitment to look after someone else's welfare, whilst delivering a quality level of ethical care. Moreover, the one-cared-for needs to be able to respond to the one-caring through the acceptance of the care. Then, the one-cared for should act co-operatively to enhance the level of care.

Ideally, there should be an expression of gratitude for the care and a proposal to reciprocate the care in a way the cared-for can handle (Noddings, 1984). Parents could assist the principal and partnership leaders, with delivering quality care between parents. This is because individuals by their very humanity are limited in the scale and quality of care they can deliver. Realistic constraints affecting someone's ability to deliver quality care to others include lack of time, energy, enthusiasm and money. These constraints may possibly result in burnout for the one-caring (Noddings, 1984) if too much is expected of them as individuals.

The parents considered that children needed a leader who displayed strength of character and integrity. These leadership qualities are not based on a rigid belief compelling us to act moralistically. Rather, they are caring notions that should be fostered for society's wellbeing. These leaders are aware that their choices are watched and imitated by children. Furthermore, these choices to act ethically are not unrealistic, but are a part of daily life (Noddings, 1984).

> P2: I think a strong presence to me shows that that person has a strong presence. That they are capable of being a leader in the community and other people will see that they are a strong leader. … Their presence is a good one… Children need that as a peer. They need to see strong leadership. (PFG1. 2 L 173-176)

Another purpose of the partnership was supporting teachers in enhancing student engagement and interaction with students' families. This was because of the extremely challenging conditions under which the teachers were working (see 1.1.2 in chapter one for St Elsewhere's context). Sometimes it was difficult for teachers to demonstrate genuine care for their students whilst they were busy trying to teach (Noddings, 2005).

> V3: I think the purpose ... was to try to assist teachers … through working with young people and their parents. (V3 L 1-2)

An interesting finding was that some parents felt an ethic of care was an option for others. But not that they, the parents themselves, could deliver that care. Possibly this parental perception of themselves as not able to help others had been unintentionally fostered by staff working within a framework of enabling

through care for parents. This was rather than staff working within a framework of empowering through transformation with parents.

> P1: It's important to get the message across that they're there to help the community … no matter what happens … to help whoever needs it regardless of the circumstances. (PFG 1.1 L 112-114).

Because parents were not invited to provide input into the partnership's establishment, this casts doubt on whether the partnership was developed on the foundation of an ethic of caring. Parents could not express whether they felt they needed the care, or indeed, what form it should take (Noddings, 2002b, p. 14). The parents (the cared-for) weren't given the option of responding to the partnership (the ones-caring) through choosing to accept the care. There was an implicit expectation that parents would accept the care on offer, despite it being a demanding exercise for staff.

> S10: It's also tapping into the resources that are out there and not doubling up. So that if other people in the community close by are offering mini courses to help with language [or] finance [or] emotional support … that we can help them to tap into [we will] enable it to happen …Because we can't do everything. It just depends on what it is … We can help people more if [we know] it's out there … [In five years' time] I was thinking of keep on responding to the needs. (SFG 2.4 L 80-85,143, 238)

There was an expectation that parents would act co-operatively to augment the level of care through sharing skills and networking. Also, that parents would openly convey appreciation for the care, through welcoming others to join the partnership.

> S10: Perhaps nominating someone who feels comfortable to go out and spread the word, basically to their particular cultural group or families that they know of. (SFG2.4 L 118-120)

> S8: Students … can carry messages home … They also attend church and a mass at their other church and [can] spread the word. [So] that would get around to a lot more people as well. (SFG2.2 L 121-123)

At this point, I prompted more explanation: *So in terms of communication, are you talking only in English?*

> S7: No, in their other languages. I don't want to talk about St Elsewhere as such, but we have a lot of children that speak lots of different languages [and] come from different cultural backgrounds … They would attend different functions within their cultural groups and they could definitely spread the word [to] make other people aware of what was on offer. (SFG2.1 L 125-129).

There was a belief that those same parents would reciprocate the care in ways staff perceived that the parents as the cared-for) could manage. These included volunteering, assisting on excursions, making sandwiches and reading to children. Despite parents feeling that others in the partnership should deliver the care, there were responses which indicated that parents, albeit unknowingly, were the ones-caring. This automatic willingness to be ones-caring was a pre-cursor to their readiness for opportunities to be involved in meaningful leadership roles within the partnership. These people, no matter how well meaning, were tacitly ignoring parents' and some staff's leadership capacity. This 'meaning well' was manifested under the guise of puritans and priests caring *for* them, rather than *with* them and is discussed in the following section.

5.3.1   Puritans and Priests

Staff perceived that St Elsewhere was fulfilling its Josephite ethos of working with and caring for disadvantaged families and students. They professed the difficulty of working from a Community Development model of partnerships in a high needs school. Therefore, staff adopted almost a puritanical stance towards meeting needs where possible as a precursor to developing community. This differed from

the visionaries' original purpose which was to adopt a community development model of partnerships as preferable to a social service model. Authentic community development would have been a reality if parents were given full responsibility for facilitating and delivering all programs, especially those with a food component. They would have been accepted as true partners and contributors, rather than merely as consumers.

> S11: I can't see … in our situation here how you can develop community unless there is some sort of social service attached to it … That's not the prime thing that we do, but it … has to be part of it. Because if someone comes to you hungry, how can you not first of all give them something [to] eat and then show them where to go to get food before you develop community. They go hand in hand. We are not primarily a social service model, but it does definitely come into what we do. (SFG3.1 L 19-24)

Despite best intentions, culturally relevant pedagogy was hindered because the teaching staff's training did not involve "new epistemologies in the multicultural setting" (hooks, 1994a, p. 41). To further complicate St Elsewhere's context, by the time this thesis was in its early stages, the two original CDWs had resigned their positions, and their replacement CDW was a classroom teacher, enthusiastic about his new role, but untrained in community development principles.

Catholic social justice teaching was an impetus for the project because the visionaries perceived St Elsewhere as a place with problems which exhibited the multi-varied needs of the families and children who attended the school. The visionaries perceived themselves as enabling and caring activists, because the school had needs requiring action. St Elsewhere, as a caring Josephite parish school was mindful of its patron saint's exhortation, "Never see a need without doing something about it" (St Mary of the Cross, MacKillop). So the visionaries concluded that St Elsewhere staff had a moral responsibility to meet these perceived needs.

S11: The purpose comes from the history of it … Catholic Education wanted to put in place here something to say to the wider community that this is a special place … and there needs to be some sort of acknowledgement of that ... I see it very much grounded in the Josephite reality, without it crossing that line to being a social service centre. (SFG3.1 L 141-144, 162,163)

For the visionaries there was a risk that they may have acted on the belief that all parents and staff had identical aspirations to theirs and that the visionaries saw themselves as 'saviours' of those who may not have wanted, let alone needed to be saved. A way to avoid this 'messianic' viewpoint is to practise the authentic deep listening of the ethical carer (Noddings, 2010).

It is unclear whether the visionaries questioned whether they wanted to help families from a selfless motive or whether they were merely following church teachings and BCE's expectations for education. They realised that providing Catholic Education and teaching for transformation in low SES areas to disadvantaged students, was a mammoth task. It was something which St Elsewhere could not achieve on its own. So, because the BCE leadership team expressed concern about meeting the needs of the school's marginalised families, BCE, the school, parish and wider community, met together to form a CPP.

V1: Initially the impetus for starting the community development program came as a response to providing Catholic Education in our marginalised areas within the … Archdiocese … There was great concern in the [local] area … from the leadership within Catholic Education … stemming from … [V3's] research [regarding] children and students [in] primary and secondary [Catholic schools], who were deemed to be at the margin [and] struggling with mainstream curriculum. (V1 L 6-15)

Despite funding to critically disadvantaged schools, these schools were struggling to remain viable and sustainable. So, one visionary asked a critically engaged question. It highlighted the disjunction between what was BCE's stated mission and what it was doing. As principal of the focus school, she discussed how

sustainability has to be factored into decision making about how schools might keep enough numbers to remain viable. This is both a systems issue and a schools issue.

> V1: [We asked], "If Catholic education at the heart of its mission is to be a preferential option for the poor and marginalised, why is it that … our schools in our most disadvantaged areas were no longer sustainable?" The original taskforce included [the director for school services] … [V3 and the] area supervisor and … a senior education officer in the area of student support … So this taskforce got together to [explore], "What did we need to do as a system to provide sustainable Catholic education in areas such as [our local area]?" (V1 L 18-30)

Embedding Catholic spirituality into the program was based on the premise that as Catholics we are called to build caring and transformational relationships. We should advocate for the marginalised, whilst respecting and celebrating diversity. The visionaries nurtured a Josephite ethos of responding to needs, and encouraging parish connections. They achieved this through including the school pastoral worker (a Josephite sister) and the parish priest in the reference group.

> V1: [The parish priest] was also a part of that original task group as was … our school pastoral worker, [a Sister] of St Joseph. … [With] that strong … Mary MacKillop spirituality of providing all children access to quality education. (V1 L 36-40)

There were actually two priests in the visionaries group which established St Elsewhere's CPP. They were St Elsewhere's parish priest who had worked with marginalised youth in the US and the BCE chaplain who advocated for youth in detention and marginalised children in Catholic schools. The school networked with organisations such as the local parish on whose grounds the school was situated. This was aimed at ensuring the partnership's viability and sustainability. This decision to work closely with the church was to have significant implications for the partnership, which will be discussed later in this section.

St Elsewhere's parish priest seemed to be unaware that he was discounting the fact that children came to school with prior cultural knowledge or social capital (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Mc Neal, 1999). As Connell (2010) warns, we should be aware of "the contemporary process by which the school system managed by a modernising state and an evangelising church disrupts indigenous knowledge…. [through implementing an] hegemonic academic curriculum" (Connell, 2010, p. 610).

> V2: The area that we needed to look at was sociological and educational … What could we do to enhance the children's educational and social [knowledge? Then help them] gain higher qualifications in academics [or] socialise better. (V2 L 4-7)

Staff liaised with the cultural development worker to devise programs which focussed on addressing the students' multifaceted needs. In this way they were creating multicultural learning communities, through culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Scriber, Young & Pedoza, 1999). Outright assimilation (the process of taking on social and cultural traits of the majority race of the nation in which one resides) was never an aim of the partnership. Whilst alternative programs proved to be a learning experience for both refugee students and staff, the question is, "How far can we go in thinking that our culture is superior to others, therefore it is the one we will promote?" For example, when students were celebrating Easter, they were asked to donate eggs for a hamper. Without being told that these eggs would be chocolate ones, the expectation was that they would automatically know and incorporate Australian traditions.

> V2: We believe that for the majority of children, they had the capacity [but they struggled with] the English language … Culturally they were learning to experience the Australian way of life. But [they also struggled with] simple things like everyone should bring an Easter egg for Easter. The African children [brought] hen eggs [instead of] Easter eggs that were chocolate covered ones. (V2 L 73-78)

The parish priest perceived that while the CPP leadership would be overseen by the principal, he/she would have to operate within canonical law. This was because it was a diocesan school, under the auspices of both the church and the BCE. Whilst the parish priest acknowledged church management as a good way to 'keep things in hand', the church was the ultimate power holder in major decisions. This again calls into question both the motivation for and the quality of care that is possible within ideologically restrictive boundaries.

> V2: The school principal gives main oversight to the community development centre and liaises with the parish priest to make sure the canonical situation is kept in hand … It is part of the Catholic church's canonical responsibility to make sure that the grounds … buildings … staff and children are looked after and nurtured … That relationship … still has to be maintained [and we] still have to communicate with each other. (V2 L 155-162)

Interestingly, an issue close to participants' hearts was dismissed as 'a hiccup'. The parish priest had been coerced into listening to a small and vociferous number of parishioners. The removal of fruit trees brought to the forefront of our collective consciousness the hegemonic privilege imposed by the parish priest. The original cultural development worker heard teachers' discontent about the absence of fresh fruit in the tuck shop. So, on the pretext of providing free fruit and shade for students and families, the CDW built up the community garden which he had established during his first year in the community centre. It was close to the CDW's heart so he spent an entire weekend voluntarily planting approximately 60 fruit trees on the school grounds. However, he was disappointed to observe a week later that all the trees had been removed at the parish priest's behest.

The parish priest defended his position by stating that his parishioners were concerned about fruit bats contaminating the school and parish grounds. According to a long time older white female parishioner, only three or four older white men and women had spoken out against the trees and the mess the fruit bats might make. The African, Burmese and Sri Lankan parishioners all loved the idea of the fruit trees, as did the teaching staff. As one visionary stated:

> V2: We had to move all those fruit trees around [because] there
> were too many. About 80 of those things were put in and the
> reason that they had to go was it wasn't orchard here. It was just
> a school and we had to worry about fruit bats and rats … The
> community … was not happy with [the] idea of [them] around.
> So we had one little hiccup in six years, but … we just carry on.
> (V2 L 130-134b)

Further to this example of white privilege, there is evidence that in a school-based context, a principal's leadership style can and does have an impact on staff perspectives of parents and parental engagement. Staff and parent perspectives of leadership for a community partnerships program are explored in the following section.

5.3.2   Leadership Style

In contrast to the CPP's founding principal's leadership style, one principal acknowledged having a leadership style which was different. It was shaped by personal beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge and skills, which may have facilitated or constrained the process (Horvat et al., 2010).

> S11: Those two roles grew out of [the purpose and I have now
> ensured] that those two roles have a totally different focus. [It]
> is something that I have worked very hard to do. [Now] the
> community development worker works primarily with the
> parents and the wider community. [While] the cultural
> development worker works with the teachers and the children
> … I think that's probably its big strength. That you do have …
> those two focuses. Yes, they do merge, but the merging is less
> since we have got our direction … If you can get these two roles
> happening the way they should be, then that's a real strength of
> the program. (SFG3.1 L 145-153)

The perspective of the two CDWs would have been valuable to the leadership team. They could have gone a step further and brought some parents onto the

team with them. This would have been a truly transformative perspective of parental engagement.

> S11: Shared leadership [is] different for me than it was for the previous principal. The previous principal (she pauses momentarily) [had] the two community development workers [as] part of the leadership team … After six months that shared leadership model didn't work for me. I didn't think it was working the way the previous principal had set it up … I've got a different idea of what that is, so I approach that differently. (SFG3.1 L 26-31)

Principals face a constant struggle when they need to exhibit assertiveness. This struggle includes setting boundaries around parents' influences. A principal should learn how to avoid political issues that promote divergence and dissent. An assertive leader makes final decisions, justifies and stands by them. Most parents perceived this assertiveness as a positive move which manifested itself in a mask of confidence.

> P7: I think [having a strong presence] is important because you don't want someone who is going to get flustered when they have problems presented to them … or they are dealing with somebody. They need to be able to keep their head and know what they are doing. (PFG3.1 L 107-110)

Some parents felt that a leader's assertiveness was developed as leaders were visibly seen regularly around the school. They perceived that this visibility indicated to parents their care, commitment and allegiance to the CPP. Even though the leader may not know the parent's name, just acknowledging the parent's presence was an integral CPP leadership trait for St Elsewhere families.

> P5: The strong presence can just be at the school or in the community centre, even if you don't know their name, just saying, "Gidday, how are you?" That can be enough of a strong presence to give people [a chance] to think, "Yeah, okay, I see

you on a regular basis. You're the person that I need to talk to."
[Just] like I know yourself (she smiles at 2.1 who is co-president
of the P and F, and names her) … when you are here that's a
strong presence that you have for the P and F association. [Then]
people can say, "Gidday, how are you?" (PFG2.2 L 336-339)

Some leaders' personalities can be so compelling or forthright that their presence
is felt even if they aren't physically there. Parents felt this may have been linked
to confidence or self-belief.

P6: I think that a leader can have a strong presence without even
being there …If you have such a strong belief [in yourself, then]
you don't have to actually physically be there. [So] you don't
have to be in their face all the time … If they believe in you [you]
are going to have a strong presence. (PFG2.3 L 295-298)

An interesting finding was that the parents spoke of strong presence as a
leadership trait more than staff members. In fact staff focus group three did not
specifically refer to the notion of strong presence at all. Regardless of how one
feels about leadership traits or their importance to a partnership's success, caring
leaders should constantly reflect on how they are delivering those traits. This
includes whether that leadership style works for a particular context. This staff
member reflected on strong presence as a leadership characteristic, highlighting
the importance of continuous reflection to a partnership's validity and
authenticity.

S4: What does strong presence mean? That you are there, that
you are everywhere. Is that necessary for a partnership? (SFG1.4
L 129b-131)

The previous staff member's reflective comment is augmented in this soft-spoken
parent's thoughtful response about the tacit power of leaders imposing their will
on others.

P8: I sort of interpreted it differently. Strong presence I kind of
saw as a dictator type person who is very forthright. "And this is

the way it will be!" Which is just my perception when I heard it

… I think that one good quality of a leader is that they are able

to watch and listen. (PFG3.2 L111-114)

Staff and parents unanimously perceived that authentic dialectical reciprocity was integral for a caring partnership and that the leadership were integral to ensuring this occurred. As some participants stated:

P7: [A leader is] not a person that can't talk or communicate with

a person when they come in. Either give them an ear to listen to

or talk them through their problems or know how to deal with

anybody. So, you have to be a really good talker. (PFG3.1 L 117-

119)

P1: Yeah, it's important. As a good communicator, you've got to

be able to communicate what you want and what your needs are

and the other person has to be able to communicate what they

want and what they need. (PFG 1.1 L 188-190)

P2: A good communicator to me is someone who can get the

message across effectively, but also prompt those who aren't

good communicators and get them to try and say what they

want to say. (PFG1.2 L 191-193)

A small number verbally credited the principal with the renewed sharing of information about St Elsewhere's programs and initiatives. I have recorded some of these ideas in field notes. During fieldwork, some staff stated concerns about not being consulted, invited or informed about the program's initiatives. They were especially unaware of many programs aimed at parental engagement.

S11: Communication … is something the partnerships has

grappled with, because there [were] some good things

happening. But they weren't being communicated to the wider

community, and that's something that we work at all the time.

(SFG 3.1 L 34-37)

This staff member thought that the lack of communication within the community partnerships program was due to a privacy issue protecting the participants.

> S7: We are not always aware of what has happened. [Because] there is a privacy issue … Perhaps the trust part has been working really well and that because of privacy … you see, probably more than hear, the things that are brought in. You see the community garden working [and] the vegies growing. [Also] you see people coming in and helping themselves to vegies for their dinner. (SFG 2.1 L 207-216)

The principal perceived that more communication was happening at St Elsewhere. This underscored the incongruence between teaching staff and administrative staff's perspectives of the partnership. It also highlighted the need for mutual and inclusive dialogue, so that everyone feels they are being heard.

> S11: There is a lot more communication happening … The communication wasn't happening … I think all of those things are so vitally important for the success of the partnership. (SFG3.1 L 123-125)

In a partnership committed to parental engagement, the principal has the fundamental role in ensuring that school community members know each other. She achieves this by personally inviting, planning and implementing face-to-face meetings between parents, teachers and students.

> S12: The person leading [a CPP] or drawing everyone together obviously needs to be approachable. Otherwise nothing will happen. [He/she] needs to be a communicator … Luckily that's all working beautifully with C now that everybody is starting to have a say … [Also] with the kisses and wishes [survey] that J has put out. There is obviously a lot of faith there. You know in, "Be honest." He has said it about five times. "I'm not scared. I trust you. Tell me what you really think." (SFG3.2 L 116-122)

There is an element of trust and confidentiality that must be respected by both parties. Sometimes parents do confide a sensitive matter to the principal or a staff member (including a community development worker). They have the right to feel that any sensitive issues will not be discussed with others without their consent.

> P3: Approachable to me means that you're able to trust them to communicate with you effectively. It's a two-way street, if you can approach them, they can approach you. (PFG1:3 L 165,166)

> P2: Well the community members and staff and students ... have got to be able to trust who is leading the community group. Because if there is no trust then people will not open up and express how they are feeling ... and what they want to happen. (PFG 1.2 L 149-152)

Additionally, this parent felt that she should be also trusted in her role as a mother.

> P1: Trust is the main key, because ... children need to be able to trust teachers. Parents need to be able to trust teachers, and priests ... and people in the community. They need to have that trust to feel safe to parent and be who they are. (PFG1.1 L 153-156)

Overall, both staff and parents perceived trust to be the most important leadership issue.

> P8: It's really important for a leader or leaders to be trustworthy. Because if they are not then people are likely not to confide in them or communicate honestly with them. (PFG3.2 L 96-98)

I asked, *How important is trust?"*

> P4: Very important. (I prompted, *"Why and what does it look like?)* Well, if you don't trust the people that you are dealing with it causes big issues ... across the board ... not just in a certain area. Trust is very important. (*"Could you maybe give me an example of a type of issue?"* She speaks as if searching for the

right words, a tad hesitant perhaps?*)* Well, if you don't trust … a particular person … with a problem that you are having [then] you are not going to go to them if you don't think that they are going to keep that to themselves. (*"Confidentiality?")* Yeah. (She nods. Is it with relief that I have not probed too deeply?) Confidentiality is just one example. (PFG 2.1 L 256-267)

S11: I mean trust probably to me is the most important one … Your community has got to be able to trust that if they go to you, that you're going to deliver. And the personnel working within the program also have to be able to trust each other. (SFG3.1 L 112-115)

Time may constrain this process of shared communication because the principal is only one person. The community development worker's role description includes liaising between parents and staff so he/she should assist the principal. Personal introductions ensure that all partnership participants feel included and valued. Having the message effectively communicated to all participants is a means of inclusion. Parents felt that activities and special days required more aggressive advertising to the wider community to increase involvement. Trusting the parents to carry the responsibility of promoting the CPP and liaising with others would have been a great leadership opportunity for some parents.

P4: Everyone has easy access to the program and … support … like … [with] a computer club … that anyone can come in and [use] …The biggest thing about accessibility is people knowing about the program and … that it exists. (PFG2.1 L 144-148a)

For this parent, jaded by many years of waiting in Centrelink lines, the chance to talk to someone without having to make an appointment, was much appreciated. Parent to parent encouragement is another way in which parents could have been trusted to show leadership.

P7: It means being able to come in at any time to see somebody or whatever. You are not going to be like some government

places, make an appointment and wait to be seen … Here you can come in and talk to someone. Regardless of whether they can help you or not, there is someone there to talk to. That's what it should be about. (PFG3.1 L 66-69)

Furthermore, parents themselves perceived that effectively communicating about the program, through mutual dialogue, would not only involve more parents in programs. Parents seemed to be aware that the process of communication itself would be something that they themselves could excel at. This could have been another way of purposefully including the parents in leadership roles which would have assisted both the principal and the CDW.

P2: You got to know who's … doing what so you can [share] the information. It's good to know what is going on around the community, [including] fun days, [and] anything to do with the church, [as well as] any information from other community groups … So that you can pass on the information to everyone that needs to know about it. (PFG1.2 L 129-132)

Parents themselves may have been able to do as this parent suggested:

P5: They could … get out on assembly day and [announce] "The community centre are doing this and we are organising this," because some of the newer children … may not know what happens down there. [They may think] "Hang on a sec. You just follow these kids and I get a brekkie on this day, [but I] don't understand the reason for it." (PFG2.2 L 164-168)

Successful parental engagement involves the principal's daily role of keeping all participants informed, involved and satisfied with the partnership's progress and outcomes. This complicated and detailed process has been likened to the intricate and well thought out moves involved in playing a poker game (Wiles, Wiles & Bondi, 1981). The parents appeared to understand that mutual dialogue was the key to effective communication. This, in turn, would be a positive benefit for any program or initiative.

P1: You need good communication regardless of who … or where it is coming from … Because if you don't … then no-one is going to find out what is going on. (PFG1.1 L 214-217)

Parents perceived that practising superior listening skills is a vital leadership characteristic. This includes taking the time to listen fairly and impartially to both sides of an issue. This skill is essential for effective communication. The outcome is that everyone feels that their voice has been heard and acted upon.

P4: Communication is the crux of everything really. If you want to get your message out there, you have to be able to communicate that … to everybody. A good communicator is also a good listener as well … If you have got someone who is very good verbally and [at] listening as well that's going to make a [good leader]. (PFG2.1 L 301-305)

P5: Just be out there and talking to the right people … Understanding [them] and getting people to come in and see what they are doing. I think that is what the leadership [of the] partnership and working within that community [is about]. (PFG2.2 L 179-182)

5.4   THEME TWO: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

St Elsewhere's partnership aimed to transform student learning, staff teaching and parental engagement. This was to be achieved through enhancing student educational experiences and developing staff interactions with students and families. It was to be achieved through encouraging families to feel empowered enough to engage with the school and wider community through community nutrition and gardening programs (Grootenboer & Hardy, 2013). The school supplied an unused area of ground behind the library, staffroom and some classrooms to grow a community garden. Two empty classrooms were repurposed as a community centre for the parents to have a space and place of their own. This was a generous and far-sighted initiative of the reference group who wished to

see the community centre as a part of the CPP and a means of increasing parental engagement. However, a question arose of the tacit intent behind where the community centre was actually situated. How and why staff and parents perceived the community centre is discussed in the following section.

5.4.1 Community Centre as Hub

The community centre was intended to create a transformational place and space for students, families and staff. Parents approved of where the community centre was situated, attached to the school, but separate at its periphery. They did not feel that moving the community centre to a more central location within the school would augment the community partnerships program.

I asked the parents "*Is the community centre situated in a good spot and why?*"

> P2: I think it is. It is near the school entrance and people don't have to go through the school to get to it … It's a good little spot down there. Even though it's attached to the school, it's got its own little pillar and it can either be attached to the school or in its own little sector. (PFG1.2 L 291-294)

The reality was that the community centre's location ensured that parental engagement was limited to a physical place.

> S12: In my opinion [the CC is] extremely accessible to our students … Some parents [also] feel very welcome and able to go there. [There are] a lot of parents who are not so aware that the community centre is actually there for them as well. Partly because it's lack of promotion [and] possibly it's a little bit tucked away. (SFG 3.2 L 58-61)

The community centre was perceived by both parents and staff as the heart of the school. This diverged from the visionaries' original aim of the partnership itself being embedded as the heart of St Elsewhere.

> P1: It's in a good place because it does not disturb the rest of the school. There is not a stream of foot traffic going through the

school to get to the community centre. What they do down there stays down there during the day. And that's a good idea as the school does not have random people roaming around. (PFG1.1 L 295-298)

The CPP stated that it aimed at transforming the depth and quality of participants' engagement. This reference to the partnership as being 'down there' reiterates the notion of mentally confining the parental participants in the partnership, to a manageable place and space. That is to a place that was away from the classroom environment. Therefore, questions need to be asked about the difference between the quantity and quality of parental engagement. Such as, "Does looking busy mean successful transformation?" and "What does constitute 'successful transformation' in a school community partnership?"

S11: The more proactive stuff we can do, the more we can have our parents [and] our community being a hub of activity down there, the better things will be (S12: and obviously that's happening with our playgroup) S11: playgroup, community days, all the things that are happening down there … None of that was happening when I arrived. (SFG3.1 & 3.2 L 133-137)

Another aim of St Elsewhere's CPP was to transform parental engagement through increasing their physical access to the school and the wider community. On the surface, this seemed to be the case as the parents expressed appreciation for the partnership and everything that was occurring through it. Nevertheless, the parents remained on the outer, almost as outsiders looking in. Whilst parents were welcome to view children's work and aesthetically pleasing murals, most were not invited themselves to do these activities with the children. This is except for one Aboriginal mother, whose participation as mural creator was primarily fostered specifically through the Indigenous parents' forum.

The dislocation of the community centre down the bottom may have been an intentional means of welcoming parents to the school grounds. While it may have also been a tacit means of excluding parents from daily school life, St Elsewhere actively aimed at creating a caring, welcoming school environment. This was

evidenced through aesthetically pleasing art, vibrant gardens and purposefully created seating areas for parents. New seating areas outside the community centre included screens that ostensibly created privacy for parents, but which obscured views of the children. Its articulated welcome door policy for parents was more restrictive rather than authentically transformational. This was because its invitation to participate in the CPP did not include access to assist in the classrooms, or invitations to become involved in participatory decision making.

> P5: I think the inclusiveness is St Elsewhere itself and how everyone is very welcomed in, no matter what functions we do. Whether it be the community centre down the bottom [or] meetings that we have. Everyone feels like … they can contribute individually. (PFG2.2 L 20-23)

Despite parents perceiving the partnership as open to everybody, at least one parent did not want 'random' people roaming around the school. Notwithstanding the school's professed open-door policy for families and the wider community, the welcoming aspect for parents was limited to those who were wanted or invited. Parents seemed to be unaware of their ironic perspective of a CPP. This was one in which everybody was welcomed in the partnership, but only legitimate people were allowed on school premises in classroom vicinity.

Whilst parents were unable to identify who these 'random people' were, wanting to keep them away would have been purely from a safety aspect. The centrality of the school to the community means that it has three gateways to the street. On Sundays, the school's playground is accessed by church-goers' families. The school has been quite often the victim of vandalism and/or theft. There was a perception that these occurrences may have been lessening due to the community aspect of the CPP.

Whilst parents did connect the school, parish and wider community as parts of the partnership, they were unaware that they themselves, as parents were equal partners in this partnership. Again, there was a sense of 'them and us.' For parents and staff, this seemed to symbolise almost a disconnection between parents and

the CPP, which remains a barrier to authentic transformation of parental engagement.

> P2: I don't know what that means. I think that my understanding of a community partnership is where the school, church, local businesses all come together to help each other … The community centre, the parish and the school all work together with people of the community, including people from different nationalit[ies]. (PFG1.2 L 6-8, 9-11)

The CPP was welcomed by teachers in the early days who utilised it to access alternative ways of knowing and to enhance and transform students' educational experiences. Some classroom projects included film-making and an artistic photography project in bushland at the first cultural development worker's home. Films were tailored to varying themes such as shadow puppetry for social science. As Indigenous studies teacher at the time I was very excited about the endless possibilities of utilising the CPP. There was a play written by an Indigenous student about the Dreamtime and his interpretation of the coming of the white man to Australia, which was made into a film. A team of Indigenous students also filmed the life story of the school's adopted Aboriginal elder who had experienced a childhood impacted by the Stolen Generations.

Other projects included assisting parents to facilitate the Indigenous students' Advent Parade and pageant in partnership with Fusion. This parade through suburban streets culminated each year in a different place to present the play. One year it was in a park, another year in Fusion's community centre. The year it was in the parish hall the first cultural development worker arranged for hay bales to deck out the stable. A parent arranged for a live sheep named Lambert to accompany the children on their parade and to join shepherds in worshipping baby Jesus. Another promising outcome was that families who had not previously identified themselves as Indigenous were now doing so and inviting new Indigenous families to the school. Not only were their children joining the Indigenous program, parents were joining the forum to have input into it.

Classroom staff generally remained unaware of the programs on offer in the community centre. Classroom teachers do not seem to utilise it for alternative programming as much as in the past. The ESL department mainly utilises the community centre for its families, which reinforces the perception that the partnership is primarily for migrants and refugees.

> P3: If you are unable to speak English, there are ways that you can communicate through translators and things like that. (PFG1.3 L 106.107)

> S11: The purpose is it's … helping families that have just come to Australia. There is a place here that they can get help [and] become part of this wonderful vibrant community. It's a place where children can go and learn how to access the curriculum in ways they can't in a traditional setting. (SFG 3.1 L 157-160)

Nowadays, it has been designated by council as a community hub. It is primarily focused on providing integrated childcare and early childhood services, including family support services, parenting support, health services, community activities, and education services (Johns et al., 2000). This diverges from the original aim of the CPP, which was to have the community centre as a place and space to be utilised by all staff, all parents and all students.

Whilst the community centre is a busy place, again questions arise including, "Does quantity of parental engagement ensure a better indicator of success than its quality?" "Can a truly authentic parental engagement program be defined to numbers and statistics?" "Is a school-based community partnerships program authentic if only some participants are involved in it, indeed, if some staff are unaware of its existence?" (Anderson, 1998).

> V2: [The CC] has assisted teachers … students [and] parents who have been able to count on [it] as being there for them in … encouraging children educationally … culturally and socially. If it were to continue that way and to build on that I can see the

> future of the community development centre continuing. (V2L
> 149-153)

Teachers rarely access the CPP through utilising the community centre now. This is because new teachers are either not made aware of its possibilities for transformative education, or they are unwilling to leave the familiar confines of their classroom. Long term staff members, such as the grade five teacher, who has been on staff since the nineties, utilise the community centre for extension activities such as cooking, art and science. Despite being quite exceptional in her caring teaching style, she delivers these lessons alone or with a school officer. This is because community centre staff are usually busy elsewhere.

This again diverges from the CPP's original aim of employing a cultural development worker. His role was to assist staff by liaising with them on programming and delivering alternative teaching activities. Nowadays, assisting the teachers is interpreted as provision by the CC of an extra teacher in the room for rotating groups in literacy and numeracy.

In the past, viewing the community centre as a concrete manifestation of the partnership, in which CDWs would actively assist with alternative teaching, inspired genuine dialogue between all staff and students. This incidental learning transformed and enhanced students' and staff's educational experiences.

It is not necessary for CDWs to attend all the lessons that take place in the community centre. It is a positive step for teachers to liaise with the cultural development worker on alternative options for education. It is beneficial for the students to interact with him on a non-academic level. The CDW and the students get to know each other. This positive interaction is then relayed to parents, which might encourage more parents to engage with the school. This interaction is more of a possibility now that the community centre has more than one cultural development worker.

Although it was originally perceived by the parish priest that a relationship was being built between the CDWs and teaching staff, the consensus now is that the cultural development workers directly liaise with the principal. Then one or the

other will inform the staff of any decisions that have been made. Teachers rarely liaise directly with the CDW anymore, as it all requires approval of the principal. This style of micro- management in leadership can prove to be burdensome for a principal. Instead of creating leadership roles for a wide variety of people and trusting them to do their job, she prefers to keep her leadership team compact. She is a part of every decision no matter how big or small. This not only hinders the CPP's goal of transformation of parental engagement and staff teaching. It puts the principal and her small leadership team in danger of burnout from overwork and anxiety. I would argue that the community partnerships program has been in existence long enough for the parents to understand how they could proactively contribute to it as leaders of different groups, initiatives, forums, committees, and events. This would be a way of transforming parental engagement by taking a burden off the shoulders off administration. It would be a major step towards an empowering and transformative partnership that cares *with* the parents, rather than an enabling one which is caring *for* them.

I asked, *"So 2.2 you mentioned proactive leaders as opposed to a proactive community. Do you think that there is a connection?"*

> P5: Yeah, I think there should be a connection. But it … depends on that leadership … It's like anything, if you don't have a good leader as a captain for a sports team are they going to be with you? No. If you don't have a good leader [of] a community, then they're not going to lead you either. … If you get a great leader in there that is … open-minded and really passionate about what they are doing, [and] making the right connections outside the community, then people will follow. (PFG2.2 L 239-246)

Teachers liaising directly with the CDWs alleviated the principal from the weight of micro-management. This freed the teachers to express their creativity, whilst demonstrating their leadership capacity, through working in genuine partnership with community centre staff. The original roles of the community development worker and cultural development worker were both non-teaching staff, so that families who would normally avoid school situations would approach them. It was

believed that parents would perceive that they could trust these culturally sensitive people who did not represent school and its ideologies. This was a promising beginning for a transformational parental engagement program.

Nowadays a CDW attempts to bridge the gap between the families accessing the community centre and the school. She does this by taking playgroup children and parents to major assemblies and events. This is only a small part of the strong relationship which was beginning to be built up between community centre staff, parents and teaching staff when the partnership began. That strong relationship was beginning to have a transformational impact on students' learning and parental engagement

Not only was the CPP viewed as a potential resource of teacher support, teachers themselves were envisaged by visionaries as a resource for the CPP. This was to be through a reciprocal relationship.

Because the community partnerships program was established as a means of enhancing parental engagement, the concept of transformational parental engagement needs to be discussed. Parents as authentic partners in a partnership will be discussed in the following section.

5.4.2   Parents as Partners

Research states that authentic parental engagement has a positive impact on student learning (Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Thus, St Elsewhere was keen to build up its welcoming ethos for parents. Despite this altruistic intention, the school did not appear to fully understand the notion of welcoming parents as true partners in the CPP.

Firstly, parents perceived ongoing two-way communication through meetings between parents and staff as an important staff support. The parents displayed limited understanding of how they themselves could support teachers, other than assisting with excursions. This restricted interpretation of parental assistance for staff may have stemmed from parents' amplified perceptions of staff as professionals. They perceived staff as not requiring support in learning "to accept different ways of knowing, new epistemologies, in the multicultural setting," apart

from accessing professional development in cultural protocols when talking with parents (hooks, 1994a, p. 41).

This view of staff as professionals who know everything worth knowing about teaching students is fostered when teachers and parents are kept apart. This is almost as if parents had nothing of value or in common with staff that could be shared. Parents have historically and traditionally perceived that their place is away from classrooms (see 2.2.2 in chapter 2 - Historical Perspectives). Classrooms are sometimes perceived by parents as spaces in which the 'all knowing teacher' remains secluded, whilst sharing exclusive wisdom with his/her students. The myth that hooks cites which is, "no-one really expects or demands of [teachers] that [they] really care about teaching in uniquely passionate and different ways" (hooks, 1994a, p. 198) is perpetuated because of this enforced isolation.

If both parents and staff were invited to provide initial input into the CPP, mutual respect could have developed, through listening and working together. Instead parents continue to venerate teachers. This is evidenced by the school officers who participated in the parents' focus group rather than the staff focus group, because they perceived themselves as less knowledgeable than the teachers (see 3.6.5 Participants in chapter 3). This sense of awe contributes to parents' perceptions of staff coping in every situation because of their training. It contributes to staff's perception of parents needing help, rather than viewing each other as individuals with a common goal of education for their children. Principals need to be "well appraised of the significance that parents attribute to them in building and maintaining relationships with families and communities" (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014, p. 12).

Leaders who care about parental partnerships will not merely invite the parents to share coffee or a sausage sizzle. This symbolises a token gesture of appearance, then withdrawal, without having involved parents in genuine engagement. Principals and leaders should acknowledge parents' capabilities for leadership by creating authentic parental leadership opportunities. This would be through working in teams with school personnel as policy makers and advisors. This ensures that the principal and leadership team move from regressive hegemony

and a top-down form of leadership. They will move to a form of leadership embedded in a caring school community operating from the bottom up.

At St Elsewhere's the leadership is distributed between those who already hold positions of power, leaving minimal room for others to be built up as potential leaders, such as parents. (I asked, *"Shared leadership. What are your thoughts on shared leadership?)*

> P2: Well, where the leaders of the community centre … the school and the parish … come together [to] form a little committee and discuss things that are happening within the school, parish and community centre and let each other in on what's going on and see if there is any sort of information that they can help each other with. (PFG1.2 L 28-32)

> P1: Yeah, that's what I see shared leadership as. People that run the school … parish, [and] the community centre, all getting together and discussing what the community needs. (PFG1.1 L 33-35)

> P4: I think leadership is important for a partnership … like around St Elsewhere for example. We've got the school working with the community partnerships program [and] the church. [Then] all the leaders communicate and [they] come together to make sure that everyone can be involved and the community is looked after. (PFG2.1 L 31-34)

These parents and staff indicated awareness of principles of authentic community development and shared leadership when they said:

> P3: I see it as not autonomous. It's shared, meaning that there is not one boss. It's shared by everybody. (PFG1.3 L 36.37)

> P8: I think that shared leadership … has things for people to aspire to so that they are not always going to be on the bottom rung. Not that there is such a thing. But they feel that they can

> grow and … have more responsibility at some stage [and] work
>
> towards that. (PFG3.2 L 27-30)

Sharing leadership roles with parents will enable leaders to administrate, consolidate and sustain the CPP. Although parents indicated a sense of ownership of the partnership, they did not question the status quo. For instance, I observed that parents were trusted with sourcing the donated food, assisting with breakfast preparation, serving, and cleaning up afterwards. Yet, they were not being entrusted to facilitate the entire breakfast program on their own.

Despite the popularity and educational benefits of the shared community lunches, they troubled the incoming CDW. This was because he worried about health and safety standards of the food providers. These providers not only included a famous restaurant chain and a local Foodbank that fed many St Elsewhere families weekly. The incoming CDW expressed concern that the facilitating family and their team of volunteers took leftovers home, rather than discarding them. The CDW discussed the situation with the parent facilitators. But rather than providing parents with an opportunity to explain or find alternative providers, the lunches were abolished by the principal at the request of the new CDW. Those parents left the program and are currently valued as facilitators of another Catholic school's breakfast program. This appeared to be in direct contrast to an ethos "in which [the ways] people, both inside and outside the school, relate to one another are placed at the centre of everything they do" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 75).

Whilst both parents and staff perceived St Elsewhere's CPP as a caring, welcoming entity, the reality was that they had no choice other than blindly accepting designated roles and willingly accepting certain values imposed by the school leadership. This was accepted by parents, partly because of the warm and paternalistic ethos of the school. It was a school in which parents were welcome, so long as they didn't upset the status quo.

Whilst Barr & Saltmarsh (2014) argue that there are "forms of parent engagement that are often less visible, hence often unacknowledged, within schooling contexts" (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014, p.5), parents identified their role in the CPP in

caring, albeit traditional ways. These included joining the P and F group, cooking barbecues and fundraising.

Leaders who care about parental engagement encourage parents to become involved. They inform teachers to align their goals and agendas to the parents'. Moreover, they model for staff how to treat parents respectfully and how to use easily comprehended language because "teachers are the front-line warriors in the battle for education" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 206). Principals should address any personal or staff's inadvertent discrimination or "entrenched patterns of exclusion among more vulnerable parent groups traditionally marginalised within schooling," before they become barriers to effective family engagement (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014, p. 9). This is because "a partnership based on the premise that one party is a problem is likely to be doomed from the start. It is parental understanding of this covert agenda that inhibits the success of many such plans to increase parental involvement" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2010, p. 47). Indeed, some principals seem to be unaware that strong leadership need not entail autocracy. Parents could have followed the leadership example of the Indigenous parents' forum. These parents displayed leadership traits by inviting each other to home visits, community walks and family/student collaborative activities. These were organised and conducted by parent leaders in the forum (Epstein, 2001). By overlooking opportunities to skill parents as leaders, some prospects of viability and sustainability of the caring CPP were abandoned. This included parental chances for mentoring families. The attitudes and perceptions of family engagement by staff were proportional to their feelings about the families themselves. It is unclear whether staff perceived parents as CPP partners, or merely consumers.

> "Partners recognise their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students, improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with

others…[and] help teachers with their work" (Epstein, 2001, p. 403).

Parents' purposeful contributions in the CPP remained secret, because staff thought parents declined to be identified. It remained unclear where staff perceptions of parental privacy originated from, despite parents expressing pride in the partnership.

> S10: Within that trust, there is a privacy issue … so we aren't
> always … aware … of the good works that have been done … You
> see [outside the classroom] … more than hear [good things such
> as] vegies growing… [and] people coming in and helping
> themselves to vegies for their dinner. (SFG2.4 L 208-211)

From a critical perspective, the implementation of a community linked model of community partnerships, seems to assume a limited paradigm of parents. That is, seeing the 'problem' of minimal parental engagement as located with the parents. There appears to be an assumption that bringing them together and 'to' where the church and school are situated is a suitable strategy to overcome this 'problem'. This may prove to be an effective strategy for increasing the quantity of involved parents. It differs considerably from community embracing models of community partnerships that propose schools open up to parents and the wider community. This is where educators go out amongst the community to build relationships which transform the quality of parental engagement. In fact, in relational schools, the relationships between and among the participants are the defining feature of their success (Smyth et al., 2010).

5.5   DISCUSSION OF POWER AND LEADERSHIP IN ST ELSEWHERE'S COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

The St Elsewhere's community partnerships program (CPP) was motivated by Catholic social justice teaching and established with an ethic of care. A purpose of the CPP was to nurture and transform parental engagement, through enabling initiatives such as connecting them to school and linking them to wider community services. This caring was evidenced when the visionaries acted on their promise to

establish a partnership by creating a place and space for parents to call their own, in the form of the CC. The BCE chaplain was committed to the principles of CD and cultural sensitivity in marginalised areas, so he was invited to join the visionaries in establishing a CPP.

As a means of engaging students, alternative educational programs were devised. A genuine effort was expended in finding creative ways to engage parents in daily school life. Parents were not invited to assist with their children's schooling other than in traditional ways such as making sandwiches, assisting on excursions and reading with children. Minimal consideration was granted to the notion of parents as authentic partners in the partnership by empowering them to show leadership through transformational participatory democracy.

In fact, both staff and parents perceived that a parents' place was away from the classrooms, in the community centre. This was established at the periphery of the school and perceived by all participants in the CPP as not only its hub, but the entire CPP. Although its physical space was confined by the two classrooms repurposed as the CC, the visionaries intended the CC to be part of the CPP. In fact, the community partnerships program was to be embedded at the heart of St Elsewhere.

Differing principal styles impacted the original vision of the partnership. This was because they interpreted the purpose of the CPP, the CC and the CDWs from varying perspectives. The partnership which had shown so much creative promise was restricted and quantified as time went on.

Parents themselves displayed a limited understanding of how they could assist teachers. Whilst teachers remained largely unaware of the potential richness of parental involvement in their classrooms. This situation could have been avoided if all participants had been invited to have initial input into the CPP's establishment, through information sessions, workshops, surveys and focus groups. A principal's attitude to parents and parental engagement influenced staff perceptions of them. Principals who care about parental engagement purposefully create meaningful parental leadership opportunities and encourage mutual dialogue and trust within a community partnerships program.

As a principal at a Catholic parish school, he/she must defer to the parish priest for ultimate authority in decision making. Because St Elsewhere's is built on parish grounds, the parish priest, who was a founding visionary, is a leader in the CPP. His decisions based on his loyalty to the church, have had far reaching implications for the viability and sustainability of the program. Church and school interpellation have brought into question the possibility of authentic transformation in parental engagement. This is especially pertinent when subjected to restrictive church and education policy rules.

Finally, there is the question of whether quantity defines success of a parental engagement program. Or whether it actually is defined by its quality. Quality of a community partnerships program is only possible when parents are welcomed as leaders and equal partners. St Elsewhere's community partnerships program has been identified as an enabling CPP, caring *for* the parents. However, it will remain merely an enabling and caring CPP unless it remodels itself into a partnership committed to transformation of parental engagement through participatory democracy. Only when it embraces parents as authentic partners can it be called an empowering and transformational CPP, caring *with* the parents.

Chapter 6: CHAPTER 6: POSSIBILITY: AN EXPLORATION OF STAFF AND PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR A CARING AND TRANSFORMATIVE CPP

6.1   6.1   INTRODUCTION

BCE had stated that its schools existed to teach, challenge and transform. They would do this whilst exercising a preferential option for the poor and marginalised. Despite this statement, a Catholic school with similar demographics to St Elsewhere was closed by BCE. The visionaries were concerned about implications and ramifications for St Elsewhere. St Elsewhere visionaries comprised of school, BCE, university and CPP staff questioned why schools in disadvantaged areas were not sustainable. This, combined with Catholic social justice teaching, provided the impetus for the establishment of St Elsewhere's community partnerships program.

Basing the partnership on collegial discourse and grounded research, they studied full service schooling models in Ballarat, Victoria; New York and Chicago.   They preferred the caring community linked model of full service schooling. This model linked families to community services, whilst maintaining student learning as priority.   There was argument for employing a social worker rather than a community development worker, due to families' perceived high needs and visionaries' minimal knowledge of CD principles. So, a CD worker who majored in transformational philosophies of shared dialogue and reciprocity was selected.

The visionaries wanted the partnership to become embedded in the school as its heart, as a means of welcoming parents into the school community. Parents were invited to share their skills. It was hoped that this would minimise their isolation, and improve parental self-esteem. The partnership began simply, stemming from requests by parents for land to grow a garden. So, it was granted a three-year budget from the CEO, with funds managed by the area supervisor.

> V1: Community partnerships should oversee everything [that is]
> happening in the school [and be] integrated at the heart of it.

> This is how we operate at St Elsewhere – from a principle of partnership and being inclusive to all … Not just accepting differences, but really recognising and utilising differences as a benefit to the community. (V1 L 191-195)

To ensure the project's sustainability visionaries enlisted support from key personnel. Thus, "The very act of providing funding through the community partnerships programme, which enabled the employment of the cultural development officer in the school is itself evidence of a particular action- doing – reflective of a material-economic investment which enabled activities within the school which would not otherwise have been possible" (Grootenboer & Hardy, 2013, p. 714).

> V1: The two [CDW] roles … [and] setting up the community centre was funded … under the supervision of … the [Catholic Education Office] area supervisor [as] the manager of that budget … It was for a three-year project [from] 2006. (V1 L 130-135)

St Elsewhere's CPP had been established with a limited time span and is now embedded in school life. But questions emerge surrounding its relevance and viability. Has the community partnerships program remained faithful to its original purpose of caring and transformation or should purpose change as needs change? Is it sustainable if impacted by numerous variables, such as change of principals, leaders, staff and families? How is it possible to build a caring school community in a low SES multi-ethnic area, whilst ensuring that everybody's voice is heard and respected?

The research question which this chapter aims to answer is about staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for a caring and transformative school-based CPP. Therefore, this chapter presents findings that emerged from analyses and distillation of perspectives of St Elsewhere's visionaries, staff and parents. Theme one is sociocultural responsivity and care with subthemes: building community, and inclusion. Theme Two is transformation through participatory democracy including subthemes of collegial discourse, ongoing dialogue, and

future vision. These themes and sub themes, together with supporting evidence, provide insight into visionaries', staff and parents' perspectives of future sustainability and the notions of care and transformation within St Elsewhere's CPP.

6.2 6.2 THEME ONE: SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSIVITY AND CARE

St Elsewhere's community partnerships program was established as a caring response to perceived needs of students, parents and staff who may have benefitted from support. It was envisioned that a CPP would intentionally build a school community that was inclusive, welcoming and culturally responsive. For staff and parents, community was defined as a gathering of people from within and out of the school and parish community.

Whilst visionaries, staff and parent groups articulated their vision and purpose of a primary school based community partnerships program, each group viewed CPPs from differing lenses.

Parents perceived that if they were firstly individually welcomed into the partnership, then this affirming and caring gesture would build parental efficacy, enhance student learning, and positively impact staff's teaching. Visionaries and staff viewed parents as a collective group from a multi-ethnic, low SES context, almost as "the other". These parents were perceived by staff as benefitting from assistance with parenting their children. Staff indicated that a strength of a CPP was its participants sharing their gifts, talents and meals with each other. Staff perceived that once people received support, community could be established, and then participants could ideally look out for each other. This was very much an enabling perspective which almost bordered on tacit patriarchy.

> S8: You hear of [outside] groups … coming in and accessing the area … and see them from the back window of your classroom … using the space and getting so much out of it. (SFG2.1 L 217-220)

Because the community partnerships program was established to enhance parental engagement the notion of building community and how it impacts future possibilities for a CPP are discussed in the next section.

6.2.1   Building Community

Family school partnerships can be described as the connections between and within schools and the wider community. These connections are made in order to directly or indirectly, promote students' and families' social, emotional, physical and intellectual development (Epstein et al., 2002; Epstein, 1995). Community building is not linked to geographic boundaries, but refers to the types of social interactions which may occur within or beyond these boundaries (Nettles, 1991). Feeling a part of the wider school family was engendered by the CPP, through participation in parental engagement programs.

> P3: As a parent who does not have [an extended] family it's really helpful to me that I can come here. It's not just a place that I come and drop my child off and go home. It's a place where I can use resources for my other son … mainly through playgroup … I rely on my social network because I don't have family here so my friends are … important to me … I really enjoy coming here … I can stay and play with my son … have lunch on Wednesdays [and] meet other students…and families. (PFG1.3 L 119-121, 221-226)

Parents responded positively about community partnership programs and their benefits, including leading a purposeful life by helping each other through choosing to act with care and gentleness towards others. Some observations of families acting in a caring manner included the mothers who donated dresses for girls who needed one for their year 6 graduation ceremony. An Indigenous father donated his daughter's doll crib for Baby Jesus' manger and an Indigenous aunty donated fruit for the students' morning teas. Another baked a cake for Indigenous special days. Many ESL parents cooked food for children to taste a sample of their culture. Fusion generously donated cloth which was dot painted by the Indigenous students and sewn together as a reconciliation quilt by an ESL mum. Another Indigenous mum sewed curtains for the Indigenous room, whilst another made all the boys' and girls' costumes. One Indigenous mum donated her time facilitating

the P-3 Indigenous girls' group, the Pipi girls. A caring staff member anonymously donated clean, new school shirts for some students to use. Another caring staff member would drive children home who had not been picked up after school and others would help staff members with home based issues. The new CDW generously offered his time and skills when my family experienced a medical emergency. These are only some of the many acts of kindness and caring that have occurred through the course of the CPP.

> P6: At the end of the day...everything has a purpose and I think...
> [A partnership] is just about the wider community...making everyone aware. In an ideal world, we would be considerate of everyone and it's just trying to help it [through] peace and harmony. (PFG 2.3 L 341-345)

Caring opportunities to interact with all participants, in a friendly, non-threatening environment included times when staff, students and the wider community shared lunch. These multi-purposed lunches not only provided students with a home cooked meal. They aided students with socialisation skills, such as politeness, etiquette, tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Classes rotated weekly in being invited to the community centre to eat a meal, which was sourced, cooked and served by volunteer parents. It was then shared with different community groups, such as youth with a disability. All off-duty staff were welcome to interact with the youth and students.

Observing the grandparent who was chief chef was pure joy. He would not only serve the children, but give a running monologue on the meal's recipe and ethnic origin. This was accompanied by some story or anecdote about a time he had eaten that food. The children were captivated. His special gift was relating to children with special needs. This was no doubt fostered by the fact that his daughter was intellectually impaired. A number of his volunteer staff had special needs and being able to serve others in a purposeful way was a therapeutic outlet for them.

The care, time and commitment that the partnership expended in creating the community centre and school as family friendly spaces was appreciated by

parents. Murals were painted as a whole school effort facilitated by an Indigenous mother, as well as individually by a migrant youth. These murals served as healing strategies for both artists, as they made connections with students and families during creation of these projects.

> P3: As a new parent … the first thing I saw first day of school when I walked in [was art and photos] and I thought, "Oh, wow! They have put a lot of effort into putting things up and making it look nice" … I also like the wall that C painted right next to the doors there [at the community centre]. It's nice and bright and colourful and it just says, "Come on in". (PFG1.3L 313-315 and 299,300)

Parents articulated the difference between a community development model and a social service model of community partnership programs. Parents perceived a CD model of a partnership as building community through empowering families to assist each other as caring participants in the CPP. This was rather than just as recipients of assistance. This was an interesting finding because the parents were familiar with negative aspects of social services. These included waiting for appointments and being given handouts. This treatment eroded confidence and dignity, because of their lack of genuine care. It set people up in what Leonardo (2002) calls a helpless cycle of dependency. The parents indicated a preference for a community development model of partnerships, as it encouraged people to build "beloved community" (hooks, 2000, p. x).

> P4: Social service … deals … with helping people out financially and housing … Whereas community partnerships is more about bringing community together and everyone helping each other. (PFG2.1 L 10-12)

A community development model of CPPs was favoured by staff over a social service model.   Staff perceived that a CD model assisted people to identify, develop and utilise their strengths. Staff also felt that the social service model of a CPP merely "helped" people with immediate needs. This was rather than teaching them to manage their needs in the future. Staff perceived that a CD

model of partnerships could augment peoples' self-esteem. This would be through equipping them with life skills, thereby empowering them to share experiential knowledge with others.

> S3: [Community Development is about] empowering people. Giving them the skills … knowledge and the understanding of how to … help themselves, instead of just offering a service to [those who have] a need. And that could be anyone. (SFG1.3 L10-12)

The CDW's role was perceived by parents as a caring support for families as he worked towards "a reconstruction of…society based on human rather than material values" (hooks, 1982, 189). Examples of the one-cared for (the parent) accepting the help of the ones-caring (the CD Workers) and acting co-operatively to enhance that level of care, occurred in the community centre daily (Noddings, 1984). Some documented examples of the acceptance of care by parents included the use of the computers, cooking facilities and meeting tables by the parents. Parents were welcome to relax in the centre's lounge chairs, use the whiteboard for notices and harvest vegies in the garden. The community centre had interpreters as required and offered some courses in languages other than English. A lawyer specialising in migrant affairs also visited once a week. The first community development worker even attended some custody cases with parents to advocate for them to receive their children back in their care.

> P4: [The community development worker] … was helping a family … with a school issue, but it wasn't at our school. They have children [here and also] in another school … He was helping bridge the communication gap … between the parents and the school … to make sure that everything worked out. (PFG2.1 L 41-45)

The community centre was created so families would have a caring place and space of their own. Whilst it is connected to, but not situated within the school, it's perceived by both parents and staff as the hub of the partnership. In the early days of the partnership, parents could sign in through the community centre. This

initiative encouraged parents to visit the school who normally would have avoided the school office. However, the school policy now is that all visitors to the school, including parents, have to sign in through the school office.

Because both parents and staff identified the inclusiveness of St Elsewhere as an absolute in its community partnerships program, the notion of inclusion will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Inclusion

Parents emphasised the importance of feeling welcome and cared for. This underpinned their perspective of the partnership's aim which included that staff be perceived as friends to those who needed one. This welcoming entailed inclusion of everyone who was motivated by social justice in the building of a school community, regardless of demographics, ethnicity, religious persuasion or physical ability.

Staff indicated that it was imperative everybody felt unconditionally included and needed. Staff specified that school-based CPPs should encourage purposeful family/ school engagement. Furthermore, the local area's low SES compelled the partnership to focus on not only caring for, but also connecting marginalised and disadvantaged families.

Parents described caring for families as provision of shared meals, such as lunches and breakfasts. These meals were perceived as opportunities in which people gather as an inclusive community to eat, chat and gain confidence to define their needs. This was preferred to merely being given handouts from charity to consume individually at home.

> P6: This area is a lower income [area], so when families feel that they can come here [for things] ... like... lunches on Wednesday...to them it's a big deal, it's important. (PFG 2.3 L 60-62)

Overall, staff were positive about ways in which families were cared for and supported through St Elsewhere's community partnerships program. Although parents identified ESL and new families, disability and low SES families as deriving

benefit from the partnership; they did not perceive themselves as recipients of assistance through the partnership, except through socialisation. Staff perceived these opportunities for social connection were fundaments to community building as people pursue "communitarian and relational values" (Noddings, 2002b, 67).

> S1: Just making them feel welcome. Maybe have some programs in place where they [can] feel welcome themselves and the students [can] join in with their own cultural group. The cooking program has been fantastic for that [as] it allows the garden projects here [to be utilised] … There is a lot of food related groups [and] they are meeting that need. (SFG1.1 L 67-70, 195)

Whilst establishing a caring, inclusive partnership it became necessary to adequately train teachers in community development principles and working with multicultural families. Thus, staff engaged in PD about family cultural protocols. This was to equip teachers trained to teach mainstream, white children, with minimal differentiation between cultures, religions, and nationalities. Over time there had been a dramatic shift in the multicultural composition of families at the school. Whereas, previously, most families identified as Caucasian or Indigenous, they were now predominantly migrants or refugees, with about 10 percent Indigenous families. Therefore, teachers were now "confronted [on a daily basis] with the demographics which indicate[d] that 'whiteness' … cease[d] to be the norm ethnicity in classroom settings on all levels" (hooks, 1994a, p. 41). To prepare teachers in delivering a culturally sensitive curriculum, community centre staff have facilitated PD days about cultural literacies and understandings. They were presented in conjunction with the ESL department, Indigenous parents or other groups. These PD days covered topics which have enabled teachers to view their students' contexts from a caring perspective. Topics included life in Sri Lankan refugee camps, residual effects of torture and trauma on refugee children, sustainable gardening practices in Myanmar, Indigenous spirituality and utilising culturally inclusive classroom resources.

When the school entered a nation-wide dance and music competition, they chose the theme, "Where do I belong?" Each cultural dance group presented a small

sketch of their country. This was aimed at enhancing each child's belief that they all belonged at St Elsewhere's. This belief was despite the fact that they were originally from different countries and backgrounds. It encouraged those brought here against their wishes or feeling displaced, that at St Elsewhere they would find where they belonged. This sharing of cultural wisdom enables the school to move beyond merely living with difference or managing it, to authentic inclusion and care.

Perceiving the school as a place of safety was important to families who lived in challenging home contexts or who had escaped traumatic refugee experiences. The notion of St Elsewhere as a safe place or haven is an absolute in its caring and welcoming philosophy.

> P1: [The purpose of the St Elsewhere community partnership is]
> to bring everybody together so that all the parents can be friends
> … they can use the community centre when they want to … they
> can come here and be safe … and have people to talk to. (PFG2.2
> L 216-219)

Care for students extended to children gifted in non-academic areas. They were encouraged to share their skills through the partnership, whilst being instructed by both parents and staff to learn different, relevant and engaging skills. This was rather than having to confine themselves to a progressively more standardised curriculum.

> S9: I would hope … that [the CPP is] still here. It would be sad not
> to be seeing those families coming in and … showing the kids
> how to use the land. It would be a shame for … those kids who
> have gifts and talents not necessarily in an academic way, not to
> be able to have that avenue and to share their skills and talents
> … I am hoping [the partnership is] still here. (SFG2.3 L228-233)

Despite all the warm and fuzzy feelings engendered by the community partnerships program, present mainly in the parents' responses of the community centre as the hub of the partnership, questions remain. Did the presence of the community centre actually impede parental engagement with staff and students?

If so, was this because of its physical location or because of its mere existence? For some parents, the community centre symbolised the entire partnership, which may have limited parents' views of how they themselves could contribute to or demonstrate leadership within the CPP. Was the CPP's aim to keep parents confined in the community centre? Or was it a transformational aim of assisting them to work both with their children in the classroom and at home?

Parents indicated a desire to learn ways of assisting their children with homework. Home visitation by the CDW may have assisted parents' awareness of St Elsewhere's community partnerships program. These home visits could have been utilised to assist parents in many areas, including homework help. This was the case in the early days of the CPP because parents felt more comfortable interacting with a non-teaching staff member.

> S12: Even going out to [the parents] to let them know that this isn't just an ordinary school. This is a school with extras … You can come here and not feel like you're just in a school ground [so it] doesn't have that same threatening notion … The community worker has … done a home visit [which has] broken the ice. [He said] "I am not actually a teacher, but I am at the school [in] the community centre, and you can come via the community centre to the school anytime". (SFG3.2 L 183-189)

To augment students' educational experience, whilst engaging parents, staff perceived that a caring CPP should be authentically inclusive. The partnership should extend beyond school borders to embrace the wider community. Within the notion of authentic inclusion is the notion of reciprocity. Reciprocity involves working together to share skills, talents and knowledge for each other's mutual benefit. Adopting the tenets of a reciprocal empowerment model could be an important factor for sustainability of caring CPPs.

> V3: I thought [the parents] would experience it as [a] welcoming place … where their skills could be identified, and enhanced. [So] that they could put their skills, abilities and time at the disposal of the school community and … wider community. (V3 L 42-44)

It was important that the CPP interact with the wider community so that caring networks benefitting the school and its families could be established. This would then increase the partnership's viability and sustainability, through continuous renewal.

> P6: There is a potential for it to grow and I think that's really important. The more we can put into the community [through] the partnership, the more we can have. The more that the school can have, the more we can just grow. (PFG2.3 L 442-445)

> P4: Well communication is … everything really … We can advertise down at the community centre what's on offer … in the parish and school newsletters and on the school website … Putting something in the local newspaper would be a good way of getting more people into the programs. (PFG 2.1 L 144-148)

Refugees who had suffered traumatic experiences because of their ethnicity, religious or cultural beliefs, often felt insecure or ashamed about sharing their culture's food, clothing, music, art, religion or stories. The caring ethos of St Elsewhere's CPP has enabled these and other parents to overcome their initial shyness and acknowledge their collective duty to reciprocate when the community has helped them out.

> P6: How do you say it without directly saying," You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours?" …The community works for us so we should be working for the community. (PFG2.3 L 184,185,187)

To this end the school intentionally initiated special events for parents to share their skills, talents and interests. A positive outcome of this caring enterprise was that more parents were beginning to realise that they had something of interest to share.   More parents were participating, which contributed to building meaningful relationships through the partnership.

> S8: Things like harmony day or our family fun day where you see … all these groups coming in or parents … wanting to share their

gifts or talents and celebrate the community aspect of this school. (SFG2.2 L 222-225)

P5: It is a wider community. We all have different cultures coming in on [family fun day] doing dance and singing and fun activities … That is also a good way to showcase what they are doing. (PFG 2.2 L 152-155)

Whilst caring for the parents through community building and inclusion is a means of ensuring future sustainability of a CPP, there is another aspect of a partnership that ensures the authenticity of its parental engagement. That is, preparing for a transformative future which promotes parents as equal partners in a partnership. How this can be achieved through the notion of participatory democracy is discussed in the following section.

6.3 THEME TWO: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Critical notions of transformation include building people up and encouraging them to shine. This includes creating communities "based on human rather than material values" (hooks, 1982, 189). This notion of embracing human values such as respect, connectedness, sharing and affirmation delineated an initial purpose of the partnership. That is, to build up and empower parents to feel confident enough to participate in the CPP. Parents and staff were positive towards the notion of a partnership empowering families. Staff indicated that families were empowered when they engaged with the St Elsewhere CPP as active contributors and participants in their children's education.

Though building a viable and sustainable community was a specific purpose of St Elsewhere's CPP, it was necessary to demonstrate how the partnership would achieve this aim. This was attained through participation in collegial discourse and shared documentation with universities, academic circles and other schools. It was meant to be achieved by engaging in ongoing two-way dialogue between participants in the CPP. Finally, reflecting on how far the partnership had come and what its future vision was entailed another strategy for sustainability.

6.3.1 Collegial Discourse and Shared Documentation

Sustaining Catholic education in disadvantaged areas was a concern for the visionaries. Therefore, they engaged in collegial discourse with colleagues, universities, TAFEs and the wider community, and sourced partnership models from within Australia and overseas. In addition, they realised the importance of sharing the CPP's story of transformation with the wider community so they documented its journey for BCE and other schools. Numerous partnership models were scrutinised, whilst a university study was implemented to assess and analyse needs and performance. The "university was construed as a community resource to assist in facilitating improved engagement between schools and students, including as a vehicle for professional development of staff" (Grootenboer &Hardy, 2013, p. 700).

> V3: The structures that were put in place were a reference group
> that met quite regularly… composed of…staff of the community
> partnerships program…. key people from the school and… the
> head office of Catholic Education, including people like myself …
> [who were] keen on the program [and] somebody from [the
> local] university. (V3 L 20-28)

Visionaries networked with a university which formulated a framework for the St Elsewhere partnership. This occurred while the original two community development workers began separate research papers, focussing on diverse areas in the St Elsewhere CPP. One defined it as a reciprocal empowerment model of partnership and documented evidence to back up his theories. Whilst the other wrote about art cooperatives as meaningful conduits of expression for people in culturally diverse, low SES communities. It is unclear whether these papers were completed, as both workers have left the school.

The partnership itself organically developed into a model for research in minority areas, which was mutually beneficial. This was because sharing St Elsewhere's story not only served as an inspiration for other contextually similar schools, but it reenergised St Elsewhere's CPP to persevere. This affirmed the notion that this partnership was a valuable resource for students, parents and staff.

V1: Other things were to connect in that community linked model. [We wanted] to have connections with universities, so that what we were doing at the school could be grounded in relevant and effective research. (V1 L 111-113)

Experts in their field were invited to share their insights. As a means of identifying with and giving the participants a voice, a researcher specialising in marginalised and out of home children was invited to become a visionary. His recommendations to BCE included schools renewing their commitment to social or Gospel justice by employing more counsellors, giving more support to year co-ordinators and providing professional development for teachers (Dethlefs, 2004a).

After much discussion, the visionaries implemented community development principles, including participant input, as well as empowerment and inclusion of marginalised families. It also included augmenting children's self-esteem to enhance learning through provision of an alternative curriculum. The community partnerships program encouraged families to share skills, talents and interests. Visionaries acknowledged that the partnership comprised individuals from differing backgrounds who constructed their identities through diverse lenses. Whilst visionaries were aware that "an action can only be considered praxis if it takes into account the interests of … the student [and] the broader needs of society and the wider world" (Grootenboer & Hardy, 2013, p. 701), they engaged in ongoing research. Some years later, two administration staff travelled within Australia to study CD projects in schools of similar demographics and context.

V1: [Enhancing factors included] the qualities and … experience of the people involved … Keeping connected with the reference group and … the university study that [the CD workers were] undertaking … articulat[ed] what the principles of community development were about … We could start using … language [like] shared dialogue and reciprocity … Giving permission for all our community members to participate and belong [as well as] ownership of the community centre as that shared space and

place … They're principles that I have taken with me and [am] transferring into a new and very different context. (V1 L 155-167)

Documentation of the program occurred through written reports and anecdotal evidence. This was utilised by visionaries as a strategy for narrating the school's story, and ensuring the project's sustainability through maintaining that the CPP was an embedded part of the school. It worked in partnership with programs like the Indigenous program in a supportive, advisory capacity. The CPP enabled the Indigenous program to implement enrichment subjects which parents had requested and assisted with. These included art, film, dance, music, cooking, public speaking, drama, IT and horticulture that transformed students' perspectives of their cultural history and context.

> V1: I think to sustain … the program is [for it] to keep being reenergised … [and] to really take it forward into the broader educational community. Because it really is cutting edge work that is being done there … The next step is through things like … research and involvement … To broadcast … the work that is being done. For example, … developing the [Reconciliation Action Plan] … and documenting all the work that's done through the Indigenous education program … I see the Indigenous education program as very closely connected with the community partnerships. Because that's what it's all [about]. (V1 L182-190)

Annotated and story-driven documentation proving a project's validity to ensure its viability, is a contentious issue. This is because it is easy to measure how many children were served breakfast at breakfast club on a weekly basis. But it is not so easy to measure the bonding that occurs between an African refugee who has lost his dad to war and a Caucasian who has lost his dad to prison, whilst they are sharing a piece of toast. The program's sustainability also relies on ongoing mutual dialogue, which is discussed next.

6.3.2　Ongoing Dialogue

Staff contended that there was a dearth of communication in St Elsewhere's CPP, directly relating this to their scant knowledge of the partnership. Parents stated that no amount of knowledge can replace a friendly invitation, underpinned by welcome and inclusion, for leading to openness and frankness about genuine needs.

> P7: I think it's vital that people just feel welcome … [A] welcome comes from one person greeting or acknowledging another … Then communication builds and you find out what people need or want and what way you can help them or just be a friend to them. (PFG3.1 L 74-78)

Parents offered practical strategies for communication about the CPP, which they saw as a fundament to its sustainability.

> P5: So one of those things that … the community centre could do [is] a once a month big flyer. "Hey, this is what we are doing". Instead of the little snippet. Or … the kids bringing it home, because we don't always get everything from the kids … I am learning more since I have been here as well. "Okay, this is what is happening and this is how it works". Like I never knew until I started here that they did lunches here on a Wednesday. (PFG2.3 L 194-199)

Staff were very vocal when asked to respond on the notion of ongoing dialogue and communication in a CPP. Firstly, staff perceived that a partnership required multilingual information to families and students. Community centre staff supplied interpreters for parent/teacher nights and courses in the community centre, including gardening and English classes. The St Vincent de Paul migrants and refugee group provided sewing classes to skill participants with a means to develop a source of income. These services are advertised in both school and parish newsletters. Word of mouth is the preferred mode of communication for new arrival migrant and refugee people, who rely on their children to translate for

them. I said, *"So 2.2 mentioned signage. What other ways could we have communication in a community partnership?"*

> S7: Written word … in the parish newsletter [or] school newsletter [or] people going and talking at Mass [or] a leaflet drop. (S8 [Having a] letterbox drop [and] signs in the local St Vincent de Paul window) S7: Maybe [put it in] other places that people access, having some information there and encouragement [by] word of mouth for a lot of our families who wouldn't be able [to] read … S10 Perhaps nominating someone who feels comfortable to go out and spread the word [to their] cultural group or families that they know. (SFG2.1, 2.2, 2.4 L 112-120)

Secondly, staff felt that parental information would impact more if teachers or CDWs personally spoke with them. This is becoming increasingly necessary as more LBOTE families are welcomed in the school community. The school is finding that these parents have been traumatised by the effects of war or years in refugee camps and that building up a relationship with them is going to take time. For the Syrian parents, especially, the school is a welcome place of refuge. Whilst they are keen to stay and watch how their children are doing, the school is aware of the language barrier. Through the partnership, it has employed a number of Syrian cultural workers. These cultural workers both assist teachers in classrooms and translate for and liaise with parents. It is pleasing to note that these cultural workers are welcomed as employed staff. So, they share meals and breaks with other staff members in the staffroom which builds relationships on a personal level.

> S11: [The parents] are not going to read a letter that you send
> home. It's got to be a personal approach. (SFG3.1 L 179-180)

Thirdly, staff emphasised the need to communicate about the CPP and its programs. This is a fundament of building and sustaining a transformational community in a low SES. The CDW speaks at some student assemblies. As more parents are showing attendance, he outlines dates and times for various activities, programs and events. A weekly supplement appears in the hard copy school newsletter for the eldest child to bring home. There is a soft copy on the parents'

portal for those that request it. Staff are informed of the CPP at weekly staff meetings, and informally at Friday staff breakfasts.

The community centre is aesthetically pleasing and welcoming, with furniture that invites parents to linger. There are bright photos of activities, and noticeboards detailing weekly programs and upcoming events. Whilst the kitchen and sitting areas display hygiene, parenting and nutrition posters, as well as multi-lingual council and government flyers for parents. Staff perceive that it needs to be promoted more.

> S12: The families, staff and students [need to] be invited to be involved … Other community members would … find if [there was] more communication about it … that they were … welcome and that it is accessible to them … It is a matter of getting the information out to everybody … They could have their own newsletter [or] monthly community partnerships bulletin. (SFG3.2 L 57, 66-68, 70-71)

> S11: I know that parents aren't going to come unless we say who we are and what we are on about. (SFG3.1 L 193,194)

Fourth, as a Catholic school, staff felt that increasing parish connections, through speaking at church, was also a viable means of advertising St Elsewhere's CPP.

> S8: Students … can carry messages home … and … spread the word [at St Elsewhere Church]. (SFG2.2 L 121,122)

Fifth, St Elsewhere's students are a communication resource for families because they are keen to assist their parents in becoming vibrant participants in school life. This is achieved for parents through students sharing their experiential knowledge in a spirit of transformation.

> S7: We have … children that speak … lots of different languages [and] come from different backgrounds. [In attending] functions within their cultural groups… they could definitely spread the word and make other people aware of what was on offer. (SFG2.1 L125-129)

Sixth, staff perceived that they themselves needed to be better informed about what each class was doing within the partnership. Formerly, this issue was being addressed during gatherings before school. These were gatherings at which each class, their teacher, and parents were informed of what was happening that day. Classes now go straight to their classrooms as a time-saving measure aimed at increasing face to face teaching time. This appears to be a means of keeping parents in the dark about what is happening at school. It ensures that parents have little reason to appear on school grounds, other than down at the community centre.

> S3: A classroom teacher would know what [her/his] class is doing
> in terms of how [it works in the community partnerships]. But
> you probably would not have that knowledge of [what] the class
> next door is doing [with the community partnerships, for
> instance] the 6/7s. (SFG1.3 L 163-165)

Because all partnerships need to constantly reflect on where they are going the notion of future vision for sustainability of the St Elsewhere's CPP is discussed next.

6.3.3   Future Vision

These focus groups were possibly the first-time parents were asked to discuss sustainability of the CPP. In them, parents were unanimous in wishing to see the partnership prosper. They offered ideas like technology and language classes, interactive children's activities, and sports to ensure its sustainability. Parents stated that key to sustainability of the partnership was the willingness to evolve with the community and its needs, which is a key aspect of transformation. This response to needs included purchasing a community bus for special purposes. Although five years' on to date this has not happened, it is a hopeful prospect for the future. Parents mentioned and hiring out rooms in the CC to ensure financial viability. At the time of this study, these rooms were free of charge to community groups.

> S11: It does have a specific purpose here that you couldn't translate to another part of Brisbane … I just hope in five years' time that Cath Ed. will still fund it … Where do you see it in five years' time? Where do I see it in two years' time? I just want it to continue in some form because our … socio-economic situation in St Elsewhere hasn't changed. (SFG3.1 L 161-167)

Parents' ideas in advancing strategies for the CPP's sustainability, were limited to building crowd capacity and the implementation of more programs. There was minimal evidence of these parents themselves believing they could positively affect the partnership's sustainability. Their responses indicated readiness to take on leadership roles suited to their tastes and capabilities. Parents could have taken on roles including facilitators of groups or programs, coordinators of special events, members of parent advisory committees or forums, and teachers of their children.

Although parents were grateful for the CPP and wished to see it continue, they mostly spoke of the partnership as a separate entity to both the school and to themselves. This seemed as if the CPP existed for the benefit of others, but was not really relevant to their own life.

> P7: I hope the partnership prospers, I really do. That's my wish.
> [That] it just gets stronger [and] the networks get tighter and it grows. (PFG3.1 L 133,134)

To ensure viability and sustainability of a transformative St Elsewhere's partnership, its leaders must become advocates for social justice. This occurs by remaining open to learning about its participants. In addition, a school philosophy can be developed that acknowledges, affirms and celebrates the diverse school community in which the staff work. To achieve these aims, leaders should actively encourage staff to invite input from parents of differing backgrounds, interests and lifestyles. Staff can develop deeper awareness of and sensitivity for families' personal contexts with a view to celebrating and utilising their diversity as social capital.

P7: If you are not part of the community you don't tend to really care for it. But if you are engaged with it, you tend to have a vested interest in it. (PFG3.1 L 86-87)

Whilst a leader's beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge and skills shape his/her leadership style they may transform or stagnate the process. The caring and nurturing leadership of the partnership, including the principal, was perceived as the driving force behind the vision. A CPP's leadership had a responsibility to ensure its sustainability. Furthermore, because leaders for authentic partnerships value transformational family engagement, St Elsewhere should intentionally implement strategies to engage and sustain parents in purposeful roles. These purposeful roles include seeking parents' ideas and opinions as valuable sources of inspiration. Everybody has a story to tell, everybody has something of value to contribute. When leadership is a process from the bottom up, rather than the top down, inclusive care and transformation becomes a reality.

P5: It's got so many benefits to it. It's really hard to see that big vision of where it's going to go, but … it really depends on the leadership … and what the community wants at the time. At the moment, the community is saying "Okay, we need brekkie club [and] the internet … But in five years' time they may say, "We don't need the internet [or] to learn about computers, but we need to come in to see about a bus to facilitate getting people around the community". So, really [having] that five-year plan (PFG2.2 L 359-366)

As an additional sustainability measure, the principal should be able to purposefully choose to employ staff members who have worked for some time with the children and families. Because authentic, transformational relationship building takes time, devotion and diligence (Vinson et al., 2015). The best person for the job may not necessarily be someone with the highest academic qualifications. Rather, it may someone exhibiting care for students and their families, who has demonstrated a willingness to stay until reciprocal trust is built up. This sense of being cared for and cared about is particularly important for

marginalised disadvantaged parents who have relied on impersonal government interactions. It is also important for traumatised refugee parents who have experienced racism, ostracism and great loss in their lives.

> V1: Other recommendations included … the principal [having] input into the staffing … [So] when it is a requirement of Catholic schools to take on graduate teachers [I could say], "Well, actually, no, I have teachers … on contract … teaching very successfully here with our students and we need to maintain that continuity." So just a greater input into decision making for school staffing. (V1L 103-110)

Listening to the parents gleaned interesting ideas which staff had not referred to. These included students' interaction with the CPP to extend beyond their primary schooling. Parents perceived this as part of a transformational family centred participatory program that utilised past students as mentors for current ones. In fact, past students visiting to "help" on last days of terms was a tradition that had been in operation for many years at St Elsewhere. It is now discouraged, as the newer principals do not remember the students who were here some years ago. This again reiterates the argument for employing long term staff willing to get to know the families, including older siblings.

> P8: Hopefully the ones that go to school here will finish high school. [Then they can come back to] become involved in the [school] community and not just leave. (PFG3.2 L 135,136)

Any changes that may occur in the partnership should be driven by the community's needs. This reiterates the need for community consultation and input before decisions are made. This is because it is easy as school staff and church figures to impose what we think people may need. We may do this without taking the time to listen to what it is they actually want or need.   Authentic transformational partnerships are willing to not only listen to participants' voices, but to act on them where possible. In this way we ensure that the CPP remains both relevant and sustainable.

> P4: It's got to evolve with the community and what the community wants. (PFG 2.1 L 370,371)

Accessing a wide range of community collaboration entails careful monitoring by participants in the partnership. This ensures non-duplication of services that could be retrieved elsewhere. Transformational leaders of a CPP should have an extensive knowledge of the local community in which its families live. Their personal context gives valuable insight into why the parents and children act and react as they do. "Students and parents have a high regard for teachers who demonstrate pride in and respect for their community" (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 205). At St Elsewhere, some of the CPP's leaders not only shop and eat in the local area, but they attend local community events and forums on community development to find out what is available for the families to access. It's a healthy sign that the CPP is aware that it cannot and does not have to do everything to be viable and sustainable. It just needs to ensure that what it does do is done within a framework of caring and that it is done to the best of its ability.

> S10: While … a school might offer [financial support], it's also tapping in to the resources that are out there [and] not doubling up … So if community [groups] are offering mini courses [in] language … [or] finance … [or] emotional support … we can help them tap into that … Because we can't do everything. It just depends on what it is. (SFG2.4 L 79-84)

Because the CPP has always strived for authentic inclusion, welcoming refugee children of differing nationalities is becoming a daily occurrence. This enriches the partnership and grants it a broader, transformational view than merely a white, Christo-androcentric lens. St Elsewhere is a multicultural Catholic school which embraced Catholic social justice as impetus for the partnership.

These children and families are enabling the St Elsewhere's school community to become enlightened about world current affairs and to exhibit Christian tolerance, mercy and compassion. The children are being given a chance to answer Christ's query of, "Who is my neighbour?" This is through demonstrating care for children of varying cultures, nationalities, religions and skin colours. This transforming

validation of humanity in its diversity teaches more than a hundred textbooks discussing the topic of racial tolerance. Their diversity is a gift and their inclusion is a fact. As we welcome more cultures into St Elsewhere's community, we can be thankful that we are the face of God for these children who are looking for a place to belong.

St Elsewhere's inclusiveness, by the embracing of many different cultures and languages, is exemplified by the plaque which states, 'Love spoken here'. In fact, the room in which the plaque hung for many years symbolically tells the story of the changing face of St Elsewhere's. It began as the wheelchair accessible inclusive education room for the disabled teacher. Then it was periodically the room for inclusive education, ESL and Indigenous studies, followed by the inclusive education and numeracy support room. Eventually it was repurposed as a mainstream classroom for a couple of years. Then it served as the music and arts room, until it again became an ESL room for LBOTE children.

> S7: I think [the partnership should be] evolving and changing as the years and the time goes on as well. Maybe the types of families and cultures might change. We have had a lot of Burmese children coming into the school, whereas before that wasn't the case as much. So it's changing with the times and the community who's here at the time. (SFG2.1 L 234-237)

The first parents' focus group were an enthusiastic collection of mothers whose responses to my question were so honest and interesting I feel I should include them in their entirety. I asked, *"So, where do you see the St Elsewhere community partnership in five years' time?"*

> P2: (She laughs and straightens herself as if ready to launch into her response). Well, I hope that L. is running a restaurant (she means in the community centre), and [1.1] and I are famous for running the P and F (they smile at each other and nod). And I hope through being on the P and F and doing so much fundraising that the school gets more resources and achieves

more … Who knows what is going to happen in five years? But whatever will happen it can only get better. (PFG1.2 L 254-257)

P1: Being on the P and F [means that] I am going to be here for years. I have one more to go through school, so I will probably be here in five years' time. So, it would be nice to see the school progress. (PFG1.1 L 258-260)

I prompt her, *"Can you tell me what that might look like, 1.1? I am trying to discern your ideas for the future".* The excitement in the air is almost palpable now. I can see the ladies all wanting to have their say on this issue. They clearly love what the partnership has offered them and want to see it continue.

P1: I would … like a new playground … The one we've got now is good but a bigger … and a safer one would be better for the children. And [I would like] more going on at the community centre. (PFG1.1 L 263-265)

"What kind of things going on?" I ask.

P1: Language lessons, interactive things for the kids, and more sports for the younger kids as well. I would like to see that for the younger age groups. (PFG1.1 L 267,268)

P2: That would be fantastic if the younger ones could get into it. And I would also love to see undercover walkways for the children from prep so that they did not get wet. That's just one of the things that I would love to see happen in five years. (PFG1.2 L 272-275)

P3: I would like to see more mums in playgroup. (PFG1.3 L 276)

P1: I would like to see more mums and parents involved in everything like P and F, the meetings and fundraisers and things like that. In five years' time, I would like to see more people helping than we have now. (PFG1.1 L 277-279)

These mums were so excited about the future of the CPP, I found myself being excited with them. St Elsewhere's partnership began as a caring response intended to assist people who may benefit from support. There is a question of whether a CPP merely caring for the parents can remain viable and sustainable. Indeed, is it even relevant or meaningful? To ensure that the CPP is a transformative and purposeful one with the parents, St Elsewhere must include parents in leadership and advisory roles. The previous parents who spoke on sustainability of the partnership and where they wanted it to be in five years' time would have been motivational and inspiring leaders. Sadly, this did not transpire and all three left the school within a couple of years. The focus groups revealed other parents who were ready for leadership roles. A discussion of parental leadership through care and transformation of a sustainable CPP is discussed in the following section.

6.4 DISCUSSION OF CARE AND TRANSFORMATION IN FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE ST ELSEWHERE CPP

The CPP at St Elsewhere was established as a means of "changing things for the better" through "doing policy differently" for participants (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 1128, p. 161). It aimed to build community amongst its participants through caring for students, families and staff. It invited them to share their skills, knowledge and talents with each other.

The CPP's prime ideological principles were transformation through authentic inclusion and mutual reciprocity. This was to be achieved through the implementation of a Community Development model of school/community partnerships. Furthermore, sustaining the program entailed collegial discourse and documentation of the transforming projects that were in place at St Elsewhere. In addition, a commitment to ongoing dialogue was required, between leaders and participants in the partnership which included discussing ideas for future vision of the CPP.

Parental empowerment through inclusion in traditional methods of engagement was fostered, as parents were encouraged to share their skills, talents, interests and culture. These included through becoming active participants in special events

such as harmony day or family fun days. These are held on prescribed days and entail an invitation to families to participate. Regardless of ethnic origin, parents have indicated that they are ready and willing to become more active in their children's daily education within the classrooms. They want to become more involved than merely being relegated to a specific place and space such as the community centre.

Much effort was expended in engaging in collegial discourse with colleagues, universities, TAFEs and the wider community, whilst sourcing partnership models from within Australia and overseas. There was documentation of the project's journey with a view to its sustainability.

Criticism of the lack of communication between leaders and participants could have been minimised or avoided, if all parents and staff had been invited to provide input during the initial stages of the CPP's establishment. This highlights the importance of initial consultation, as well as ongoing mutual dialogue between all participants, for the sustainability and future vision of any caring CPP. For a CPP to be truly transformational in its education of students, engagement of parents and development of teachers and staff, it needs to create shared leadership opportunities. These opportunities would be for all participants, including parents, in the spirit of participatory democracy. The parents have shown that they are more than ready to become leaders, through the multi varied suggestions they have given for the future sustainability of the CPP. If they are embraced as true partners in the partnership, it would become authentically transformed. In this way, the partnership would move forward from being an enabling one that cares *for* the parents, to an empowering one that cares *with* the parents.

Chapter 7: CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A CD INFORMED PARENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM IN A DISADVANTAGED SCHOOL

7.1   INTRODUCTION

This ethnography has explored concepts of care and transformation in a community development-informed parent engagement program in a disadvantaged school with multi-ethnic, low SES families. In doing so, it highlights the personalising experiences of the families and the community partnerships program which was established as a supportive means of caring for them.

Through exploring individual experiences and perspectives of staff and parental participants, this ethnography seeks to rework the discourse of parents. That is, from merely a caring one that focuses on benefitting from support and guidance, to a transformative discourse that recognises, utilises and celebrates parents' capacity and capabilities for social success and leadership.

Particular reflection focuses on ways in which educational learning can enhance acknowledgement, utilisation and celebration of the home contexts of disadvantaged parents. Data from this socially critical, qualitative ethnography inform the study. The understandings, experiences, values and choices of staff and parents in a small disadvantaged urban Catholic primary school inform the discussion.

This study offers insights about sociocultural care and responsivity in working with and celebrating disadvantaged, multi-ethnic, low SES parents. It reveals how transformation of parental engagement in schools is only possible through authentically involving parents in an equitable system of participatory democracy. A framework for contextualised sensitive care in parental engagement in schools is given (see Table 7.1). Implications for how ethnographies can supplement parental engagement typologies and strengthen school-based community partnership programs are also discussed.

7.2 REVIEW OF DATA CHAPTERS

There are three data chapters included in this thesis. They are firstly, *Purpose: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives on care and transformation as purpose for a CPP*. The second data chapter is *Power: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives of how power can enable or impede care and transformation in a CPP*. Lastly, the third data chapter is *Possibility: An exploration of staff and parents' perspectives of future possibilities for a caring and transformative CPP*.

Overarching themes of sociocultural responsivity and care, and transformation through participatory democracy were identified in the literature as being core components of authentic school/community partnerships. They are utilised in all three data chapters as an inclusive thread throughout. They are pertinent to the story of St Elsewhere's community partnerships program which was implemented as a supportive response to perceived needs of students, families and staff. Each data chapter explores notions of care and transformation in a CPP through exploring staff and parents' perspectives.

The purpose chapter analyses care and transformation as purpose for a CPP. This is achieved by exploring and contrasting the visionaries' aims for establishing the St Elsewhere CPP with staff and parent perspectives. Theme one is sociocultural responsivity and care with subthemes: supporting disadvantaged students and disadvantaged families, and staff in Catholic schools, inclusion and diversity, and community centres. Theme two is transformation through participatory democracy, with subthemes: engaging students, connecting families, developing staff, and community development.

The power chapter analyses how power can enable or impede care and transformation in a CPP. It highlights the central role of leaders such as principals in school based contexts. In Catholic parish schools like St Elsewhere, priests impact on a community partnerships program's success. Theme one is sociocultural responsivity and care with subthemes: commitment to care, puritans and priests, and leadership style. Theme two is transformation through participatory democracy with subthemes: community centre as hub, and parents as partners.

The possibility chapter explores whether a caring and transformative community partnerships program is a possibility. Whilst analysing St Elsewhere CPP's viability and sustainability, possible strategies to achieve these aims are explored. Theme one is sociocultural responsivity and care with subthemes: building community, and Inclusion. Theme two is transformation through participatory democracy with subthemes: collegial discourse, ongoing dialogue, and future vision.

To begin with, I will discuss the St Elsewhere community partnerships model and its innovative elements in the following section.

7.2.1 What the Community Partnerships Program Model was and why it was innovative

St Elsewhere's community partnerships program was implemented as a caring response to research conducted in secondary and primary schools. This research found that quality education was difficult for marginalised students living out of home or in compromising home contexts (Dethlefs, 2004, 2006). A Catholic school in a low SES had been closed by the BCE due to declining enrolments and St Elsewhere enrolled most of these children. To provide support for diverse students, (including 60 to 70% students who were marginalised, had ESL, or behavioural and learning difficulties), St Elsewhere implemented a full service schooling model of community partnerships. It was hoped that a community development program would prove beneficial in assisting young children and their parents. It was hoped that it would assist teachers directly and indirectly.

The school's low SES, high multicultural context required specialist support. A guidance counsellor and school pastoral worker were already employed. The program was innovative because of the visionaries' request. They argued for a community partnerships program based on a community development model. They preferred this model over a social service model, despite caring for others being a Josephite mandate. Visionaries cited Catholic social justice teaching as impetus for establishing a community partnerships program at St Elsewhere. BCE acted on its statement that it existed to teach, challenge and transform. Whilst stating that it had a preferential option to educate disadvantaged children, it provided funding for a community partnerships program at St Elsewhere.

The visionaries perceived that the community partnerships program was established to firstly support disadvantaged students. Support would be delivered through provision of an alternative curriculum and through employment of two CDWs to interact with students.

Secondly, the community partnerships program would support teachers in educating these students and interacting with students' families. Teachers' support would be delivered through provision of a cultural development worker. His role was to liaise with staff about programming and assist them with its implementation.

Thirdly, the community partnerships program would support disadvantaged families. Family support would be delivered by a community development worker. His role entailed assisting with meeting needs through connecting families to services. This role included minimising parental isolation by identifying and celebrating their skills and enhancing parental engagement.

Because St Elsewhere is a Catholic school, both the principal and the parish priest are perceived by parents as people of authority and power. Their accountability and liability to be bound by the ethics of caring and integrity are enhanced. Their leadership choices have had lasting impacts on implementing and sustaining the community partnerships program.

Staff and parents' data analysis revealed the CPP's purpose aligned closely with the visionaries' original caring plan. However, there are some differing viewpoints and perceptions. These differences occur especially within the areas of how care and transformation are enacted in parent school engagement at St Elsewhere. It is within this dissonance that lies the richness of this ethnography.

How parents and staff perceived that the partnership supported disadvantaged students will be explored in the next section.

7.2.2   Supporting Disadvantaged Students

The first stated purpose of the St Elsewhere community partnerships program was to provide care by supporting children. Some children's home contexts entailed living with low socio-economic families, migrant and refugee families, and low literacy families. Many of these children presented with a variety of special needs.

These needs included ESL, behavioural issues, social emotional issues and learning difficulties. The community partnerships program aimed to enhance the quality of students' engagement with learning. This enhancement would occur through the provision of an alternative curriculum, whilst utilising creative strategies to meet their diverse needs.

Although some parents and staff were unsure as to why the CPP was actually established, they agreed with the visionaries' perceptions. This was that a partnership purpose was supporting students through provision of alternate programs.

These programs for students were varied. They included shared class/community lunches and the community garden. There was homework club, playgroup, life skills, social skills, breakfast club, crafts, and cooking, academic and multicultural programs amongst others. Staff agreed with the visionaries, that supporting students through the CPP entailed providing a fundamental right of all children, which is education. Staff contended that the CPP contributed to educating students through various means. These included classroom withdrawal, meal provision before tests and assistance with planning and implementation of alternative curriculum enrichment programs. Staff appeared to view all students from the lens of a neutral veneer. This was one in which students were all entitled to the same treatment, regardless of their race, gender, class, culture or religious orientation. However, staff at all times indicated awareness of students' personal home contexts (disadvantaged, multi-ethnic, low SES). They perceived that this fact constituted a core purpose for establishment of the CPP.

Another purpose for the CPP was to provide support for teachers in working with disadvantaged students. Therefore, how parents and staff perceived that the St Elsewhere partnership supported teachers to help these children and their families is discussed below.

7.2.3   Supporting Teachers to Help

A second purpose of the CPP was supporting teachers to work with students and their families. Although the visionaries had hoped that the community partnerships program would become embedded in school life as its heart, staff

viewed the CPP as a separate entity to the day to day business of teaching students. This finding was supported by the fact that the community development workers were perceived by staff as assisting teachers in developing and delivering programs for marginalised and behaviourally challenged students. These programs were usually away from the classroom environment. The provision of interpreters by CPP staff for families to talk with classroom teachers was perceived by staff as a positive means of inclusion for some parents. This highlighted the fact that for staff and parents, the CPP primarily existed to assist migrant and refugee families with assimilation into Australian life. This was evidenced by the high number of references to those families in the staff and parent responses.

The two roles of community development worker and cultural development worker, along with the community centre, were created as resources to assist teachers. These teachers were endeavouring to educate students with a diverse range of emotional and academic abilities, life experiences and cultural backgrounds (Chavkin, 1993). These challenges were compounded for teachers by perceived minimal parental engagement, which was reality for a number of valid reasons. Teachers needed support in understanding that varying parenting styles were due to differing sociocultural perspectives of care. They were aware of how important it was to be prepared as educators working with diverse families (Chavkin, 2005).

The following section explores how care and transformation may be enacted in a school environment.

7.3 HOW ARE CARE AND TRANSFORMATION ENACTED IN PARENT SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT?

7.3.1 Care

Caring in a low SES school based context encompasses providing support for all participants. This includes meeting the needs of families in order to enhance students' learning experiences.

The parents had a diverse range of needs stemming from barriers to parental engagement. These barriers included prior negative experiences of schooling, low SES and low literacy. For ESL and LBOTE families there were language barriers and

differing cultural issues surrounding care and parenting. Moreover, for refugee parents, there were unique barriers to parental engagement. These barriers were exacerbated by prior experiences of torture and trauma by government officials or authority figures. These experiences resulted in refugee parents being understandably wary of any institutionalised care.

A major strength of St Elsewhere is its history of celebrating differences in its student population. It has always embraced multicultural perspectives and has been inclusive and respectful of its high level of diversity. This has ensured that enrolments of multi-ethnic and special needs children has remained high. The school has remained mindful of this fact, that "it is critical that strategies recognise the importance of a community's historical, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural resources" (Chavkin, 2000, p. 288). The community partnerships program was established partly as a means of providing specific support for these children and their families. The partnership was viewed as a means of ensuring that the staff as "educators [became] trained to surmount barriers between families and schools" (Chavkin, 2000, p. 288).

Because caring for participants was an impetus for the establishment of the partnership, how parents and staff perceived care at St Elsewhere is discussed next.

7.3.2   What does care look like in practice in a parent engagement program?

Because of their low SES contexts, financial constraints often caused tension, anxiety, disharmony and discord in families. All programs on offer were perceived by parents as opportunities for children and families to develop life skills and socialisation skills. These included good manners, patience, nurturing and assisting others, and developing conversation skills.

In sharing class/community lunches, preparing, serving, sharing and clearing away meals were perceived by parents as not merely the consumption of a nutritious meal. Rather, they were viewed as a conduit to children's future success in life. Parents perceived these meals as being a physical, emotional, spiritual and sociocultural response to their own perceived isolation and marginalisation. These meals provided an opportunity for staff, parents and the wider community

to interact with students and each other in a non-threatening, emotionally fulfilling manner.

This was an interesting finding, because it challenged the traditional view of low SES parents as being merely consumers of free handouts. These meals were shared with intellectually and physically challenged young adults from the wider community. Children and parents were learning tolerance and acceptance of diversity. I would argue that these meals were "a Gospel of the street," a lived experience in which communitarian values were being enacted by students, families, staff and the wider community. This was in an immeasurably practical, rather than a theoretical and abstract manner. It was an exemplar of a school and community program which makes a difference for children and families who don't fit the conventional education system (Smyth et al., 2010).

For both staff and parents, supporting students included enhancement of student attendance and behaviour. Parents admitted that they couldn't always be there to spend quality time with their child. So, parents trusted community centre staff to take on a parental role in their place. This trust was fuelled by staff's ethics of care and passion for the students' wellbeing. Parents indicated satisfaction that not only behaviourally challenged students, but sometimes entire classes, would be invited to care for others. Caring activities included raising chickens and guinea pigs, as well as working in the community garden.

Concurring with staff perspectives, parents perceived that students viewed the CPP as being the community centre. Parents perceived that for students the community centre was somewhere to go when they were having a bad day in class. It was a place where they could join in alternate programs and they could feel comfortable enough to talk to someone who was not school staff. Parents perceived that challenging students benefitted from interacting with non-teaching community centre staff, rather than the principal or assistant principal.

When discussing their own child's access to the community centre, most said it was to participate in community building activities. Some of these community building activities included homework club, in which high school students volunteered to tutor those students whose parents were unable to assist their children at home. This inability was due to a number of factors such as time

constraints for working parents, lack of knowledge or language barriers. Other activities included breakfast club.

> P5: They're supporting the students through brekkie club … [which is] not just for low socio-economic [kids] but that social gathering of children together … My kids have brekkie at home every Wednesday but they'll go to … brekkie club for the social aspect …That support and the homework support … is really important [because] kids learn a lot from that … Kids … who are just having moments in class where they're feeling uncomfortable … have someone else to talk to … Having the chickens and the community garden … [all] helps. (PFG2.2 L 104-112)

Parents perceived that staff were assisted through the community development worker's role of liaising between teachers and families. The cultural development worker aided teachers with the planning and implementation of a creative alternative curriculum. They both shared provision of social-emotional care for struggling or challenging students, which relieved the stress for teachers. The community partnerships program aimed at connecting parents to school, each other and the wider community. One means was providing the community centre as a space and place for parents to meet and network. The provision of a welcoming place offering opportunities for parent empowerment (through sharing skills and helping with special events) was acknowledged and appreciated.

> P5: [The CDW] is like [a] mediator … He knows the right people in the right places and is able to [assist] … if you have a family issue. [He can say], "You can go and speak to that person over there, or hang on a sec, I know someone over here to help you". He is making that connection at a family [and] wider community level]. (PFG2.2 L 53-58)

Research states that "children improve academically when schools include family and community members in establishing full service schools" (Barbour et al., 2011, p. 306). Despite this finding, the CPP was perceived by parents as a separate entity

to the daily education of their children. Parents did not refer to themselves as assisting in the classroom in any capacity, (except reading with children). Parents felt they could assist in other traditional ways, such as covering books for the library, assisting on excursions or making sandwiches for homework club. In this way, they indicated that they knew their place in the school system entailed serving in ways that did not encroach on the classroom. The school, in fact maintained this 'class system' within the school by mainly sourcing its adult readers from older volunteers in the parish. Whilst this was a lovely way of connecting the school and parish, it was a tacit means of excluding school parents. To support participants through a CPP, schools must develop a reasonable and caring plan to achieve this aim. It has been useful to apply elements of Epstein's framework for six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 2002) as possible indicators of levels of sociocultural reciprocity and caring at St Elsewhere. They include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and collaborating with the community. (The sixth type, decision making, has been identified by myself as an indicator of transformation through participatory democracy and will be discussed in that section).

In the area of parenting, St Elsewhere assists families with awareness of child development, through provision of courses for parents. These courses cover behaviour management, social emotional development, parenting skills, nutrition and student support. They are delivered by community members in various languages. Parents are invited to share ideas through multicultural cooking, playgroup and cultural groups. Parents may meet with the guidance counsellor to discuss needs or concerns. This is after consulting with the classroom teacher, community development worker or pastoral care worker.

In communicating, St Elsewhere distributes an online or hard copy weekly school newsletter. Sometimes an insert from the community centre is included. The newsletter's content is primarily in English and the school relies on students to translate it for parents. The community centre has employed interpreters for families and children. St Elsewhere states that it has an open door policy for both the school office and the community centre to elicit information. Parents may speak with teachers at a time convenient to the teachers, usually before or after

school. Parents may speak with the principal, whenever she or he is available, by appointment. The community centre is classed by the city as a community hub. Therefore, it has employed a third CDW to liaise with families of early years children. Parents are encouraged to seek an appointment to meet with the three CDWs, due to their ever increasing timetables. This varies from the partnership's original purpose of encouraging parental engagement through visiting the community centre and talking with the community development workers at any time without an appointment being necessary. Parents in low SES areas are traditionally wary of the demeaning and depersonalising aspects of appointments for government services. So, acknowledging this fact, an original aim of the CPP was to assist the principal with his/her workload. This was to be achieved by encouraging parents to firstly liaise with the CDWs without an appointment. The CDWs were trusted by the principal to deal with whatever they could and refer any issues requiring further assistance to the principal. This would free him/her up for other matters.

In volunteering, parents are encouraged to join the P and F. Its primary aim is to fundraise for equipment for the school. Through the P and F parents assist with school functions, including cooking barbecues and other meals. Parents operate the school tuckshop and some read with students through the raise-a-reader program. They prepare afternoon tea for students and assist them at the bi-weekly homework club. Twice weekly they prepare and serve food for breakfast club. Parents assist with cleaning and maintaining the community centre. Some plant, maintain, and harvest the shared community garden. More socially confident parents cover library books or volunteer in playgroup. Some invited parents share skills with classes through purposefully incorporated events. These include NAIDOC week, harmony day, and family fun day. Some teachers plan culturally responsive classroom themes in which they welcome parental input.

The inaugural principal of the CPP genuinely celebrated the unique diversity of St Elsewhere and allowed for whole day/whole school celebrations of harmony day. These were viewed as valuable learning experiences in which all parents were welcome to contribute.

This year a select group of parents were invited to cook food. This food was for classes to taste whilst visiting the community centre. Students were discouraged from wearing traditional dress to school. It was felt that traditional dress might interfere with their play, so they were encouraged to wear uniform. Only those who were doing cultural dances were encouraged to come to school in uniform and change into traditional dress for the duration of their dance. Harmony day was condensed into one and half hours of show time which was limited to the stage and the community centre. Therefore, it did not cut into what was classed as traditional teaching time. This again diverged from the original CPP's aim of taking time to celebrate difference. From a critical perspective, it sends the message to parents that learning about their culture is not as important as learning in a traditional Western style. If the school cannot devote one entire day to the celebration of difference, then it is diverging from what it claims is its ethos and what makes it unique to other schools. It is watering down its purpose to be inclusive of all, which was so appreciated by this parent.

> P6: We are a broad community. I went to the Tongan dance the other week and there were young children there [who] came up to me and said, "I'm from St Elsewhere community". (PFG 2.3 L 157-159)

Within the area of learning at home, the school provides a handbook about school procedures and learning expectations for new parents. This book is given at the enrolment interview, which is attended by the principal and the guidance officer. Prospective prep parents are welcomed at an information morning in the library and prep room. This is attended by all staff who would be working with these students. Their aim is to inform parents of their role as school parents and how they, as parents, can assist their child at home. Parents learn strategies to help their child with schoolwork at home. This is through assisting at homework club. At times, the school newsletter prints an article on assisting students with a specific school subject. It may be a description of how to enhance incidental learning opportunities during times such as shopping, cooking or library visits.

Some, but not all, classroom teachers encourage parents to ask them for help if they are experiencing difficulties in helping their children.

In collaborating with the community, families of diverse ethnic backgrounds from within and out of the school have initiated a shared community garden. Their aim is to grow plants from their culture, which are shared with others. The school has excelled at identifying resources in the wider community to help meet student and family needs. This is though networking with universities, TAFES, government departments, other schools and private companies. These organisations donate time, resources, personnel and equipment for the school. Initiatives include (amongst others), local high school students mentoring with children in homework club. A local football club sponsors and mentors the school's multicultural AFL team. A community organisation, Fusion, sponsored students of varying cultures over three years. These students travelled to Uluru in Central Australia as a means of reconciliation. A corporate body donated uniforms for the school cricket team. Also, a respected film director sponsored and mentored an Indigenous student in his film making aspirations. The school adopted a well-known Aboriginal elder. With his daughter, he painted murals to beautify the school. They shared cultural stories with the students as they assisted. Another mural was painted by a refugee youth. Many Catholic schools and parishes have donated unneeded classroom furniture and school supplies. St Vincent de Paul's Migrant and Refugee Sewing group provide donations of hand sewn tablecloths, chair bags, prayer cloths and blankets for classrooms. The Smith Family coordinated a peer mentoring group. Also, a corporate restaurant chain donated food for shared community lunches. This initiative was organised by a parent.

A highlight of the partnership's community engagement was when ACU initiated their inaugural certificate three course in Student Support at St Elsewhere's community centre. This was aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for parents. The course culminated in a graduation ceremony for nearly 100% of participants and lunch at the Banyo campus of ACU. Families were transported by bus to Banyo at ACU's expense. For many of the participants it was the first time they had entered a place of higher learning. Some were inspired to further their studies. A pair of the graduates were employed as school officers at St Elsewhere.

Many graduates stated to me afterwards that they felt the positions could have been more equitably distributed. They felt that rather than employing two people full time, they all could have been employed at least one day a week on a trial basis. This would have given them all a chance to prove their capabilities. While the course was on, all participants had to gain practical experience. But rather than rostering all the volunteers equitably in St Elsewhere, most had to find experience in other schools.

Because St Elsewhere's CPP was established on a foundation of caring, how parents and staff perceived care was working in a partnership is discussed in the following section.

7.3.3   When does care work in a parent engagement program?

Whilst staff emphasised the importance of taking the time to listen to families' stories, they advocated various forms of practical support. These included social, academic, emotional, financial and physical support. These depended on the individual families' personal contexts.

Staff and parents both preferred a community development model of partnership for their particular context, rather than a social service model. This was because, whereas a social service model could offer immediate physical assistance such as finances or food, it was perceived that St Elsewhere's families needed deeper, long term emotional support. This emotional support was necessary in order to establish a relationship with families, enabling them to feel empowered enough to participate in school life. Staff felt this participation would occur through a variety of means. These included parents sharing their skills, and teachers utilising parents' social and cultural capital.

St Elsewhere's parents perceived that other families (such as refugees and other low-income families), rather than their own families, required assistance from the CPP. This was an interesting finding, because it correlated with the fact that low income families are often the last ones to admit that they need help due to financial constraints. They can survive on a lot less than the minimum wage, purely because they have to. They are usually experts at helping each other out as needed and are loathe to accept help from 'outsiders', unless absolutely forced

to. Cooper, (2009), in her study of African American mothers' involvement in schooling states, "African American parent involvement traditions … have been guided by parents' care, advocacy, and desire to empower themselves and their children to educational systems that have historically oppressed them" (Cooper, 2009, p. 383). I would argue that this is true for Indigenous parents, refugee parents and disadvantaged parents. As a low SES, culturally diverse mum myself, I would argue that for many low SES parents, (no matter their ethnic origin), parental engagement in schools did not traditionally include an expectation of things being done for them, as a matter of pride. These parents saw themselves as their children's parents, protectors, providers and advocates and tried to ensure their children got the best education that they could afford. There was no expectation of handouts or special consideration, unless it was absolutely their last option. This argument negates the traditional deficit-based view of low SES parents, in which parents are seen as absent, uncaring or incompetent.

In my experience, there are only a very few parents who are so uncaring for their own children that they would impede their chances of school success. This perceived lack of care is usually fuelled by substance abuse or addiction. In fact, I have personally seen the outcomes when these parents have been forced to face the impacts caused by the reality of their destructive lives. This includes their children being removed from their care. If this happens, they are almost always remorseful and determined to change for the better. They usually try to retain the changed behaviour to have their children returned to them.

Most low SES parents only want the best for their children. Therefore, they are prepared to go without many things richer parents would call necessities. This is in order to "save face" and send their children to school with a uniform, shoes, schoolbooks, pencils and lunch. Many low SES children (including mine) have been given these basic school supplies as presents for birthdays and Christmas, because that is all their parents could afford. In fact, I can testify as a St Vincent de Paul volunteer for many years that these supplies often come from St Vincent de Paul or the Smith family. If these items look new they are put away by caring parents as gifts for special occasions.

This perception of being "the one coping and in control", would explain why low SES parents are reluctant to admit that they need any assistance. Often, this is because they are afraid the authorities may perceive them as incapable of care, so their children will be removed. This was related anecdotally to me by a mother of four special needs children, and she herself with diagnosed mental health issues. Most parents felt that the CPP should provide staff to assist other parents as needed. Some parents were comfortable with including themselves in the people who could become ones-caring, and be both "self- serving and other serving" (Noddings, 1984, p. 89).

> P4: The purpose is to bring together the community in the area
> … into St Elsewhere. [This is] not just for the school, but … so that
> everyone can look after each other. We look after the families
> [who] can bring their children to the school and the church and
> [we] work together. (PFG2.1 L 324-327)

Despite most parents stating that they were ready to help others, some parents' views of community development were impeded by personal experiences of receiving government assistance. These views were constructed around the lens of remaining a consumer, rather than a contributor. They felt the partnership should be able to meet whatever needs arose whenever someone needed the help. While they did not indicate how they themselves were in a position to supply any of this help, they referred to the relational aspect of the partnership (Smyth et al., 2010). This relational aspect was as simple as somebody being there with a listening ear.

> P7: [Accessibility] means being able to come in at any time to see
> somebody. [It's not] like some government places [where you
> have to] make an appointment and wait to be seen … Here you
> can come in and talk to someone. Regardless of whether they
> can help you or not there is someone there to talk to, that's what
> it should be about. (P8: Or just sit down and have a cup of coffee,
> it's a place you can come to). (PFG3.1, 3.2 L 66-70)

All participants, including parents, should have been informed of the principles of reciprocal care in community development. This entailed reassuring parents that not all caring involved a financial commitment. That there were a myriad of ways in which these parents could help each other, and that no one way was better than the other. Strategies as simple as workshops and information nights would have kept these parents and other participants abreast of the community partnerships program. This would have ensured that the partnership was being established to care *with* parents, rather than just caring *for* parents.

> P8: Community Development to me means expanding on services that are available to the community in general. (PFG 3.2 L 16, 17)

Another interesting finding was that for parents the CPP was perceived as supporting students, families and staff who would be ready to have their needs met, only after everyone was welcomed and included in the partnership.

> P8: Getting members of the community and helping to develop their skills and their networks. (PFG3.2 L 14, 15).

Staff felt that supporting students, families and staff was the primary aim of the CPP and that inclusion would follow after needs were met.

> S11: I can't see how you can develop community unless there is some sort of social service attached to it … That's not the prime thing that we do. But it [is] part of it. Because if someone comes to you hungry [you must] give them something to eat and then show them where to go to get food. [This is] before you develop community. They go hand in hand. We are not primarily a social service model, but it does definitely come into what we do. (SFG3.1 L 19-24)

In this way, parents, not staff, were echoing true elements of authentic community building. One mother who was physically isolated from her extended family, stated appreciation and enjoyment of the warmth and acceptance she felt whilst

participating in shared class/community lunches and playgroup. This appreciation was an essential component of Noddings' ethic of care (Noddings, 1984).

> P3: My experience is mainly through the playgroup with my younger son, A. Also, I rely on my social network because I don't have family here … I really enjoy coming here. (PFG1.3 L 221-223)

As Noddings (1984) attests, the cared-for would be given the opportunity to respond to the one-caring through acceptance of the care. This could be through participating in initial meetings, forums, discussions, information sessions and focus groups.

The cared-for could act co-operatively to enhance the level of care including proactive participation in groups, inviting others to join and expressing gratitude for the care. This could be through providing feedback in satisfaction surveys and suggestion boxes, speaking on assembly, writing in newsletters, and attending meetings. The cared-for could reciprocate the care in ways in which the cared-for can handle. This may be through sharing experiential knowledge and cultural capital. It may be by facilitating groups and programs within the partnership or advocating for the CPP within the wider community and media. Ideally it would be through sharing in decision making and some curriculum planning or assisting with students in the classroom.

The visionaries had spoken of the families actually requesting or welcoming the assistance or care. By asking for somewhere to grow their shared community garden, parental empowerment and the utilisation of social capital was practically demonstrated.

> V3 [The partnership] started … simply [when] somebody … said … "In my culture, we have gardens. But where I am living, there is no opportunity for that. Would there be some opportunity?" "Yes, absolutely, come outside and we will have a look around and see what you think". (V3 L 57-60)

Furthermore, care works in parent engagement programs when leaders are willing to work *with* the participants, rather than just *for* them. Therefore, the perspectives of leaders of a community partnership program are important

directives to guide those who wish to implement an authentic parent engagement program. For both parents and staff, a leader of a CPP needed to be a team player who was prepared to share responsibility and decision making with all participants in the partnership. Parents and staff did not specifically refer to who these decision making participants actually were. Effective leadership of a community partnership was perceived by both staff and parents as a shared collaborative process. It was not something that could be achieved autocratically by one or two people on their own (Barbour et al., 2011).

I asked, *"What are your thoughts on shared leadership?"*

> P2: Well, where the leaders of the community centre … the school and the parish … come together and maybe form a little committee [to] discuss things that are happening within the school, parish and community centre. [They] let each other in on what's going on and see if there is any sort of information that they can help each other with. (PFG1.2 L 28-32)

> S2: My point that I would like to stress is the shared leadership. I think that it is critical in the school and in a community partnership program - you must have shared leadership. (I prompted, *"Why?")* Because it gives a voice to everyone and it's majority rules. It is not autocratic. It becomes democratic. (SFG 1.2 L 241-252).

Both parents and staff favoured a delegation of responsibility and a participatory democracy process. This process was one in which all participants were invited to be innovative, dependable, friendly and willing to share stories with each other. Intentionally nurturing a climate of reciprocal trust and respect was perceived as a fundament to the partnership's success.

> S8: People in the community need to trust the leaders to ask for help. I think you are not going to ask for help if you don't trust them. (SFG2.2 L 161-163)

Strong presence was discussed as a leadership trait. Parents and staff were unsure whether this meant having a strong presence (adjective), being a strong presence (noun), or showing a strong presence (verb). Some parents equated strength with trustworthiness and having a calm, unflustered attitude when dealing with problems. A leader's approachability and openness determined whether a person would come forward to express an issue or concern and engage in the programs.

> P4: If they are seen as strong it's going to make them feel trustworthy for a start. You don't want someone leading the community that appears weak [because] people won't go to them with anything. (PFG2.1 L 283-285)

Some parents felt that children need to see strong leadership, as opposed to weakness, as this was a valuable learning model of choosing ethical caring (Noddings, 2002a). Some felt a display of weakness in a leader could undermine the children's trust in them. Others felt that a strong leader was in touch with peoples' wants and needs (Noddings, 1984). Some parents felt that strong presence in a leader meant that they appeared in public on a regular basis. Whilst others perceived that leaders could have a strong presence without actually physically being there.

Staff concurred with parents that leaders should be proficient in two-way communication. They should deliberately create purposeful and meaningful opportunities to demonstrate parents' leadership qualities. This would occur through connecting families, students and staff with each other in a spirit of reciprocity.

> S8: There needs to be emotional accessibility in terms of, "It's okay … to come here. You have stuff to offer us in the same way we have things to offer you". That reciprocity can help with accessibility. (SFG2.2 L 99-105)

Finally, care is working at St Elsewhere's as evidenced by the five out of six criteria met on Epstein's framework for parental engagement (Epstein, 2002). This also is because on Auerbach's continuum of leadership for school-family partnerships (2010), the leadership model which best fits St Elsewhere is the traditional model

of leadership in partnerships. This is evidenced by the school's community partnerships program primarily resembling a service-centred model, which revolves around the school agenda. This finding is supported by the fact that the community centre brings health and social services into the school, including nutrition classes. It assists with needs, such as food and emergency housing. Parents are strongly encouraged to make appointments with class teachers and the principal in a time which suits the staff. Whilst the school may be excelling at enabling and caring *for* the parents, it is not yet an empowering and transformative place that cares *with* the parents. Evidence for this finding is discussed in the next section.

7.3.4 When Doesn't Care Work in a Parent Engagement program?

Whilst staff felt that parents needed help or care, they were unsure of ways in which care for parents could be demonstrated through a CPP. They could give few examples of care, except for giving parents information and physical things, or showing them how to feed their children.

> S12: I have to agree that in a low socio-economic area we do struggle with moving away from a social service model because of the high needs of the families. And we're certainly trying to teach them how to provide for themselves, but they're needs in the same time. I mean with the lunches that are needed for students and breakfasts. Rather than seeing students come hungry, there just has to be some provision. (SFG3.2 L 39-43)

Staff perceived that another community partnerships program aim was welcoming parents into school. Little evidence of how the aim of enhancing parental engagement could be achieved was given by staff. One suggestion was inviting parents to the community centre.

Furthermore, one staff member gave the descriptor of 'amazing' to the community development worker. She justified why she called him this as being because he provided an interpreter. She didn't appear to be aware that this was

part of his role description because she hadn't been trained in community development or the aims of the CPP.

Despite the benefits of including all participants in initial meetings before establishment of a CPP, not all staff were consulted for their views. It appears that no parents were included in the original reference group. From a critical perspective, part of the rationale behind the implementation of a community linked model of community partnerships seems to assume a limited perspective of parents. That is, seeing the problem associated with the parents. This was based on an assumption that bringing them together and to where the church and school are situated is a suitable strategy to deal with the situation.

I asked, *"So what do you think is the purpose of the St Elsewhere community partnerships?"*

> P1: To bring everybody together so that all the parents can be friends and to get to know each other. [This is] so that they know that they can use the community centre when they want to use it … They can come here and be safe and have people to talk to. (PFG1.1 L 216-219)

> S11: There was … an idea that you didn't go out to people. They just came to you. Well, I've said, "That's not going to happen. We do have to go out to people". We do have to say, "Look, we're here and this is what we're about". We can't just wait for the parents to knock on the door [or] read a letter that you send home. It's got to be a personal approach … [Waiting is] completely out. "That whole notion," I've said, "is not on anymore." (SFG3.1, 3.2 L 174-182)

The partnership's model differs considerably from models that propose educators welcome parents as equal participants and partners engaged in purposeful and meaningful roles, rather than just as volunteers. This notion of parents as partners was advocated in St Elsewhere's participatory/ reciprocity model. This model of community partnerships was advocated by the two original community development workers. It was also the partnerships model which the community

linked model was originally intended to organically evolve into. Within the current CPP, the notion of parents as partners is not yet apparent. For this to occur, parental input should be welcomed, valued and ideally acted on where possible. Overwhelmingly parents underplayed their contributions to the community partnerships program, except as fundraisers, food providers, or readers. This was poignantly evidenced by the parent who equated inclusion with everybody contributing to fundraising for the school.

Parents felt staff needed the two-way dialogical conversations of community partnership meetings and staff meetings. Parents perceived that teaching staff benefitted from the partnership through assistance from parents and community centre staff with practical matters, such as being adult helpers on excursions. Teaching staff were not perceived by parents as contributors to the partnership. Rather, parents perceived teaching staff almost as people outside of the partnership, who were employed to remain within the confines of the school classrooms.

I asked, *"How do you see a community partnership in a school supporting staff?"*

> P2: They can … have a … meeting … and let staff in on different things that are happening around the school and … community …[Then] just help them with the knowledge and the different activities that are going on and involve them. (PFG1.2 L 54-57)

> P3: I would say that the community centre is a place where it can support the staff. The staff are not just here to do their work and go home … They're also included. (PFG1.3 L 62-64)

Furthermore, parents viewed the community centre as not only the partnership's hub, but that the community centre *was* the entire community partnerships program.

> P3: I agree. It's a place where students can go, especially if they are having difficulties. [It] doesn't matter whether it's with school or social things or social … or emotional problems. It's a

place where they can go and chill out that's still at school, but

it's not really part of school. (PFG1.3 L 74-77)

This viewpoint was fostered by the fact that most of the programs happened in the community centre and the community centre staff had their office there. Participants were encouraged to stay within its confines and not to go onto school grounds or in classrooms. This was a divergent view from the visionaries' philosophy of the community partnerships program to be embedded as the school's heart. The visionaries did not want the CPP to be perceived as separate and be confined to one area in the school. This restricted parental view of the community partnership program was evidenced when they said the community centre supported staff through being "a place to send students needing time out from the classroom". This was as a direct response to parents admitting that not all the students had ideal home lives. Parents felt as staff did, that students' personal contexts drove selection of CPP content in order to link teaching to social justice actions. Although the parents indicated that they felt the community centre was situated in a desirable area, it is actually attached to the school periphery, not in its centre. Parents were unaware of this as a subtle means of confining themselves to a specific space and place. Nor did they indicate awareness that this space and place was actually away from the classrooms and the children's daily education. The positioning of the community centre signified a partnership adhering to a traditional service-centred model revolving around the school agenda and may have been because the two spare classrooms were the only vacant space to build the centre.

The fact that students, staff and parents all assumed that the community centre symbolised the CPP as its hub is significant. It implied confining the parents to a specific place in the CPP, rather than one which valued family engagement itself. This is evidenced by the removal of computers for parental use from the community centre, a forlorn development for families without a computer at home. The new community development worker justified their removal by stating to me that they were obsolete and out of date. The fact that they weren't immediately replaced with a bank of newer ones for parental and community use

is puzzling for a community partnerships program. Especially one which states that it proactively works to engage disadvantaged and marginalised families in purposeful ways.

While parents can always drop in for a coffee, ideally, coffee in the community centre should be available not only for a leisurely break. It should appear during or at the culmination of an event, project, program, meeting or function within the partnership. Coffee, for the most part, should not be the sole event. Furthermore, parents stated that they wanted to see more things going on in the partnership, which indicated their readiness for more than just a morning tea break.

St Elsewhere's principal welcomed new parents and personally accompanied them to the community centre to find out about programs that were available. This was unintentionally working against parents having an open door policy to school. This was because the principal reiterated to staff that parents had to fit into staff's timetabling, not the other way around. The principal discouraged parents not employed as school officers or interpreters from helping in classrooms. They were discouraged from asking questions of teachers about their children's progress. This was only encouraged at annual parent/teacher interview nights. This was a decision made by the principal for the teachers' benefit. It was decided because the principal didn't want some teachers feeling 'put on the spot' by parents who had been used to asking questions in the past. Usually questions arose as they were dropping off and picking up their child. Some teachers had not yet mastered the art of relieving the parents' worries in a few short words. They felt pressured to give a complete report of the child's progress off the top of their head. So, the principal instructed teachers to tell the parents to wait till a specified time - that is, the annual parent/ teachers' night.

Parents agreed that a principal should be seen around the school as often as possible in order to be perceived as having a strong presence. One parent interpreted strong presence as overt assertiveness of a dictatorial, autocratic type of leader who would not work collaboratively in a team environment. This was perceived almost as a regressive form of hegemony in which a leader dictates to

others, rather than negotiates. This leadership style is not the most ideal for a CPP that professes to be caring.

In order for authentic care to be demonstrated in a CPP, it is necessary for it to be reconceptualised. How this can be achieved is discussed in the following section.

7.3.5   How can Care be Reconceptualised to Benefit Marginalised Families?

From its inception, care could have been reconceptualised to benefit marginalised families if a cross section of staff and parental input was involved in very early discussions. Studies such as Freire's (1970) ground-breaking work in the slums of Brazil clearly delineated the importance of involving all participants before establishing the partnership. This was to determine that the partnership would be authentically meeting needs and inclusive of all voices. It was to be achieved through discussions, workshops, information sessions, meetings and forums, amongst others. These initial discussions could have been platforms for "healing words, healing strategies, [and] healing theory" (hooks, 1994a, p. 75). It would have been beneficial if all parents and staff had been invited to share their needs, personal stories and life contexts.

Over time teachers developed confidence in working with marginalised and multicultural children and their families. The teachers themselves became a resource for the community partnerships program. This was through utilising their talents, experience and expertise.

Almost everybody involved in the project, (except for the community development worker), was unfamiliar with the philosophy of community development and the ideology behind authentic parental engagement. So they required professional development in that area. There needed to be a formal agreement on how the school would enact its engagement with parents. As Chavkin (2000, p. 287) attests, "organisational realities make the idea of family education an idea that is difficult to introduce and to maintain, without a formal written policy". She maintains that any school policy on parental engagement should clearly define what it means by family involvement. The policy should set its priorities and guidelines for working with groups from home, the school and the wider community (Chavkin, 2000).

Whilst there was no formal policy on family engagement at St Elsewhere developed for staff, PD in community development was initially supplied to staff by the community development worker. Nonetheless, sometimes he seemed to forget that teachers did not speak the language of participatory/reciprocity models of CD. Therefore, the information sessions were not geared to their level of understanding. This highlights the importance of taking care to tailor information to the recipients' levels. I believed parents should have been part of this initial information process in order to gain an understanding of the community partnerships program. But I ended up being almost grateful that they weren't there. This was because there was no doubt CD was the community development worker's area of expertise and his passion for CD was obvious. If we as staff could not understand his ideologies and principles, then how could our parents? I do believe, that given time, the CDW would have listened to the feedback and would have catered for less scholarly thinking people by using participant friendly language. This would have gotten his point across, allowing staff and parents deeper insight into the principles of community development.

Furthermore, parents stated an insightful but unique comment regarding staff requiring PD in cultural protocols. This PD would be aimed at increasing staff confidence in their daily interface with multicultural students and families. Staff have stated that they would like to be better informed of what is happening with parental engagement in the community partnerships program.

Because a principal's attitude to parental engagement can enhance or hinder the process, and "authenticity, then is concerned with both an authentic process and an authentic outcome" (Anderson, 1998, p. 576), staff discussed principals' personal leadership styles. They perceived that the current principal's style differed widely from the founding principal's (V1) style of leadership.

> S11: Shared leadership [is] different for me than … for the previous principal [who had] the two community development workers [as] part of the leadership team. [But] after six months that shared leadership model [just] didn't work for me … The way the previous principal had set it up [didn't suit me]. I've got

a different idea of what that is. So I approach that differently.

(SFG3.1 L 26-31)

The importance of the principal's role in welcoming parents to school, whilst changing staff's negative perceptions of parents and parenting, through introducing purposeful ways for parents to be actively engaged in children's schooling, cannot be overemphasised (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Under previous principals, parents had been welcome to ask any specific questions about their child at the 'Meet the teachers barbecue', 'Classroom open night', Christmas concert or Sports Days. If unable to do this they were encouraged to set up an appointment with the class teacher at a mutually acceptable time. This was in consideration for the parents as these may have been the only times they could attend school to see their child's teacher. As mentioned in the previous section, the current principal asked parents not to do this for the teachers' sake. Again, the priority of the community partnerships program needs to be revisited and clarified. If the CPP was set up to encourage parents to participate, then flexibility on times parents can meet with teachers, (especially for shift workers), needs to be factored in.

To reiterate, St Elsewhere is a Catholic primary school operating under the direction of BCE. Because of this, the original reference group consulted with two representatives from both BCE and the local parish. Both of these people were white, male priests, but a comparison of their contextual experiences highlights their differing justifications for the CPP.

Firstly, the BCE chaplain had dedicated his life to working with and advocating for marginalised children in schools and youth in detention. He argued strongly for a CDW, rather than a social worker, because he believed in the power of the people. His gentle, unassuming manner was perfect for putting the parents at their ease and drawing them out to ascertain their needs and wants.

In contrast, the parish priest is an affable, friendly, approachable man, and well-liked by his parishioners. He had worked with troubled youth in New York. Because of those experiences, he originally thought that the partnership needed a social worker who could work with the parents and guide them in what he

perceived as 'better' parenting. Discussions ensued surrounding the ideologies and principles of community development. Eventually he agreed that a community development worker would be more effective in engaging and empowering families in St Elsewhere's context. As parish priest he had to defer to canonical law. Whilst his responses seemed to vacillate between the personas of a kindly white father gathering in his brood, and a holy combatant determined to wield justice, it was difficult to reconcile the two personalities. One who enjoyed chasing guinea pigs with the children, and the other who ordered the removal of the fruit trees. This was to concede to the feelings of a few parishioners who had scant regard for the man who had spent an entire weekend voluntarily planting them.

Without even intending to or consciously doing so, the parish priest and school principal shaped instances of interpellation (Althusser, 1971). Interpellation concerns ways that individuals recognise themselves in relation to certain ideologies and institutions of power. Examples of interpellation at St Elsewhere discussed in this thesis include the removal of the fruit trees; the removal of the two CDWs from the shared leadership team; the dissolution of the P and F; the banning of shared class/community lunches and the subsuming of the Indigenous program and the Indigenous parents' forum. These and other examples reveal how interpellation was experienced by those who did not want to question these events. Indeed, they were unaware that they could question them. This was due to the historically bestowed control exercised by the Catholic church, BCE, and their representatives in schools.

There is a way in which care could be reconceptualised to benefit marginalised families. This would be for the leaders of systems of power such as schools and churches to expend an effort to understand parents' perspectives. Leaders should familiarise themselves with the contexts in which these perspectives are cultivated (Chavkin, 2005; Smyth et al., 2010). Principals and priests should make a concerted effort to be more approachable, understanding and compromising towards parents' requests. This would be of mutual benefit to both leaders and participants and enhance the level of care offered and received.

In this low SES demographic, a significant proportion of the families are welfare recipients (Vinson et al., 2015). They are accustomed to regularly receiving assistance from charities such as St Vincent de Paul. Despite acknowledging the financial hardship confronting nearly all its families, St Elsewhere's P and F's main purpose is not to inform and empower parents to engage more deeply with the school, but rather it is to motivate parents to raise funds for it. For me, this is a critical social justice issue. This is because the school is fundraising from parents struggling to pay next week's rent, or choosing between buying new school shoes or groceries. This is a different notion from asking high socio-economic parents to contribute by donating or raising money for the school. It is a moral dilemma which needs to be addressed if St Elsewhere is to be centred on a core of justice. Despite ostensibly choosing not to add to families' financial burdens, St Elsewhere unconsciously creates divisions between the have families and the have nots. This is by holding fundraisers for various organisations and charities. These include Christmas appeals for the local St Vincent de Paul conference. Parents affectionately call it Vinnies. In these appeals each class is encouraged to fill a box of food and toys for a needy family. Previously, St Elsewhere school itself was the recipient of these charity drives. Many St Elsewhere families, on the last Saturday before Christmas, are personal recipients of gifts and food hampers. How would a family feel if they received back the very can or toy which they had donated to the St Elsewhere Vinnies Christmas drive? Although all children are encouraged to contribute, teachers must remain vigilant in ensuring that open packages and used or out of date food is not donated. This is because often the food is sourced from the charity food bank which supported the family that week. Care at St Elsewhere could be reconceptualised from a system which encourages and rewards children and families for donating the very things which they may be the recipients of in later charity drives. It could be reconceptualised to acknowledging students and families as funds of knowledge and sharers of skills and talents, which have more than monetary value, and as such are priceless.

> P7: I don't know why it got started in the first place, but [I think]
> it was to serve the community [and] to bring the parish … school

> … parents … children and [others] together in a way that accommodated many interests. Because we have adults coming in and reading with the children … doing gardening and … cooking … The partnership has offered … a platform to bring those gifts … talents or interests that people have, in a way to serve others. (PFG3.1 L 142-151)

A genuine reconceptualisation of care would then lead into other means of reconceptualising parental engagement, such as creating authentic leadership roles for parents. The notion of transformation in parental engagement at St Elsewhere is discussed in the following section.

7.3.6   Transformation

An aim of the community partnerships program was to "address entrenched marginalised within society" (Barr & Saltmarsh, 204, p. 9). From its inception, St Elsewhere's CPP focussed on creating an inclusive, peace-filled and transformational place for families who had experienced trauma, loss, deprivation, exclusion and marginalisation. This inclusive ethos was manifested in St Elsewhere's welcoming atmosphere. From including designs on windows and murals on walls to photographs of children working, which are aimed at inviting families to stay. These welcoming aspects of St Elsewhere are described in anecdotal observation notes of parents, interacting with community centre staff and attending special events, assemblies and functions at the school.

7.3.7   What does Transformation look like in practice in a Parent Engagement program?

Parents and staff felt that people in the community partnerships program were its strength. They felt that everybody, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or religion should feel included in the partnership. Inclusiveness was viewed through a participatory/reciprocity lens. This was one in which parents were enabled to serve others and build self-efficacy, through sharing their skills and interests. This model of partnership had been trialled for some time at St Elsewhere and

elements of it remain today. An example is the mother who gives back to the partnership by preparing sandwiches for homework club.

It was important to ensure that this community partnership developed as an authentic, transformational partnership *with* the parents, not merely a caring program *for* the parents. So, staff required constant reflection on how and why the partnership assisted them in their daily interface with students and families.

> S12: The other big purpose … is that we live in a low socio-economic area [and] so many parents are scared of school. [They] have such a negative attitude towards school [because they] didn't have good experiences at school themselves. So it's got a … welcoming function to … draw in parents that might not otherwise feel comfortable in a school. There's a place where they can … sit and chat and … have coffee and it doesn't have all the connotations that a school has. (SFG3.2 L 168-173)

A school's peaceful ambience, as well as the staff's approachability contributes to parents' feelings of inclusion.   This in turn leads to the building of parental self-efficacy and confidence in parenting. This is an important notion for parents experiencing marginalisation due to low SES contexts.   They may lack the confidence to engage in their children's schooling. So, a welcoming atmosphere at school is imperative because "parents who believe that the way they bring up their children will have a considerable impact on their development are much more likely to be positive about parental involvement than parents who believe they can have little impact on their children's development" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 40).

> P2: [This school has a] relaxed atmosphere, everyone is … more approachable. You know when you walk in the school gates you don't have to worry about talking to anyone because they are so open and honest. (PFG1.2 L 250-252)

Staff agreed that personal invitation was an inclusive approach essential for any transformative CPP's success, including St Elsewhere's. It is important for children to invite others to dress up in their national costume and perform a traditional

dance. Dances would be watched by family members of many cultures during harmony day celebrations. This is transformative and special because the dance groups are a homogenous mix of ethnicities, races, religions and languages.

It is transformative for proud refugee parents to attend every school event that they can. Many of these refugee parents are professionals themselves who are appreciative of the chance to participate in their children's education. When they linger for conversations they are delivering informal parental modelling. This is impacting positively on St Elsewhere's families. Particularly with those few parents who had viewed school as a reprieve from parental responsibility or those who had been classed as an 'absent parent'. They are now beginning to engage with the school.

The female CDW is familiar to many parents and encourages them to join in programs. She enjoys accompanying playgroups to interact with school during assemblies and prep days. This demystifies the concept of big school for children, and the concept of new or refugee families for the school's current families.

> S8: Being inclusive means, not just waiting for people to come
> and ask [you which] services or help [you need] to be included.
> But to go out [yourself] and invite [others]. (SFG2.2 L 26, 27)

Whilst staff valued the CPP as an ideological philosophy which they hoped would continue well into the future, they insisted on mutual dialogue. Staff want to be better informed of developments in the partnership. They discussed having their suggestions taken seriously and acted upon. Some parents perceived themselves as part of the communication process and referred to signage they were installing to invite and inform other parents of upcoming events.

Staff perceived having sufficient knowledge of families' and students' local community was a prerequisite for any CPP (Smyth et al., 2010). This was especially important in a multi-ethnic, orally based context which ensured that staff's perspectives of families was from a strengths-in-difference based one (Bryan & Henry, 2008). This acknowledgement of the families' differences as their strengths is a major step towards transformative parental engagement. The next section

discusses the conditions in which authentic transformation can succeed in a parental engagement program.

7.3.8   When does Transformation work in a Parent Engagement program?

Transformation in parent engagement only works when parents are trusted to become leaders. An example of this would be in parents facilitating the community partnerships groups that they are participants in. This is because in my experience the personal approach works best for disadvantaged and culturally diverse families. Encouraging all parents to have a sociocultural group to which they feel that they belong makes them feel as if they are a valued part of the bigger school family. From there a policy of mutual dialogue, in which all the groups have input into school-based decision making, requires constant vigilance to ensure that all parents' viewpoints are included.

The partnership's founding principal realised the importance of personally approaching and getting to know families. She acknowledged that she could not do all this effectively on her own. So, she created positions for an Indigenous studies teacher and a literacy/numeracy specialist. The roles were created to improve student outcomes through personally liaising with families. She also employed a support teacher (inclusive education) who was trusted to achieve the same results.

When I became Indigenous studies teacher, I firstly liaised with the parents. This was to ensure that not only was I teaching what the parents wanted me to teach their children, but that cultural protocols were being respected. I found my six years in this role to be a valuable learning experience for myself as I consulted with the Indigenous parents' forum on all matters pertaining to their children's education. Through sharing professional development opportunities with the parents, we mutually increased our knowledge. We co-constructed an interactive, engaging approach to Indigenous studies for their children.

Another parental leadership initiative was when grandparents from the Indigenous program assisted in the breakfast program and facilitated the shared class/community lunches. They were entrusted with the purchase, preparation, serving and clearing away of lunches for one rostered class and many community

members per week. Transformative parental engagement occurred when ESL parents were invited to cook nutritious meals and share recipes with each other. Transformation was also evident when a grandmother (and past parent) was asked to set up and facilitate sewing classes for migrants and refugees. This has been in operation for over ten years in a disused parish room adjoining the school oval. It has now grown to include anybody who wishes to learn to sew. Self-management by families of the shared community garden has supplied free fresh produce for over a decade.

These, and many other instances of sharing skills assisted in breaking down traditional barriers between differing cultures. They have contributed to transformative connections between parents and school. There remains an area in which St Elsewhere needs to improve before it can have a truly empowering and transformative CPP *with* the parents. This is in the area of decision making, which will be discussed in the next section.

7.3.9   When doesn't Transformation work in a Parent Engagement program?

Despite participatory democracy being a precursor for transformation, the only parental involvement area for improvement in St Elsewhere's community partnerships program is decision making (Epstein, 2001). This finding is supported by written and anecdotal evidence that parents are rarely asked for their opinion on matters concerning curriculum, policy and procedures. This is except through the medium of the P and F, in which I have been present (both as a parent and staff) as they are asked questions on topics such as uniform colours, Tuck shop menus and fundraising initiatives for the school.

The school has provided opportunities for parental professional development, including the new CDW organising the certificate three course facilitated by ACU. There remains a noticeable absence of parental involvement in participatory decision making. This is characterised by an absence of staff training in parental engagement at teacher in-services or principal's meetings. It is imperative that teachers are trained in parental engagement and are consulted on ways to interact with families (Williams & Chavkin, 1989).

The community partnerships program operates in a manner resulting in separation of administrative and teaching staff from direct involvement with parents. This includes keeping parents confined to the community centre located at the periphery of the school. This is a divergence from the visionaries' aim of the community partnerships program being perceived as the heart of the school.

Only the visionaries and some staff had a shared understanding of community partnerships programs. Most staff and the parents had mixed understandings of the purpose of a school-based CPP. Particularly in their understandings of how partnerships could support staff and students. These mixed understandings related to how community partnerships programs could empower parents as partners. There was minimal understanding of parental empowerment through the creation of purposeful leadership roles. Some staff felt that community partnerships programs were useful for skills transference to parents. Only some parents and staff articulated the importance of providing opportunities for parents and families to participate in the CPP through sharing skills, talents and interests.

In addition, the Indigenous parents have been told to liaise with the staff of the community centre. The outcome is the complete subsuming of the Indigenous program into the community partnerships program. This means that it is utilised by those few Indigenous parents who are confident and outgoing. It has resulted in many Indigenous parents beginning to stay away from the school again. This is notwithstanding the community centre touting that it would be all parents' place and space and encouraging all parents to interact together. But it counteracts the good that was being engendered by the Indigenous families having their own place and space in which to meet. Previously, they were beginning to be confident enough to contribute to their own forum in the spirit of participatory democracy. This empowered them to slowly venture to join the P and F and to volunteer in a variety of capacities at the school. This process of Indigenous families' input and participation took at least two years to cultivate. It needs to be again nurtured over a number of years. But it will have to happen if the CPP is genuine about wanting to engage the families in purposeful ways. This is rather than expecting parents to be merely appearing for assemblies, making food and assisting on

excursions. St Elsewhere no longer has a full-time staff member devoted to increasing Indigenous student literacy and numeracy outcomes. This is despite the model of the Indigenous program being so successful that many schools around Queensland told me they were adopting its tenets. The original cultural development worker also told me that it was being discussed in preservice teachers' courses in at least one university. Whilst the program has changed for the students through not having a full time Indigenous studies teacher on staff, they do have a male Indigenous liaison person coming in weekly from BCE. However, whilst the community development worker has taken on the Indigenous program as part of his role, it is not his only responsibility. I would argue that the Indigenous program cannot be as deeply cared for and well managed as the ESL program is, which has at least five full time support teachers and its own room. Despite how well intentioned the community development worker is, not all parents have a voice in the school's day to day life, (including ESL parents). This is notwithstanding the community centre staff's attempts to liaise with all parents in a variety of languages.

Though parents co-manage the two playgroups with the female CDW, this involves a relatively small cross-section of parents of mainly Pacific Islander, Burmese, Sri Lankan and Syrian heritage. This reinforces the perception for parents and some staff that the community partnerships program at St Elsewhere is mainly for migrant and refugee families. It also highlights the disjunction between the perceived welcoming of ESL parents and Indigenous parents at the school.

In addition, the principal subsumed all the afore-mentioned positions created by the founding principal. One outcome of this is that support staff only work for short times during literacy and numeracy rotations with the students. They have no interactions with the parents at all. This change in perception has been reflected in the staffroom. New teachers speak of parents as strangers, rather than as partners in their students' learning. The original CPP's aim was to keep teachers for as long as possible in order to foster relationships with parents. But the school now has nearly 75% of staff who have taught there for a relatively short period. Many of these are totally unfamiliar with the families and their contexts. This highlights the fact that a principal's positive or negative attitude to parental

engagement influences transformation in a school-based community partnerships program.

In a school context, parents have traditionally been a disenfranchised group. Historically they were systematically removed from school grounds and classrooms in which their own children were working. As a result,

> "Parents tended to lack insider information and familiarity and were unclear on the parameters of their power…[Within school,] institutional norms of propriety and civility kept principals, teachers, and parents on traditional turf and cast disagreements as personal affronts, thus restricting discussion, suppressing conflict, and confining discussions to noncontroversial matters…[Subsequently,] the micropolitics of participation are such that, even when participation is carefully orchestrated, most often power and influence remain in the same hands" (Anderson, 1998, p. 583).

Parents perceived the CPP as being there for other parents and did not acknowledge the fact that they were rich funds of knowledge about their own children. They seemed unaware that they have the right to become co-contributors and partners in their own children's education. This was evidenced by four school officers employed at St Elsewhere or other schools. They were also parents of St Elsewhere students. Despite their insider knowledge of St Elsewhere, they each opted to be interviewed as parents. This was because they revealed to me anecdotally that they felt they did not 'know as much' as the teachers. One school officer parent was a past student and the daughter of another school officer at St Elsewhere. Despite training to be a teacher at the time of data collection, she opted to participate in the parent focus groups. The only school officer who participated as a staff member was my daughter. This personal association may have made her confident enough to add her voice. She has now re-enrolled at ACU to be an early years' teacher. She cites a prep teacher in the early years of the CPP and a past BCE director's talk about the Josephite mandate to care as the catalysts which motivated her to want to teach.

Despite excelling at caring for parents, St Elsewhere has not yet mastered transformation with the parents. Is authentic transformation of parental engagement in a CPP a possibility? Yes, if it is reconceptualised to benefit the families, as is discussed in the following section.

7.3.10 How can Transformation be Reconceptualised to benefit Marginalised Families?

St Elsewhere's community partnerships program states that it aims for authentic transformation in parental engagement. To achieve this it must entail a reconceptualisation of transformation to benefit marginalised families.

Firstly, this reconceptualisation can only be achieved if it purposefully engages parents in meaningful leadership positions within the partnership. This requires ongoing staff and parental training in the ideology underpinning the community partnerships program (Williams & Chavkin, 1989). This is in order for parents to perform these leadership roles with confidence and competence. Parents have indicated their readiness to become leaders within the CPP by sharing their ideas of a future vision for the partnership. These ideas have been shared with the leaders of the CPP and would be beneficial for the CPP to listen to.

> P4: I would like to see [the partnership] still doing the things that
> we are doing now [such as] breakfasts [and] lunches [and] the
> community gardens … Maybe doing language programs … Just
> opening up the rooms so that people in the community can …
> hire the rooms [and] so that they know it is there and are aware
> of it … I would definitely like to see it keep going. (PFG2.1 L 353-
> 357)

Secondly, Anderson (1998, p. 575) states that before participation in any group can be classed as authentic, questions need to be answered. These questions include "Who are the participants?" "Within what areas and under what conditions are people expected to participate?" and "To what end is the participation?" Anderson (1998) states that participation is authentic if it includes the relevant stakeholders and creates relatively safe structural places for multiple

voices to be heard. This is in the spirit of democratic citizenry and redistributive justice for disenfranchised groups.

Thirdly, Anderson (1998, p. 589) has four recommendations for authentic participation of parents. He totally discounts the notion of participation as being confined only to the sale of pizzas, i.e. fundraising. These recommendations are giving parents a voice in:

(a) governance and decision making;

(b) organising for equity and quality;

(c) curriculum and its implementation in the classroom; and

(d) home educational support.

If I apply Anderson's four recommendations for authentic parental participation to St Elsewhere's community partnerships program, then recommendation (b) for transformation is being met for migrant and refugee families. This is through the inclusive practices and programs and the employment of the ESL teachers as well as cultural workers/interpreters for students and families. It is being met for Indigenous students through the CDW's role and the partnership with an Indigenous liaison worker. More could be done to specifically include the Indigenous families and welcome their input. It is also being met for disadvantaged and low SES students and families. This is through the establishment of the community partnerships program and the use of the community centre.

Recommendation (d) is nearly being met, through the homework club and inserts in the newsletter regarding helping children with their homework or classwork. Although these inserts need to be in a variety of languages to authentically meet the needs. However, recommendation (a) is not being met at all. This is because, even though parents demonstrate participation in the P and F, there is little facility for autonomy.   Indeed, the principal micro manages decisions on spending the funds raised. There is a need for the principal to relinquish power over the P and F in order to improve in this area.

Recommendation (c) is not being met, because the parents are never consulted on curriculum matters. This is except to inform them of any new developments decided on by the school's leadership team, such as any sport, language or arts

programs. Parents need to be invited to have input into purposeful decisions surrounding curriculum. As well listening to children read, all parents should be invited to have input inside the classrooms. Currently, the only parents authorised to work with the children are employed as school officers or are interpreters for ESL children.

Anderson (1998) asks a critical question about participation of students from low SES backgrounds and racial and cultural minority groups. It can be applied to their parents as well. This question is, "Can authentic participation occur at classroom or school level when they are expected to participate in a culture of power in which the exchange value of their cultural capital is perceived as low?" (Anderson, 1998, p. 590). I would argue that the answer to this question is, "No, not unless there is a change of perception of the value of their cultural capital". In other words, transformation of parental engagement is not possible until parents are included as equal partners in their children's education. This can only occur when parents are:

- valued as contributors, rather than utilised as consumers;
- considered capable enough to not only raise funds, but to decide how it is spent;
- invited to not only enrol their children in school, but to have reasonable input into philosophy, content and methodology;
- welcomed to not only participate in programs, but are trusted to establish, facilitate, self-manage and coordinate these programs; and
- respected as equally important members of a school family.

Until all these criteria for authentic parental engagement are met, the idea of transformation through participatory democracy is an elusive dream.

As a past parent myself, I would like educators to acknowledge that as the first teacher of my child, I know him or her best. I would also like educators to acknowledge that despite being a low SES parent, I care as equally about my child as high SES parents do.

As a teacher, I would like principals to actively challenge these limited notions of parents and parenting. To me, the onus is on the principal to cultivate and nurture

for staff, parents and students, a climate of mutual respect, consideration, trust, integrity and gratitude within his/her school family. Furthermore, through pre-service and in service professional development, teachers and staff, (in partnership with parents), can engage in collegial discourse which will lead to a variety of illuminating shared insights. These include acknowledging, examining and confronting any possible biases; considering strategies to minimise or eliminate barriers to parent engagement; and exploring success stories of sociocultural care and responsivity, as well as transformation of parental engagement.

Whilst Anderson (1998) states, "authentic participation moves beyond concerns with legitimacy and public relations to shared control" (Anderson, 1998, p. 595), therein lies the difference between an enabling school-based community partnership caring *for* the parents, and an empowering, transformational school-based community partnership caring *with* the parents. Implications for enhancing parental engagement through community partnership programs are explored in the next section.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR AUGMENTING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SCHOOL-BASED COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

Many Australian schools are attempting to increase their levels and depths of parental engagement in order to assist students with their learning. While this is challenging for Australian schools with high multi-ethnic populations, it is an important aim because schools with over a quarter of migrant students perform at a lower level than schools with a zero migrant student population (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2016).

Schools committed to authentic parental engagement are wisely acknowledging that quantity of involvement is not as important as quality.   Utilising parental engagement ethnographies to increase our understanding of how issues of context and school culture impact parental engagement can benefit this field of research.   Moreover, this ethnography focusses on the framework of contextualised sensitive care (researcher's term) specifically required for St Elsewhere and its community partnerships program participants in this particular

time and place.   It can assist other schools of similar demographics and populations. Contextualised sensitive care looks at who its participants are, where they live and what they need. It starts simply, asking all participants for input and grows only in a way that the participants want. Sometimes it stays small because that is all that is needed or wanted by participants. The emphasis is in on quality of parental engagement not its quantity.   The framework lists motivation, inclusion, situation, direction, cultivation, transformation and reflection as broad parameters in which to work towards contextualised sensitive care (see table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Framework for Contextualised Sensitive Care in School/Community Partnerships

Motivation (Purpose)	Why do we want to enhance parental engagement?	Examine motives for implementing parental engagement before its implementation. Aim for caring, empowering and transformative, rather than merely caring and enabling engagement.
Inclusion (Care)	Who are the participants?	Include all participants in initial meetings. Schedule meetings at times that suit the parents including during the day and at night for shift workers. Arrange baby-sitting. Serve a meal after each meeting.
Situation (Context)	What are their circumstances?	Become thoroughly familiar with each family's own individual story. Be sympathetic and offer practical help as necessary. Provide a Family Centre for them to create as their place and space.
Direction (Collective Power)	What do they want?	Ask families what they hope to gain from parental engagement. Ask what types of engagement they would prefer. Offer diverse types of engagement to suit different personalities. Form parental committees and forums. Respect parents as partners in their children's education.
Cultivation (Capital)	What are their strengths?	Encourage families to discuss their interests, skills, talents and networks. Record these for future reference as required.
Transformation (Democratic Participation)	How can they contribute?	Develop a varied list of possible ways parents can assist as leaders, facilitators, tutors, volunteers, advisors, employees. Devise a prepared calendar of events. Distribute newsletters in straightforward language. Use interpreters when necessary. Be flexible, creative and inclusive. Trust parents to lead.
Reflection (Possibility)	What is their future vision?	Constantly revise, update and add to the list of suggestions and the calendar. Engage in ongoing contemplation by all participants, of the partnership's purpose and necessity. Remain open to innovative ways of knowing and doing. Constantly engage in mutual dialogue. Enjoy the process.

Whilst the previous framework could be valuable as a guide for schools wishing to enhance parental engagement, St Elsewhere's community partnerships program did not have a current model of parental engagement specifically devised for Australian marginalised and multicultural families. As an innovative initiative, the

visionaries chose to implement small but significant inclusive initiatives to enhance parental engagement. These included employing two community development workers, and establishing a community centre and a shared community garden.

There have been many positive developments in meeting the aims of St Elsewhere's community partnerships program. However, for the CPP to remain viable and sustainable, new parents need to be viewed as individuals, not as a homogenous group. These parents have diverse strengths, dreams, wants, needs, gifts and talents. St Elsewhere has attempted to hone in on parents' strengths and let them find their niche. Some of the parents' strengths are as nurturers of theirs and others' children. Some parents are cooks and storytellers, whilst others are artists and dream keepers. Some excel as earthmothers and advocates. One or two of those who were classed as absent parents are very involved from home in a variety of ways.

One suggestion for transformation of parental engagement includes changing the focus of the enrolment interview. Changing it from one about merely the child, to one about both the child and the parents. This is an ideal opportunity to find out about parents' skills and interests. Then to discuss ways in which they can be purposefully engaged in their child's schooling.

Parents often ask at these interviews how they can be involved. So principals should be prepared to harness this opportunity. They should start the process of parents thinking of themselves as valued and valuable participants in the partnership. Parents could be given a list of suggestions of ways to become involved which are suited to their personal interests. These could be derived from parental involvement typologies such as Epstein's (2002) typology.

Parents could be asked to complete a survey of their strengths and interests. If they wish this can be done verbally, with the principal ticking off points as they talk. It is important to note that this survey needs to be completed at the interview. However, parents are welcome to take home another copy to add more points, and return it later if they wish. They should be given a calendar of upcoming events. Principals should personally invite parents to whatever activities or functions are coming up next. The power of this initial personal

invitation cannot be overemphasised. Any suggestions that parents have for purposeful involvement should be taken seriously and recorded in written form. Parents should be offered an option for immediate involvement such as sewing or gluing costumes, chair bags or props, or covering books for the library or classes.

At this initial enrolment interview, the P and F president and the community centre staff should be present, in order to personally welcome parents and invite them to the community partnerships program. Whilst the principal accompanies them to the community centre to look around, parents should be offered a cuppa and invited to meet other parents. Also, parents should be asked to identify friends, contacts and community members who may wish to become involved with the school.

The enrolment interview would even less intimidating for parents if it was held in the community centre, rather than in the office. This would be an opportunity for parents to witness ways in which they could become contributors to the community partnerships program. These could be in a variety of ways suited to their personality and interests including lending their books, CDs, DVDs, toys or artefacts from home. They may prefer donating craft items, cooking, sewing, facilitating workshops or identifying other ways they choose to help.

Principals can and do impact staff attitudes towards parents and parental engagement. For this reason, principals and staff should examine their motives and be trained in family engagement before implementing a CPP. Parents should be consulted and engage in ongoing training before and during a CPP's implementation (Williams & Chavkin, 1989). This would shift the community partnerships program focus from caring *for* the parents to caring *with* them. It would transform not only how staff view parents, but how parents view staff. They would begin to view each other as mutual partners in their children's success. Parental engagement would be transformed from merely a contributory level to a democratic participatory level. This would be one in which everyone's opinion is sought, valued and acted upon where possible.

Rather than merely enabling parents, the community partnerships program would be empowering them. Rather than merely engaging parents, it would be enthusing

them. Also, rather than merely utilising parents, it would be celebrating them and their contributions.

Because all school communities are unique, only some examples of what works for St Elsewhere can be translated to other school contexts. Through describing the use of contextualised sensitive care, this ethnography explores some universal principles of care and transformation. Furthermore, this study highlights sociocultural responsive care for parents as a factor to consider in the success of a school-based community partnerships program. It finds that if parental engagement does not include opportunities for transformation through participatory democracy, then the engagement is not truly authentic.

Whilst most schools can deliver sociocultural responsivity and care it is harder to be authentically transformative. The critical factor of transformation through participatory democracy is quite often underplayed, fabricated for statistical purposes, or unintentionally overlooked. It is important to study at first-hand what parents, teachers and community members do and say in school-based contexts. Potential barriers to authentic transformation can be minimised by personally witnessing and transcribing what is actually happening. This is preferable to relying on second hand written or verbal information or interpretations of the truth.

In order to achieve the aim of authentic transformation, teachers and staff must firstly, admit their biases about parental engagement. They should confront these biases head on, then proactively work to develop their knowledge of and appreciation for the families. This deepening of knowledge and growing appreciation for families will develop into a strengths-in-difference based perspective of families. One in which parents are viewed as valued partners in their own children's education.

Ethnographies which are long term, contextualised and richly imbued with the participants' perspectives of shared experiences can promote positive change. Such as supplementing the limitations imposed by the parent typology of Epstein (2002). That typology is offered to help schools navigate their way through parental engagement in practice. It generally presumes a certain type of parent, living in a certain type of context. It presumes that parents have a certain type of

expectations, both of themselves as parents and of schools as educators of their children. Realistically, this is only a generalised model to which a number of schools can aspire. Epstein (2002) herself has offered this typology as a starting point for a framework for schools and parental engagement. It offers suggestions for implementation of parental engagement in practice and is an extremely useful catalyst for change. However, schools are wisely cautioned to refrain from limiting themselves to slavishly following this or any framework as the only means of augmenting their parental engagement programs.

Ethnographies are useful tools for providing detailed descriptions of what works and what doesn't work in caring and transformative parental engagement within certain contexts. They offer not only participants' stories from the frontline, but their diverse perspectives of these experiences. It is within these stories that the richness of differing perspectives is revealed. More often than not those who did not fit the mould have the most interesting stories to tell.

Ideally, this study will inspire more educational research into acknowledging and valuing parental contributions to student success. This acknowledgement will become real by implementing not only enabling community partnership programs which care *for* the parents. It will become real through inspiring empowering and transformational community partnership programs which care *with* the parents. This reality is especially true in disadvantaged schools.

The findings from this study lead me to this conclusion. That it is only when schools authentically embed parental engagement into school life that community partnerships programs can truly be a means of enhancing student learning experiences, then schools will be able to relate to the opinions of Representative George Miller (2011). The then ranking Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee, California State Board of Education, cites, "The fact of the matter is, when we look at developing a model for real change and improvement in public education, it's pretty hard to do without parents. We've tried for years and it's not working".

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Appendices

Appendix A
Figure A.1 - Map of St Elsewhere
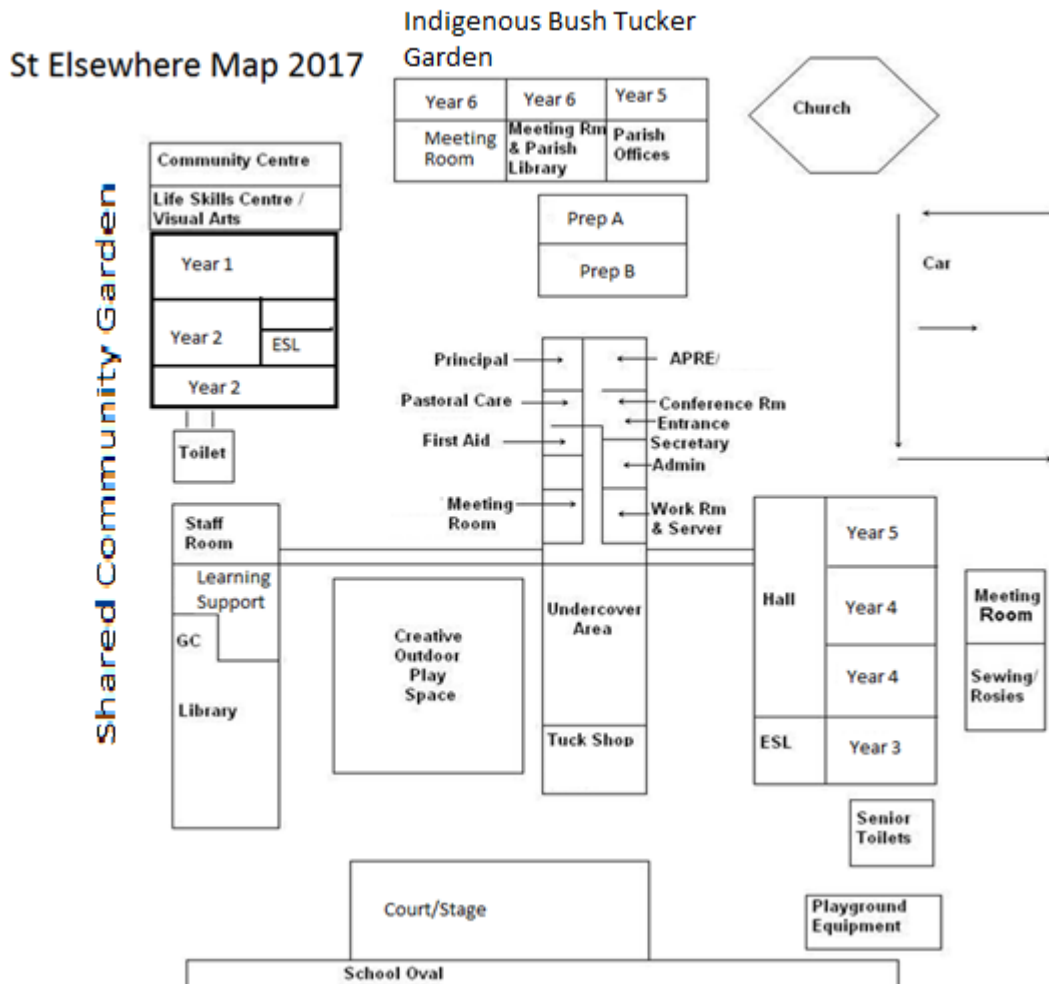
Appendix B
Sample Transcript Analysis

[handwritten] ...at are staff perspectives of ...CPP?

[handwritten] ...ntified themes from the ...ta

[handwritten] D Model vs Social Service

Group: 7   Community development instead of social service model?
        8   I guess its empowering people isn't it?
        9   Yeah

[handwritten] FGI S6

L   10 So it's empowering people, giving them the skills and the knowledge and the
        11 understanding of how to I guess help themselves instead of just offering a service to
        12 people who have a need and that could be anyone

[handwritten] FGI S3

TB   13 showing them how to solve their problems, giving them the skills to solve them
        14 rather than solving the problem for them.

[handwritten] FGI S1

R   15 Community is for me a gathering of people, so its gathering those people
        16 and then those people look after each other.

[handwritten] FG. S2

TB   17 community for me is just different levels it's our local, out school community and
        18 out parish and then the local suburban community and then further out state and
        19 national

[handwritten] FGS1

M   20 Then when you get people together and once the community comes together then
        21 it is easier to work out their needs if they're there to work out what they need from
        22 there.

[handwritten] FGIS4

L   23 and even each other's Strengths and what they have to offer each other.

Inclusive

Connie: 24 What does inclusive mean to you ladies?

Group: 25 Everyone's welcome and included FG1S6

...ople from the outside our ...tate and local government

FG1S1

M 29 Plus people who may not necessarily have children that go to this school, it's a
30 community centre so it's for the local community as well as what ▊▊▊ has said

FG1S4

FG1S3 31 For me it's a sense of belonging, having that sense that you do belong no m
32 what there is no but.

M
FG1S4 33 And that would be an important thing for people especially refugees who have come
34 from other countries it would be having a place to belong.

red L'ship

TB
FG1S1 37 I don't know too much about shared leadership I guess it to me it means a combined
38 leadership, people from say the school, the community centre and leaders from
39 various groups who might have some stake in our community

M
FG1S4 40 It's also to do with what ▊▊▊ said about different people having different strengths,
41 so you use people's strengths

L:
FG1S3 43 Sorry can I just go back to the shared leadership, we used the shared leadership
44 model here when ▊▊▊▊▊▊ was here and that was through principals as
45 literacy leaders, so she would get, she gathered a team a people around her to
46 support her and enable her to as a principal to I guess it was more of a task
47 orientated group, but there were and see you were a part of that too ▊▊ and were
48 you a part of that as well, someone from the different areas of the school, someone
49 from community, someone from the senior school, someone from the junior school,
50 ▊▊▊ was a part of that before then it was ▊▊▊ and ▊ often spoke about
51 shared leadership and but it did need to come from the principal of course and
52 through the principal the blueprint, if you remember me flashing the blueprint in
53 front of you often, that was at the core so shared leadership is something where the
54 principal is a key holder within that but dispersing those responsibilities across the
55 whole across our community.

G1 S2
See pencil pge

Support for families

Group:

61 There are so many ways to support families; it could be in a physical sense or it
62 could be in an emotional sense so that is a really big undertaking supporting families
63 and whatever needs they present with.

TB

FG1S4 64 I suppose you could target various groups, like various refugee groups that come
65 into the school, supporting new students, new families, new arrivals, I guess just
66 communicating with them, physical needs ███ or just information, giving them
67 information to the wider community and just making them feel welcome maybe
68 have some programs in place where they you know feel welcome themselves and
69 the students and join in with their own cultural group.

most important theme

Group:
FG1 S6 103 For our particular one, for our school I would say support for families, staff and
104 students

Group: S6 106 I would think so, that's your clients isn't it, that's your client base.
FG1 M S4 107 Then its accessibility, Communication is just as important
TB S1 108 Yeah but that ties in. If you're providing support for families, staff and students all
109 that falls in line. It's covered that's your most important
M S4 110 No I see them all as important as each other.

TK S5 189 and then they do have Wednesday lunches for whoever wants to come (oh is it) but
190 they do actually provide food for a special needs group on a Wednesday,
FG1 S6 191 Oh do they, I didn't know that

TK S5 172 Yeah I have been to it. That's strength in the community.

Support for staff

FG1 70 The cooking program has been fantastic for that it allows, the garden projects here
S1 71 and supporting the staff and students with children who find normal learning within
72 a classroom very difficult so those with challenging behaviours there's a place for

FG1 S1 76 So having the community partnerships here is so valuable, and having the two
77 different roles, the community worker and the cultural worker working with
78 teachers and providing that support has just been a valuable and I think that the
79 partnership with the community partnerships' and linking with our behaviour
80 learning as well is really important and its we've come a long way and I think it's
81 important to keep that tie going.

FG1S3 See pencil page.

Appendix C
Ethics

August 17th 2010

To Whom It May Concern

I hereby give permission for Cornella (Connie) Koch, doctoral candidate, to conduct her research at this school.

I am aware that it may entail surveying staff and parents, as well as observations and data collection over an extended period.

Yours sincerely

ACTING PRINCIPAL

Appendix D
Sample Focus Group Transcript

Parent Focus Group 1 – 21/08/2012   3.10 pm

Present:

Connie Koch   Aboriginal Studies Teacher
P1 ▮▮▮▮   Co-President P & F
P2 ▮▮▮▮   Secretary – P & F
P3 ▮▮▮▮   Playgroup

Ladies I have a two part interview today about our community partnership   1
program at ▮▮▮   We would like to talk first about what you understand a   2
community partnership program to be like. Is there anybody that would like to   3
talk about the theme community development instead of a social service   4
model?   5

P2 ▮▮▮▮ I don't what that means. I think that my understanding of a   6
community partnership is where the school, church, local   7
businesses all come together to help each other.   8

P1 ▮▮▮▮ My understanding is of where the community centre, the parish and the   9
school all work together with all people of the community   10
including people from different nationality backgrounds and   11
they help each other   12

P3 ▮▮▮▮ My understanding is that ▮▮▮▮ reaches out to the community around   13
the school particularly the families that have trouble with   14
English and helps the school and community support each other   15

Connie: Okay thank you, what does inclusive mean? Being inclusive

P2 ▮▮▮▮ Inclusive to me the word inclusive means all together, all in, so it's   16
everybody doing everything all in one go.   17

Connie: So in terms of a community partnership and at a school what would   18
inclusive mean   19

P1 ▮▮▮▮ Where the whole school, the community centre and the parish they all   20
come together and help each other with stuff   21

P2 ▮▮▮▮ Everything such as fundraising, should all be inclusive, should all be   22

together. 23

P3 [redacted] And it's a non discriminatory way of including everybody 24

Connie: Shared Leadership, what are your thoughts on shared leadership? 25

P1 [redacted] Well, where the leaders of the community centre, the leaders of the 26
school and the parish they come together and maybe form a 27
little committee and discuss things that are happening within 28
the school, parish and community centre and let each other in 29
on what's going on and see if there is any sort of information 30
that they can help each other with. 31

P2 [redacted] yeah that's what I see shared leadership as. People that run the 32
school, people that run the parish the community centre all 33
getting together and discussing what the community needs 34

P3 [redacted] And I see it as not autonomous, it's shared meaning that there is not one 35
boss it's shared by everybody. 36

Connie: Okay, How would a community partnership provide support for 37
families? 38

P1 [redacted] Well with the community centre you have [redacted] and [redacted] 39

Connie: We are not talking [redacted] at the moment, any community partnership 40

P2 [redacted] Community partnership is there for the people who cannot speak 41
English, they help them speak English, they provide meals for 42
the community during the day and people can come and eat if 43
they are not well, they have activities such as sewing and 44
knitting groups, child care groups that can involve the whole 45
community so that they are here to support those people that 46
need the support 47

Connie: Is that what you were going to say [redacted] 48

P1 [redacted] Yeah I was going to say with the community leaders helping the people 49
from non-English speaking backgrounds, helping them as in 50
translating in what is going on and helping them with day to day 51
activities

52

P3 [redacted] And also with new parents to the area and new families making them feel 53
welcome, particularly when they do not have a very good family 54

network, family support it's a good place to come and get help and catch up 55
with friends and things like that. 56

Connie: How do you see a Community Partnership in a school supporting staff? 57

P1 ██████ In the school supporting staff, well they can say have a little meeting or 58
such like that and let staff in on different things that are 59
happening around the school and in the community and you 60
know just help them with the knowledge and the different 61
activities that are going on and involve them. 62

P2 ██████ I would say to support the teachers if the teachers wanted to do 63
something with the children within the community that's what 64
that would be there for, if they wanted to go on trips that are 65
within the local community that's how they would support the 66
teachers 67

P3 ██████ And I would say that the community centre is a place where it can support 68
the staff, the staff are not just here to do their work and go 69
home, and they're also included. 70

Connie: How would you think a Community partnership in a school, in any 71
school would support the students? 72

P1 ██████ Well like with excursions and other things for the students to attend the 73
community people can help the teachers by attending the 74
excursions and letting the children expand their mind with other 75
things other than just in the school 76

P2 ██████ I think it's like pastoral care, student services, give the children 77
somewhere to go to talk to somebody or cause some kids can't 78
talk to parents at home so it's good for them to have something 79
here where they can go and talk to somebody and things like 80
that 81

P3 ██████ I agree it's a place where students can go especially if they having 82
difficulties, doesn't matter whether it's with school work or 83
social things or social problems or emotional problems it's a 84
place where they can go and chill out that's still at school but 85
it's not really part of school 86

Connie: Accessibility means being able to find something or use something or it 87
being available there for you, is this what accessibility means to 88

you in terms of a community partnership to access something. What does 89
accessibility mean to you in terms of a community partnership? 90

P1 ▮ It means that we can access resources and other things to do with school 91
and outside of school that we may not be able to resource 92
anywhere else 93

P2 ▮ think accessibility means that you have access to the community 94
centre, the parish, children and adults have access to resources 95
anything that can help with the community and what the 96
children need. Accessibility to me means that you have access 97
to everything, use of the computers, phone, and the teachers. 98

P1 ▮ And also learning how to cook in the community centre as well in certain 99
community centres they have cooking groups and stuff like that 100
which may not happen in other places that is another good 101
resource that would be excellent for the community. 102

P2 ▮ Sorry and access to information public information within the 103
community as well like the library, information about ____ you 104
should be able to access a wide range of information 105

P3 ▮ would say it's a place where you can go, it's available it's just available 106
for everyone to use within the school community 107

P1 ▮ And its non prejudiced so it doesn't matter who you are where you are 108
from or what colour you are you can make good use of it. 109

Connie: Communication – ▮ touched on a bit of communication – what kind of 110
communication is important in a community partnership 111

P1 ▮ It's important to get the message across that their there to help the 112
community and that no matter what happens they are always 113
there to help whoever needs it regardless of the circumstances 114

P2 ▮ Good communication with the teachers and parents, being able to talk 115
to each other openly and not worry about approaching 116
someone , you need to be approachable, you need to keep the 117
lines of communication open so that you can get problems 118
solved and things like that. 119

P3 ▮ And if you are unable to speak English there are ways that you can 120
communicate through translators and things like that 121

Connie: So thinking about those themes that you talked about, Community 122
Development, Being inclusive, shared leadership, support for 123
families, staff and students, accessibility and communication 124
how important are they and which would stand out as very 125
important to you. 126

P1 ████ they are very important within a school community and I myself think 127
that the communication part would be very important for me 128
because how are the community members that do not speak 129
English and that how are they supposed to access anything at all 130
without interpreters. 131

P2 ████ I think it's all important communication, the accessibility; you should 132
be able to come into school and have a range of things available 133
to you to help you through your day and to help the children 134
and help the teachers 135

P3 ████ And I feel as a parent who does not have family it's really helpful to me 136
that I can come here it's not just a place that I come and drop 137
my child off and go home, it's a place where I can use resources 138
for my other son. 139

Connie: Thank you for that, so we talked about community partnerships, 140
thinking in general again, not ████ itself we will talk about 141
leadership of community partnerships so what do you think 142
knowledge of the local community means if you wanted to lead 143
a community partnership. 144

P1 ████ Well you have to know what is going on in your community, who is 145
running it, where you can access certain resources from 146
because otherwise if you don't know how can you translate it to 147
any other person in the community 148

P2 ████ You got to know who's is doing what so you can rely the information, 149
it's good to know what is going around the community, fun days 150
anything to do with the church any information from other 151
community groups that is going on so that you can pass on the 152
information to everyone that needs to know about it 153

P3 ████ The knowledge also has to be relevant so you need to know what people 154
in the community are struggling with, what problems they have 155
and what they do really well at 156

P2 ▮ What people want and don't want   157

Connie: Proactive means, yeah so how important is being proactive, doing 158
something rather than waiting for other people to do it, how 159
important is that to a community partnership?   160

P1 ▮ Well you have to be proactive because if you are not proactive in the 161
leadership then nothing will get done and nothing will get 162
started at least   163

P2 ▮ Being proactive as well encourages other people to be proactive in the 164
community so you're seen to be proactive and you encourage 165
others to be proactive it spreads and everyone then gets 166
involved   167

P3 ▮ And you can also envisage problems that might happen if you do 168
something about it before it happens   169

P1 ▮ stop it before it starts kind of thing   170
                                                                           171
Connie: What about trust in leadership

P1 ▮ Well the community members and staff and students they have got to be 172
able to trust the people who are leading the community group 173
because if there is no trust then people will not open up and 174
express how they are feeling and what they want and what they 175
want to happen   176

P2 ▮ Trust is the main key because like you said children need to be able to 177
trust teachers, parents need to be able to trust teachers and 178
priests do they call them priests and people in the community 179
they need to have that trust to feel safe to parent and be who 180
they are   181

P3 ▮ And it's like in any relationship, any relationship needs trust between the 182
two parties   183

Connie: Approachable, what does that mean to you ▮ or a leader   184

P1 ▮ Well if the leader of the community is not approachable then how do 185
they expect other members of the community to come and be 186
part of the groups and other activities and workshops for that 187
matter?   188

P2 ███████ Approachable to me means that you should be able to go to that 189
person at any time about anything without any bias or 190
judgement for anything 191

P3 ███ Approachable to me means that you're able to trust them to 192
communicate with you effectively it's a two way street you can 193
approach them they can approach you 194

Connie: Strong presence means, Strong presence can be seen two ways, one can 195
be where they are able to be seen or can be to do with their 196
personality. So what is a strong presence to you ███ and how 197
important is it for leadership? 198

P1 ███ Well a strong presence is good, because if there is not a strong presence 199
in the community then no one will want to be involved in what 200
is happening 201

Connie: Yes okay 202

P2 ███ think a strong presence to me shows that that person has a strong 203
presence that they are capable of being a leader in the 204
community and other people will see that they are a strong 205
leader and that their presence is a good one and children need 206
that as a peer they need to see strong leadership 207

Connie: Okay, thank you 208

P3 ███ A strong presence to me means that you are in touch with the people you 209
know what the people need, what they want and what they 210
have trouble with and they can approach you 211

Connie: Okay. And the last one is good communicator, what does that mean to 212
a community partnership, to leadership 213

P1 ███ You need good communication regardless of who it is or where it is 214
coming from in community partnerships because if you don't 215
have good communication then no one is going to find out what 216
is going on 217

Connie: Okay, So it's important for the leaders of a community partnership 218

P1 ███ Very, very important 219

P2 ███ Yeah it's important as a good communicator you've got to be able to 220

communicate what you want and what your needs are and the other person has 221
to be able to communicate what they want and what they need. 222

P3 ▮ A good communicator to me is someone who can get the message across 223
effectively but also prompt those who aren't good 224
communicators and get them to try and say what they want to 225
say 226

Connie: Okay, doing well ladies, doing very well. ▮ this would be easy for 227
you. How do you describe your experience at ▮ s in the 228
community partnerships program? 229

P1 ▮ Yeah it's been a good experience being part of the P& F and being part of 230
making the sandwiches of an afternoon on Tuesday for the 231
homework club and even organising and helping with the family 232
fun day it's been a good experience and I've met so many 233
different people that I don't even remember their names 234

Connie: And what do you think is the purpose of the community partnership 235
program at ▮ 236

P1 ▮ Well I think, in my point of view it's just to get everyone together so 237
everyone can meet each other and you always meet someone 238
different at St Paul's and you always find out different stuff that 239
is going on and you meet people from all interesting types of 240
backgrounds and it make you, it's a very broad-minded school. 241

Connie: So Jenn, I will ask you what your experiences are of the community 242
partnerships program are and what you feel is the purpose of it 243
here. 244

P2 ▮ My experience being part of the P& F and being the secretary, I'm 245
involved with the school, I help with things, doing the BBQ to 246
raise money, checking out signs for the school, I go into the 247
community centre on a Wednesday and have lunch with 248
everyone with Louie and you meet new people and I've met so 249
many different kids and I've made friends with so many 250
different people and i think that's what's important to me is the 251
fact that you can come here and do that you can make friends 252
and find out what is going on in your community. 253

Connie: So what do you think the purpose of the ▮ ommunity 254
Partnership? 255

P2 [redacted] To bring everybody together so that all the parents can be friends and 256
to get to know each other, so that they know that they can use 257
the community centre when they want to use it, they know that 258
they can come here and be safe and they have people to talk to. 259

Connie [redacted] what's your experience? 260

P3 [redacted] My experience here is mainly through the playgroup with my younger 261
son, Also I rely on my social network because I don't have family 262
here so my friends are really important to me and I really enjoy 263
coming here, I know that I don't just have to drop off my son 264
and go, I can stay and play with my other son, I have lunch on 265
Wednesdays as well I meet lots of the other students and lots of 266
the other families and I really enjoy it here. 267

Connie: So what do you think was the purpose of setting up the Community 268
Partnership Program? 269

P3 [redacted] Mainly because there are a lot of ethnic families here some of the parents 270
don't speak English well and it's a chance for them to feel 271
included and safe even though they can't speak the language 272
really well and mainly it's to integrate all the families in the 273
area. 274

Connie: So what are the strengths of the partnership, Alicia, what's good about 275
it? 276

P1 [redacted] Where do I start? Everything is good about it the community centre the 277
parish the school, having [redacted] down at the community centre 278
to cook on a Wednesday to cook for about 20 – 50 people, 279
having homework club for the kids if they don't have time to do 280
it at home they can do it here and being involved with the 281
tuckshop and getting to know the kids, it's just all great 282

P2 [redacted] it's the school strengths or the resources that the school has, the 283
community centre you've got the school hall, you've got the 284
P&F, and I would say that's its strength because it brings 285
everybody together 286

P3 [redacted] would say it's the people the leadership, I am also a member of a couple 287
of other community centres which are quite clicky and here I 288
don't find that at all, i felt really welcomed here. 289

Connie: So you feel one of the strengths is the way it's being run and the administration of the actual partnership 290 291

P3 ██████ Yeah 292

P2 ██████ More relaxed 293

Connie Relaxed 294

P2 ██████ Well relaxed atmosphere, everybody is just more approachable, you know when you walk in the school gates you don't have to worry about talking to anyone because they are so open and honest 295 296 297 298

Connie: So Alicia where do you see the █████ Community Partnership in five years time 299 300

P1 ██████ Well I hope that ████ is running a restaurant an████ and I are famous for running the P & F and I hope through being on the P&F and doing so much fundraising that the school gets more resources and achieves more it can only get better, who knows what is going to happen in five years but whatever will happen it can only get better 301 302 303 304 305 306

P2 ██████ Being on the P&F I am going to be here for years, I have one more to go through school so I will probably be here in five years time so it would be nice to see the school progress 307 308 309

Connie: Can you tell me what that might look like ████ I am trying to discern your ideas for the future. 310 311

P2 ██████ I would say like a new playground a bigger one; the one we've got now is good but a bigger one and a safer one would be better for the children and more going on at the community centre 312 313 314

Connie: What kind of things going on 315

P2 ██████ Language lessons, interactive things for the kids, and more sports for the younger kids as well I would like to see that for the younger age groups. 316 317 318

P1 ██████ eah that would be fantastic to see them playing more sport instead of it just being from 319 320

P2 [redacted] From year 5 upwards 321

P1 [redacted] That would be fantastic if the younger ones could get into it and I would 322
also love to see undercover walkways for the children from prep 323
so that they did not get wet. That is just one of the things that I 324
would like to see happen in five years that would be fantastic 325

P3 [redacted] would like to see more mums and kids in playgroup 326

P2 [redacted] I would like to see more mums and parents involved in everything like 327
P&F the meetings and fundraisers and things like that in five 328
years time I would hope to see more people helping than what 329
we have now. 330

P3 [redacted] Because often I see like at assembly time, I get here at just after 2:30 and I 331
see parents sitting in their cars just waiting until 2:50 and I think 332
why they don't come in, come up and see what's on 333

Connie: How do you think that they could know that they are invited? 334

P2 [redacted] We have a sign going up; we are trying to get money to get a sign to go 335
up out the back so hopefully that will encourage parents to 336
come in, cause we could put messages on that board and say 337
anything, so I think when people park out in the [redacted] 338
entrance if they know that there is an assembly happening at 339
2:30 we could put that on the board and they would know to 340
come in. 341

Connie: So the community centre, so this is just an extra question to what is on 342
the sheet is the community centre situated in a good spot and 343
why? 344

P1 [redacted] I think it is, it is near a school entrance and people don't have to go 345
through the school to get to it and I think it's a good little spot 346
down there even though it's attached to the school it's actually 347
got its own little pillar and it can either be attached to the 348
school or in its own little sector. 349

P2 [redacted] in a good place because it does not disrupt the rest of the school, 350
there is not a stream of foot traffic going through the school to 351
get to the community centre, what they do down there stays 352
down there during the day and that's a good idea as the school 353
does not have random people walking around. 354

P3 ████ And I also like the wall tha██████ painted right next to the doors there its 355
nice and bright and colourful and it just says come on in. 356

P2 ████████ And its easy access as well to the car park, the car park is so close and 357
people can just park there come in and then leave. 358

P1 ████████ One thing that I really do like that they have done recently to the school 359
is all the different art designs on the windows and walls, and 360
have pictures of the students reading and all the different 361
activities that the children have been doing instead of them just 362
sitting in a file they have them displayed and it gives an insight 363
to a person that has just come into the school what the school is 364
all about. 365

366

Connie: You mean in the community centre

P1 ████████ And in the office they have a big display on the wall of all the different 367
things the children have done. It gives you an insight into 368
what's happening. Its just not all these pictures on a USB stick 369

P2 ████████ more welcoming; when parents come in and see what the children 370
are doing its just more friendly 371

P3 ████ As a new parent, this being my first year here that's the first thing I saw 372
first day of school when I walked in and I thought oh wow they 373
have put a lot of effort into putting things up and making it look 374
nice. 375

376

Connie: Anyone want to say anything else. Okay that's been great.

Meeting ended 3.52 pm

Appendix E
Interview Questions for Steering Committee Members

One-on-one Interview Questions for Steering Committee Members

1) What was the impetus for starting the Community Development Program at St. Elsewhere?

2) What were its purpose and aims?

3) What did you envisage it would look like and how it would operate?

4) What structures were put in place to implement the program?

5) What was the starting date for the program?

6) How did you see it augmenting the school?

7) Who were the key stakeholders?

8) How did you envisage parents would experience the project?

9) How did the others perceive a community development project?

Appendix F
Interview Questions for Parents

DRAFT FOCUS GROUP & ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. In your response to the section regarding your awareness of current projects in place at the St Elsewhere's Community Centre you indicated that you were using a number of programs. Could you please talk more about your responses in order to gain a greater insight into them?

2. The School/Community partnerships program has been described as a positive improvement for St Elsewhere's School. In what ways do you think that this statement is true or false?

3. In your opinion, what are some new ways for the St Elsewhere's Community Centre to connect with many more children and families?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix G
Interview Questions for Staff

DRAFT FOCUS GROUP & ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STAFF

1. In your response to the section regarding your awareness of current initiatives in place at the St Elsewhere's Community Centre you indicated that you were utilising a number of programs. Could you please elaborate on your responses in order to gain a greater insight into them?

2. The School/Community partnerships program has been described as a positive innovation for St Elsewhere's School. In what ways do you think that this statement is true or false?

3. In your opinion, what are some improvements or fresh ideas that could result in the St Elsewhere's Community Centre connecting with many more children and families?

4. Do you have anything more you would like to add?

Appendix H
Parent/Guardian Consent Form

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
(Parent/Guardian's Copy)

Title of Project: School/Community Partnerships

Principal Supervisor: Professor Elizabeth Warren
Student Researcher: Connie Koch

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this 15 minute survey and if required, to attend in the community centre, the 1 hour focus group and 45 minute audio-taped one-on-one interview*,* on a suitable day and time to me, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. 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 PARTICIPANT: …………………………………………………………………………

SIGNATURE ……………………………………………………   DATE

…………………………….

CONTACT NUMBER: ………………………………………………………………..

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: …………………………………………………………

DATE:…………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: …………………………………………………………

DATE:......................

ACU National
Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

STAFF CONSENT FORM
(Staff Member's Copy)

Title of Project: School/Community Partnerships

Principal Supervisor: Professor Elizabeth Warren
Student Researcher: Connie Koch

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this 15 minute survey and if required the 1 hour focus group and 45 minute audio-taped one-on-one interview*,* realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. 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 PARTICIPANT: ……………………………………………………………………………

SIGNATURE ....   DATE

....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ……………………………………………………

DATE:………………………..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ……………………………………………………

DATE:...................…..

James Dobson – Dare to Discipline)
Could also be utilised
for a toy library – discuss
with M.
Lounge in corner + small
table in corner w/ phone but
phone is rarely answered
as the office phone is
answered.
Locked cupboard for
Homework club equipment
Look at better utilisation of
outdoor area – kiln, bbq,
garden.
Excited that I have so
much to do with the CPP
through the Indigenous
program with S.
Looking forward to
working with Fusion this
year – partnering in
mentoring
J. has developed a great

biscuits for the teachers
"because we need
pampering, too". What a
sweetie!
Who said our parents
are disengaged and
uncaring.
M. is passionate advocate
for her people. She
confided in me that she's
worried because her fees
have accumulated. I
suggested a way out –
because she's the
daughter of one of
Australia's most
respected Indigenous
artists (who presented
artwork to Pope J.P.II on
his Australian visit) I
suggested that she
paint a whole school
mural of hands as her
father did in the 90's (on

Sr G. and M. (Literacy & Numeracy support teacher) have donated books & toys. J. from Fusion has donated a lot of stuff too as well. From somewhere I have procured small tables & chairs for playdough, puzzles & morning tea but we will still have mat time. (Plan to use the garden a lot more this yr and to ask the parents for ideas for excursions).

J. has also asked me to run a ladies' craft group with a view to increasing enrolments (How this could increase enrolments has not been explained to me)

idea to actually run the craft session). Mums need more encouragement to run each part of the program, (cut up the fruit & cake for morning tea + clear it away) - but that all will come with time. One mum volunteered to look after the sign in book. She suggested that parents pay a fee each week but the mums all said they couldn't afford that, so the idea was denied. I agreed that we did need funds for reimbursing craft items + other expenses so asked for

teacher (whom I ✓
interviewed last year)
and who brings her
class to the Indigenous
room for cultural
lessons) most
amenable to having
her lunchtime
disrupted. The class
arrived as the ladies'
group was
finishing and the
teacher assigned
children to help
set up the tables,
and then line up
for their meal.
Responses were
"yummy), smells
good, what's that?,
can I have more",
and "can I help
serve? can I help
The conversation with

a roster might do the
trick. Previously, they
have been relying
on everybody's goodwill
because there were
only about 15 disabled
youth + their carers.
Now there are up to
30 kids, L's grand-
daughter + her friends,
some extra kids who
need a feed, the
class teacher +
school officer, plus
any other staff who
want to show their
face. Word has spread
about the great
time to be had on
a Thursday in the
centre (it used to
be Wednesdays, but
was moved to
Thursday to fit in

...ever flowers for the tables so it looks more homey + inviting. There is an excitement about when the older children are going to come because then L. says he "will have to lift up" his game and cook them a feast!

The Community carers sat w/ me for lunch today (when I finally got to sit down) and told me how they loved coming here each week because it was a "personalised experience + that had a lot of heart in it". One actually

which was frequently - come on guys, didn't I hear you say you would look out for each other?)

I honestly don't know what I enjoy more — relating to the mums + bubs in playgroup and watching the mums blossom + come alive, bubbling with ideas for the future + chattering about when these kids would be in our Prep classes + they would have more babies to join Playgroup; OR ladies' group

saying that she would
like all the ladies to
come to her place for
morning tea; or L. who
is a single mum of
four swapping parenting tips with
80+ G.; or M. who
has agoraphobia
agreeing to sit w/
us ladies and
letting us know that
it is a big step fo
her to get out of the
house; or L. who is
happy to be with
her adult daughter
+ grand-daughter;
or E. who is laughing
and calling us her
friends'; or K. who
is schizophrenic
absolutely brushing
... her chair at

Italy passed to me by
my mother before me.
(I suspect L. is a
bit of an actor at
heart, who relishes the
attention + adoration
he receives from the
children).

If we only keep these
three programs
this CPP will thrive
+ flourish. I look
forward to Thursdays,
because I am a
people person
and I don't find it
hard work at all.
Must ask C. to look
into my Thursday
duties because
it is a rush to get
playgroup completely
finished in time fo

this, I love it just as much as my beloved Indigenous program! However, I cannot discount the fact that a lot of the volunteers in the CC, mums in PG and ladies in gem friends met me through the Indigenous program and because they trust me and have known me for years in a variety of capacities are happy to join these programs. Yet again knowledge of the people, trust and LONG TERM COMMITMENT with a proven track record

get involved, PERSONALLY INVITE others and TRUST them to do their job/role/expectations is the key. Every time I report to J, I am literally bubbling w/ enthusiasm about these 3 programs. (Just as much as I do to C about the Indigenous program, which I will be partnering w/ our only Aboriginal class teacher to present a workshop at QIECC conference at the Hilton in Cairns this year.) (Our only concern is whether we will have enough time to record

do some singing
rhymes to ~~record~~ a
CD (I am hoping the
mums will be secure
enough to do this by
CD next week) and
then to finish +
clean up (they
would linger
forever if I don't
do that) C. has
agreed that doing
clean up which leads
into recess time,
then setting up
ladies' group is
counted as my duty.

The mums are inspiring
me, such as V. who has
mental health issues +
4 special needs children,
but who soldiers on because
she doesn't want her kids
taken off her by DOCS.