

**The Contribution of Short-term Cross-Cultural Immersion
to the Formation of Catholic School Staff**

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Statement of Authorship and Sources

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award, Doctor of Education from the Australian Catholic University.

It contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (see Appendix F).

Signed:

Monica Dutton

Date: 13 May 2019

Acknowledgements and Dedication

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative investigation was to explore the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. The experiences of participants involved in *Good Samaritan Education* immersion trips served to illuminate an understanding of the immersion experience and its contribution to formation. The study aimed to discover the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes, and to reveal how these outcomes are evidenced in participants' lives in the post-immersion phase.

An interpretive research design using the epistemologies of constructivism and constructionism, and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism underpinned the investigation. Case study methodology was adopted and data were gathered through 53 semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected based on their involvement in one of 10 *Good Samaritan Education* short-term cross-cultural staff immersion trips between 2004 and 2014.

As the purpose of formation is transformation of individuals and communities, the data were analysed using the lenses of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000a) and *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). These dual lenses provided appropriate scaffolds for understanding the relationships between the constructs of formation and human transformation in the context of short-term cross-cultural immersion.

The findings of this research revealed that short-term cross-cultural immersion contributes to staff formation in several meaningful ways, and key elements of immersion

which foster transformative outcomes were identified. As the research explored the experiences of participants from nine schools involved in 10 immersion trips to one of five host communities over a 10-year period, the ongoing nature of the influence of immersion was evidenced over various timeframes. Outcomes triggered by their immersion experience were noted in all aspects of participants' lives.

The investigation is significant as it addressed a previously unresearched avenue for formation of Australian Catholic school staff, and based on the findings, offers a development of Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b, 2000a) model of Transformative Learning Theory. The research concludes that short-term cross-cultural immersion trips make a significant contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff. The findings reveal critical elements in the design and facilitation of immersion trips, the importance of points of connection for participants and the pivotal nature of the medium-term timeframe in the post-immersion phase.

The research has the capacity to assist school and system leaders to design immersion experiences which contribute to the formation of Catholic school staff, thereby complementing strategic plans for the mission life of their schools.

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Glossary of Terms

For the purposes of consistency and clarity the following terms are defined as they appear in the context of this research.

CST: Catholic Social Teaching is a set of principles which offer a vision for a just society in which the dignity of all people is recognised and valued (Vatican Council, 1998).

Charism: Drawing on the work of Maréchal (2000), the understanding of charism adopted for this research is that it is “a story, a community of mission, a distinctive way of Christian discipleship and a recognised place in sharing in God’s mission in the Church” (Green, 2018, p. 36).

Communitas: an unstructured community in which people are equal; to the very spirit of community.

Conversatio: ‘conversion of life’, or openness to being changed or transformed in relationship with others.

Formation for Mission: A contemporary understanding of formation of Catholic school community members is “Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9).

GSE: *Good Samaritan Education* is a Public Juridic Person responsible for the governance of 10 schools on the eastern seaboard of Australia.

Host community: communities visited by immersion trip participants.

Laity: (lay person) member/s of the Catholic Church who have not been ordained or taken religious vows.

Lectio Divina: ‘divine reading’. A traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer.

Majority World: includes the regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America and so-called as it comprises most of the world's population. Formerly referred to as the Third World or the Developing World.

Mission: is viewed as being for the reign of God, to the world, by the community of believers, in dialogue (Phan, 2002). A contemporary approach is that it is not so much that God’s church has a mission, but rather, that God’s mission has a church (Bevans, 2009).

OSB: Order of St Benedict.

PJP: a Public Juridic Person is a legal entity under canon law that allows the Church's ministries to function in the name of the Catholic Church.

Religious: a person who has chosen to express their Christian commitment by living in community, and by taking lifelong vows.

Religious Institute: a group of women or men who have chosen to express their Christian commitment by living in community, and by taking lifelong vows.

RSC: Religious Sisters of Charity.

Sending school: a school which selects a participant for involvement in an immersion trip.

SGS: Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict.

Short-term cross-cultural immersion trip: an experience during which participants engage with local people in various settings in Majority World communities for periods of less than two weeks (Wuthnow, 2009).

Systemic school: Catholic primary and secondary schools which belong to a diocese are known as 'systemic schools'. They are managed by a diocesan director on behalf of the local bishop who has ultimate responsibility for the schools in the diocese.

Transformation: an internal change or shift experienced by an individual; changing a person from within.

Vatican II: an assembly of all the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church held from 1962 to 1965.

Chapter One

1 Defining the Research Problem

The emergence of the short-term cross-cultural immersion trip has resulted in a rapid expansion of the phenomenon across the globe. The upsurge in frequency of immersions has generated a remarkable diversity of destinations and anticipated outcomes for both participants and organising entities. Increased awareness of global issues, more affordable domestic and international travel, and the desire to be personally involved in action, advocacy and solidarity with those in the Majority World (see Glossary), have all contributed to the sharp rise in the incidence of involvement in short-term cross-cultural immersion trips (D'Souza, 2010; Hawkins, Verstege, & Flood, 2013). While corporate and not-for-profit organisations including humanitarian, secular and faith-based groups all expend a great deal of time, energy and resources on planning and facilitating such trips (Howell, 2009; Ver Beek, 2006), research in the field has not kept pace with their rapidly escalating popularity.

Concurrently, the dramatic decline in numbers of religious priests, sisters and brothers in Catholic educational circles since Vatican II (see Glossary) has led to progressively more rigorous requirements for formation of lay people who govern, lead and staff Catholic schools. Participation in an immersion trip as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff is still fairly limited, and while anecdotally participants typically report their trip to be 'life-changing', the precise significance of many aspects of the experience remains unclear.

This introductory chapter defines the background, context and purpose of the investigation, leading to identification of the research problem. The design of the research is outlined and the significance of the study explained. Finally, the structure of the thesis

is summarised chapter by chapter, to provide an overview of the scope and sequence of the research.

1.1 Background to the research.

The impetus for this thesis emerged from the researcher's professional interest in staff formation and short-term cross-cultural immersion trips. The researcher had been responsible for planning and leading a range of immersion experiences for staff and students in *Good Samaritan Education (GSE, see Glossary)* schools for over 10 years, and over a period of time began to observe patterns in individual and collective experiences and reported actions in the post-immersion phase. Typically, participants described their immersion experience in terms of it being 'life-changing', 'transformative' or a 'light-bulb moment'. In many cases the trips appeared to spark greater awareness of global inequity, which then became a catalyst for personal involvement in action and advocacy post-immersion. Participants commonly described feeling both humbled and enriched by their experience of immersion, and actively sought pathways to 'give back' in some way after returning home.

Participants generally reported immersions in a positive light. However, their perceptions of the experience, what elements of the trip fostered the transformative outcomes they described, and what the short, medium and long-term outcomes post-immersion are, remained unclear. There was also a lack of clarity around whether the effect of the experience increased or dissipated over time, and what factors enhanced or inhibited this effect. Furthermore, in the Catholic school setting, short-term cross-cultural immersion trips are increasingly being offered as a formation opportunity for staff, yet, it is not known whether the experience aligns with the desired outcomes of formation.

A review of the extant literature suggested that investigations into short-term cross-cultural immersion trips have centred on adolescents and undergraduate students, predominantly in North America (Linhart, 2006; Ver Beek, 2006; Wuthnow, 2009). Research into the outcomes of immersion for participants has also primarily focused on one group of individuals involved in one immersion trip, at one time, and data have been gathered in the immediate post-immersion phase (Linhart, 2006; Unterhalter, McDonald, Swain, Mitchell, & Young, 2002; Ver Beek, 2006; Wright & Hodge, 2012). In seeking to address the current lacuna in the body of knowledge, this investigation explored the experiences of 53 Australian adult staff members from nine affiliated Catholic schools participating in one of 10 different immersion trips over a 10-year period to one of five culturally diverse host communities. The study aimed to uncover the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff by:

1. exploring the immersion experiences of adult participants;
2. identifying elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes; and
3. revealing short, medium and long-term post-immersion outcomes for participants.

Seeking to uncover these facets of immersion necessitates clarification of many aspects relating to the context of the research.

1.2 Context of the research.

The contextual issues relevant to this investigation are:

1. formation of Catholic school staff;
2. short-term cross-cultural immersion;
3. *Good Samaritan Education (GSE)*; and
4. the *GSE Staff Immersion Program*.

The characteristics of each as they relate to this research are addressed in turn.

1.2.1 Formation of Catholic school staff.

A contemporary understanding adopted for this investigation is that formation for mission of Catholic school community members is:

Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9).

The clear expectation that staff in Catholic schools participate in formation emanates from ecclesial documentation (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, 1997; Paul VI, 1965b). Given the diversity of staff backgrounds, experience and willingness to participate in formation across Catholic schools and systems generally, significant challenges emerge for administrators in the planning and delivery of effective formation programs. As nurturing the Catholic culture in schools is now essentially the responsibility of the laity, the need for provision of intentional, developmental, ongoing and reflective formation programs is clearly apparent (Dixon, 2006; Gowdie, 2011; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017; Rymarz, 2002, 2009).

From within this shifting landscape, the short-term cross-cultural immersion trip has emerged as an increasingly popular formation experience for staff in Catholic schools. The prospect of broadening one’s awareness of global issues, engaging with marginalised people and deepening an understanding of the Catholic worldview in a different cultural setting, is being embraced in increasing numbers. How the anticipated outcomes of formation for staff are being met by immersion trips, however, has not been documented.

The second contextual issue relating to this investigation, short-term cross-cultural immersion, is addressed in the following section.

1.2.2 Short-term cross-cultural immersion.

Short-term cross-cultural immersion trips typically involve leaving one's local community for a short period of time, with the majority of trips lasting less than two weeks (Wuthnow, 2009). The aims of immersions vary greatly and include evangelism, service provision, cultural immersion, education and social justice advocacy (Probasco, 2013). Motivations of participants may include desiring to have a challenging or meaningful experience, hoping to make a difference by helping others or wishing to gain greater cross-cultural understanding (Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2009).

Globalisation and the articulated outcomes of higher education such as intercultural competence, knowledge and understanding, and global engagement have seen the inclusion of international studies, and exchange and immersion programs in many colleges and universities (FERENCE, 2006; Rodriguez, 2011). Immersion trips have been found to inspire, transform and challenge previously held beliefs (Wright & Hodge, 2012), and to increase religious participation and solidify religious beliefs in participating adolescents (Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009).

Immersion experiences are characterised not only by visits to host communities, but by “conversation with local people, identification of concerns, exposure to and exploration of traditional cultures and their values, and analysis of global influences and current social issues” (Kearney, 2010, p. 2). Most importantly, an immersion needs to be an experience of solidarity with the local people and cannot be experienced without personal engagement and reflection (Kearney, 2010). The concept of transformation

through immersion has been described as “entering into a foreign medium in the form of a culture or sub-culture and consequently emerging a changed person” (D'Souza, 2010, p. 1). The spiritual dimension of immersion has also been identified, and likened to building the Kingdom of God (Donaldson, 2010). As most research has focused on adolescents and undergraduate students, the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of adult Catholic school staff in terms of changed perspectives and behaviours post-immersion, remains unclear.

The third contextual dimension, *Good Samaritan Education* is outlined below.

1.2.3 Good Samaritan Education.

As the immersion experiences under investigation in this study are conducted by *Good Samaritan Education (GSE)*, some background to this recently constituted ecclesial entity is provided.

The Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict (SGS) were co-founded in 1857 by John Bede Polding OSB, the first Archbishop of Sydney, and Mother Scholastica Gibbons RSC. The order was the first to be established in Australia and the scope of the sisters' ministry was to be “ready to teach in schools... and to apply themselves to every other charitable work” (Pullen, 1982, p. 3). Catholic schools in the early days of the colony were conducted firstly by lay people, and then by various orders of priests, and religious sisters and brothers. The schools were administered initially by parishes, and later by Catholic education authorities. Over time, most of the schools conducted by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan were subsumed into diocesan systems, and by the latter part of the 20th century, there was a growing recognition that the governance structure in place for the sisters' remaining 10 schools lacked long-term

sustainability. After a long process of consultation and discernment, the sisters moved to instigate a new model of governance – that of a Public Juridic Person (PJP, see Glossary) (Good Samaritan Education, 2011b).

The shift in governance models by religious institutes towards the PJP, particularly in health care and education, is a relatively recent trend. A PJP is “established by ecclesial authority with an apostolic purpose; it is perpetual in nature; it has canonical rights and obligations and has its own internal statutes” (Date, 2008, pp. 27-28). Comprising 10 schools on the eastern seaboard of Australia, *GSE* was constituted as a PJP in 2011 with the agreement of the Archbishops of Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney and the Bishops of Broken Bay and Wollongong. In the transfer of governance from the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, *GSE* “assumed the congregation’s rights and obligations pertaining to the ministry of Catholic education” (Good Samaritan Education, 2011b, p. 7).

Complex issues arise for members and directors of newly emerging governance models. Responsibility for nurturing Catholic identity and mission in their 10 schools for example, now lies with the *GSE* Governing Council. Within *GSE*’s structure, *Good Samaritan Education Services (GSES)* provides a range of formation opportunities for governance, staff and students, with the desired outcome being that all members of school communities may “become inspired by the charism to respond to the Gospel call to bring about the reign of God” (Good Samaritan Education, 2011a, p. 6). As such, formation of all its people is a priority area for *GSE*, and the *GSE* Staff Immersion Program is one avenue for formation in the range of opportunities provided. This fourth contextual issue – *Good Samaritan Education* immersion experiences, is described in the following section.

1.2.4 Good Samaritan Education immersion experiences.

Good Samaritan Education (GSE) immersion experiences in Australia are positioned within a framework of formation for mission. They are designed to:

Link people in *Good Samaritan Education* communities to the contemporary mission and ministry of the Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition...and involve governance personnel and members of *GSE* schools visiting Good Samaritan Benedictine communities with which [they] are in partnership. (Good Samaritan Education, 2013b, p. 1)

A range of different immersion programs designed to meet the varying needs of governance, leadership, staff and students is organised by *Good Samaritan Education Services (GSES)*. The particular focus of this investigation is the Staff Immersion Program which has been operating since 2004. The destinations visited are communities in which the Sisters of the Good Samaritan are actively engaged in ministry, and are located in the Philippines, Kiribati, Timor-Leste, Japan and Western Australia. A different community is visited each year on a rotating basis for 10-12 days during school term-breaks, and all have English as an additional language.

While Japan fits the criteria of being a cross-cultural community, some of the more confronting elements experienced when visiting the other destinations, are not so apparent. Conversely, while Western Australia is also not situated in the Majority World, some aspects of life in the indigenous communities visited, are extremely challenging for participants. As such, the inclusion of data from participants involved in trips to Japan and Western Australia may provide useful information about whether the destination is as important as other factors in fostering transformative outcomes in participants.

Participants for the staff immersion trips are selected and subsidised by their respective schools and this process is at the discretion of the individual school principal. Information about upcoming trips is circulated to all 10 *GSE* schools a year in advance and the invitation to apply for inclusion is open to all members of staff – teaching and non-teaching. Staff immersion trip groups therefore comprise individuals who have diverse roles within their school communities: governance personnel, principals, school leadership teams, teachers, administration staff and support-staff are all represented. As there is an allocation of one place per school each year, the group is usually made up of 10 participants and two *GSES* leaders. Students are not involved in these trips, which enables staff members to participate in this formation experience without the added responsibility of daily planning and supervision duties. This aspect allows staff members some measure of freedom and discretionary time to engage with people in the host community, and to focus and reflect upon their individual experience, and their personal, professional and spiritual formation.

All *GSE* immersions are Christocentric, promote a Catholic worldview, aim to deepen an awareness and appreciation of the Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition and involve participants in experiences which invite a response from their heart, soul, strength and mind (Good Samaritan Education, 2013b). The Gospel message and a contemporary theology are central to the design, and themes of partnership, service and spirituality are explicit in all immersion programs.

The partnership dimension offers an opportunity for a practical response to the question posed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, ‘who is my neighbour?’ (Luke 10:29, New Revised Standard Version) and the service dimension centres on its subsequent imperative to ‘go and do likewise’ (Luke 10:37). The spirituality dimension

seeks to mirror the balance evident in the Benedictine way of life through opportunities for prayer, reflection and an invitation to deepen personal spirituality. The Good Samaritan Benedictine values of community, hospitality, ‘*conversatio*’ (see Glossary), stewardship, justice and peace are central to the design of *GSE* Staff Immersion Programs (Good Samaritan Education, 2013b). Substantive theological content is evident in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST, see Glossary) through the concepts of human dignity, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity, which are foundational to the rationale of *GSE* immersions.

With the contextual issues in place, the research problem, the purpose of the research, the major research question and the design of the research are identified and outlined in the following sections.

1.3 Identification of the research problem.

The contextual issues of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion, *Good Samaritan Education* and *GSE* immersion experiences, which have been identified and outlined, firmly situate this investigation within the contemporary Australian Catholic educational landscape and within the particular ecclesial entity of *GSE*. An overview of short-term cross-cultural immersion has been provided and its application to the construct of staff formation explained in the context of the *GSE* Staff Immersion Program.

While immersion experiences are generally viewed in a positive light, the nature of the experience, the elements fostering transformative outcomes and the short, medium and long-term outcomes for participants have not been researched and invite investigation through this thesis. Consequently, the research problem underpinning this study is

concerned with the short-term cross-cultural immersion trip as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff. The focus of the research is the *GSE Staff Immersion Program*.

1.4 The purpose of the research.

The purpose of this qualitative investigation is to explore the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. The research seeks to further illuminate understanding of the experience of immersion, the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes, and the short, medium and long-term outcomes for participants post-immersion.

1.5 The major research question.

The research question underpinning this investigation is: *How does short-term cross-cultural immersion contribute to the formation of Catholic school staff?*

1.6 Design of the research.

The Major Research Question for this investigation seeks to uncover the formative effects of the quite specific setting of a short-term cross-cultural immersion, and as such, invites the use of an interpretive research design to support the conduct of the study. The epistemologies of constructivism and constructionism both recognise the complexity of human meaning-making, and the individual and collective reflective processes generated by an immersion experience offer wide-ranging support for this investigation, providing justification for their application.

This study is aimed at uncovering how participants assign meaning to their experiences in the context of short-term cross-cultural immersion, and the variability of human interaction these experiences produce. Symbolic interactionism is therefore

selected as the primary lens within the interpretive research paradigm as both individual and collective social interactions are fundamental to this investigation.

The methodology adopted for this research is the case study approach as it explores “a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context” (Yin, 2013, p. 13). The case study is clearly bounded by the unique framework of the *GSE* Staff Immersion Program. The investigation also positions itself well within the case study methodology as the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy is used and the product is richly descriptive (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Informed by the research design, this study uses the semi-structured interview to gain participant insight into short-term cross-cultural immersion. Individuals were selected based on their participation in any of the 10 *GSE* staff immersion trips conducted between 2004 and 2014. The 53 participants interviewed for the investigation are representative of the nine participating *GSE* schools, which span three states and five Catholic dioceses across Australia. The interviews were conducted over a 12-month period between June 2014 and May 2015.

There is mounting evidence to suggest participants are changed or transformed in some way by their experience of immersion (International Development Agency, 2005; Linhart, 2006; Lough et al., 2009; Plante, Lackey, & Hwang, 2009; Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009; United Nations Volunteers, 2011; Unterhalter, McDonald, Swain, Mitchell, & Young, 2002). The theoretical framework selected for this research is therefore based on Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000a; Mezirow & Associates, 1990). The basis of transformative learning is a fundamental

change in the way individuals view themselves and the world in which they live. Experience, critical reflection and development of new understandings are central to the theory (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The interplay between an individual's cognitive, emotional, moral, social and spiritual dimensions results in a modification of their worldview, which in turn may be a catalyst for changed perspectives and behaviours.

1.7 Significance of the research.

Opportunities for formation of staff in the Catholic school context take place in a variety of settings. The exploration of participant experience of short-term cross-cultural immersion as an avenue for staff formation provides a distinctive contribution to the current body of knowledge. This investigation is therefore significant for several reasons. Each of these is identified and explained.

1. As the participants in the study are from Catholic schools and visit communities with a shared religious tradition, the investigation has the potential to contribute to the discussion of immersion trips within the context of staff formation, personal spirituality, Catholic identity and mission, and connecting to the founding charism of a school.
2. The investigation explores the experiences of participants whilst on immersion, the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes, and the short, medium and long-term outcomes for participants post-immersion. As such, the investigation is expected to assist school leadership teams to design immersion experiences that are both meaningful for participants, and which complement strategic plans to enhance the effectiveness of formation opportunities for staff and the mission life of the school community.
3. Immersion trips require a significant investment of time and resources, both human and financial. As there are always budgetary restraints and competing

demands for limited financial means in the school setting, it is possible that the findings of this research may assist leadership teams in making decisions regarding the most appropriate allocation of resources for staff formation. Such information has the capacity to be beneficial to long-term planning, thereby providing an effective and wide-ranging platform for informing school improvement cycles and future practice.

4. The limited research into immersion trips both nationally and internationally has focused primarily on the involvement of adolescents and undergraduate students. This study seeks to address this shortcoming in the literature by uncovering the experiences of adult participants, who have a heightened capacity for critical reflection.
5. The literature would suggest most investigations have reported a single immersion trip on a single occasion for one group of people. This study offers the opportunity for insight into various aspects of immersion given the number of trips and the time period of 10 years under investigation. The different groups of individuals involved as participants are drawn from nine schools, and a variety of experiences gathered from visits to five different host communities, provide a depth and breadth not previously investigated.
6. This research offers a unique insight into the outcomes of immersion over time. As the immersion trips under investigation span a 10-year period, identification of specific aspects of the experience which increase or dissipate over time will be informative in understanding the short, medium and long-term effect of the phenomenon.

1.8 Setting the boundaries of the research.

This investigation seeks to explore the experiences of staff participants involved in short-term cross-cultural immersion trips as a formation opportunity. While the research is limited by the inability to involve every participant in the study, this limitation will be addressed by the use of a relatively large sample (53 participants), and the diversity of these participants from nine schools across 10 different immersion trips over a 10-year period. The staff members involved are from schools which share the same values and spiritual tradition, have similar professional interests and are predisposed to involvement in an immersion experience. These factors mean the findings are highly specific to this particular context and population, yet may be useful in assisting Catholic schools, and other faith-based and secular organisations in planning and organising immersion trips in their own context.

The researcher was a participant in the 2006 staff immersion trip to the Philippines and has been a member of *Good Samaritan Education Services* since 2008. In this role, the researcher has been responsible for coordination of six of the immersion trips under investigation. The choice of research area and the particular perspective evident in the study is influenced by the specialised professional experience and interest of the researcher. This professional interest and short-term relationship with participants is acknowledged, as is the possible bias and influence this relationship may have on the research findings (Gillham, 2005). As such, every effort was made to ensure the rapport with participants optimised the capacity for authentic data collection while maintaining the integrity of the research.

The researcher has no authority within individual school structures and the interaction with participants post-immersion is minimal. There is no unequal power

relation and the researcher has no vested interest in the findings of the research. An established professional relationship increases the likelihood of honesty and candour in participant's responses (Unluer, 2012), and having been involved in the same immersion trips as many of the participants, the researcher is ideally positioned to make sense of their comments.

The investigation provides information about a specific group of people over a defined period of time and cannot be generalised beyond the boundaries of this case. However, the research strategies employed, in line with their epistemological and theoretical underpinnings, seek to illuminate the research question by providing reliable data and an integrated interpretation of the findings. Generalisations and possibilities for transference of information inferred from this case study are therefore derived by the reader.

The participants and the short-term cross-cultural immersion trips represented in this study have been purposively selected. The selection is not considered to be comprehensive or generalisable, but representative of the broad range of immersion experiences currently on offer. The research seeks to explore participant experiences by focusing on a particular model of immersion, and to derive key elements or factors that contribute to the formation of staff in the Catholic school setting.

1.9 Structure of the thesis.

The thesis comprises seven chapters. A review of the scholarly literature relevant to the research purpose is undertaken in Chapter Two. As the breadth of the literature was explored, the researcher found it was possible to structure the chapter according to three common themes:

1. formation of Catholic school staff;
2. short-term cross-cultural immersion; and
3. transformation of individuals.

From these themes two research questions emerged which provided the basis for selection of the research design.

An overview of the design of the research is presented in Chapter Three. Situating this interpretive investigation within the epistemologies of constructivism and constructionism allows a focus on how participants and the group make sense of, and construct meaning through, their experience of immersion. The lens of symbolic interactionism through which this research is viewed is explained, and the selection of case study methodology is justified. The data collection method of the semi-structured interview is outlined and the processes for analysis of the data are explained.

The findings chapters provide an opportunity to hear the voices of the individual participants as their stories emerge. Chapter Four explores the experiences of participants whilst on immersion and Chapter Five details the outcomes for participants in the post-immersion phase.

Chapter Six centres on a discussion of the findings of the research in light of the scholarly literature, theory and practice, leading to answers to the research questions. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by summarising the findings of the investigation, offering conclusions regarding new knowledge and providing recommendations for future research in the field.

1.10 Conclusion.

This first chapter of the thesis has provided the background for the research and explained the contextual features of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion, the ecclesial entity *Good Samaritan Education*, and the *Good Samaritan Education Staff Immersion Program*. The research problem has been identified, the purpose of the research outlined, and the major research question posed. The significance of the research has been explained, the boundaries of the research discussed, and the structure of the thesis outlined.

This thesis examines the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Australian Catholic school staff. This area has not been researched previously, and in this context, several key issues remain unresolved. This significant lacuna exposes the need to review the scholarly literature, which is undertaken in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

2 Review of the Literature

The research problem identified in Chapter One concerns an exploration of the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. Formation of staff is central to the life and mission of Catholic schools and its purpose is deep learning through a range of intentional, ongoing and reflective experiences, leading to the transformation of individuals and educational communities (Gowdie, 2011, 2017; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). Short-term cross-cultural immersion trips have emerged as a valuable formation opportunity for staff, and are frequently reported to be ‘life-changing’ or ‘transformative’ (D’Souza, 2010). The transformational dimension of immersion aligns with the purpose of formation, and opens the possibility for internal shifts, and changed perspectives and behaviours for participants. The literature illuminating the research topic is wide-ranging and encompasses the key areas of:

1. formation of Catholic school staff;
2. short-term cross-cultural immersion; and
3. transformation of individuals.

The review begins with an examination of the scholarly literature relating to formation of Catholic school staff, followed by short-term cross-cultural immersion and transformation of individuals. The review then moves to a focus on the literature relating to transformative outcomes of immersion for participants. The review of the literature seeks to illuminate the problem and the purpose of the research, to develop a conceptual framework, and to conclude with the generation of appropriate research questions to guide the investigation.

The literature which informs the key areas of the research facilitates an understanding of their interconnectedness and the emergent conceptual themes. A conceptual framework of the literature review is presented in Figure 2.1.



Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework of the literature review.

The relationships between the three discrete areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and transformation of individuals is revealed as the chapter unfolds. The final iteration of the conceptual framework which summarises the emergent interplay between the three key areas, and serves to generate the research questions to guide the conduct of the investigation, is presented at the conclusion of the chapter.

2.1 Formation of Catholic school staff.

Formation of staff is central to the life and mission of Catholic schools. The school's task is fundamentally "a synthesis of culture and faith, and faith and life" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977 n. 37). Catholic schools aim to:

1. impart Catholic beliefs, values, practices and traditions within a faith-filled community;
2. ensure quality teaching and learning; and
3. make a difference in our world. (Sydney Catholic Schools, n.d.-b)

Essentially, the Catholic school:

Is called to be a living witness of the love of God among us. It can, moreover, become a means through which it is possible to discern, in the light of the Gospel, what is positive in the world, what needs to be transformed and what injustices must be overcome. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007 n. 46)

So that staff members may deepen their knowledge and understanding of their role with respect to the mission of Catholic education, provision of appropriate opportunities for staff formation is a priority for Catholic educational authorities. The following section offers a contemporary understanding of formation, addresses the current Australian Catholic context and identifies the imperative for formation of Catholic school staff.

2.1.1 A contemporary understanding of formation.

The term 'formation' may be understood differently by different people in different contexts. Researchers concur that terms such as 'spiritual formation' are unavoidably ambiguous (Schneiders, 1989) and lack clarity and agreement (Crawford & Rossiter, 1993; Gobbell, 1980). The conventional meaning of 'formation' has shifted

significantly in recent times, and the need for redefinition as it applies in the contemporary Catholic school setting was proposed over 25 years ago (Crawford & Rossiter, 1993).

In the context of religious life, the word ‘formation’ broadly refers to the guidance and direction of novices in the tradition of the Church, and of their order, as articulated by their founder. Individuals enter the process willingly, in search of a deeper, more meaningful personal and communal spiritual life within a particular charism (see Glossary). While the word ‘formation’ has been used more recently to refer to the enculturation or ‘on-boarding’ of lay staff into the ethos, mission and charism of their school, the anticipated outcomes of the process are very different from those relating to the meaning of the word in its former sense.

A more contemporary understanding of formation is that participants are invited to engage with the ongoing mission of the Church. Formation for mission is therefore:

Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world. (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9)

The word ‘formation’ refers to “a set of experiences designed to prepare a person or group for a particular purpose” (Gowdie, 2011, p. 67). Formation of staff typically involves participation in programs that are designed to be developmental, ecclesial and vocationally contextualised (Good Samaritan Education, 2011d). Essentially, the purpose of formation is “to invite all those involved in educational ministry to be anchored in a

Catholic vision that is personal and public, reflective and active, nurturing and transformative”. (Brisbane Catholic Education, n.d. para. 1)

Formation opportunities for staff include, but are not limited to, formal programs such as workshops, retreats, reflection days, immersions, social justice initiatives, residential and online programs; and the less structured encounter and engagement with symbol, ritual, prayer and liturgy in the daily experience of life in a Catholic school setting. As staff members are at different points along their personal, professional and spiritual journeys, programs are ideally developmental and designed to meet the wide-ranging needs within the school community.

The original structure and intent of formation for religious life is neither applicable to, nor appropriate for, professional lay educators. This highlights the need to ensure formation programs remain authentic to the Catholic tradition, relevant to contemporary society and culture, informed by the principles of adult learning, and respectful of the diversity of religious and spiritual experience and practice of individual staff members. The provision of a range of personal, communal, meaningful and transformational encounters with aspects of the Catholic tradition is at the heart of formation for staff.

To assist with an understanding of the contemporary rationale for formation of Australian Catholic school staff, the historical narrative and current context are provided in the following section.

2.1.2 *The contemporary Australian Catholic context.*

A dramatic shift in the Catholic educational landscape has occurred in the last 50 years. After Vatican II, there was a rapid and marked decline in the number of religious in Catholic schools. In the spirit of ‘aggiornamento’ (renewal), many Religious Institutes (RIs) reviewed their position in Catholic schools in the light of their founding charism and moved into ministries of justice with the poor and marginalised. This post-conciliar upheaval in the Church also resulted in significant numbers leaving religious life altogether. According to a report on the 2009 survey of Catholic Religious Institutes in Australia, the number of Catholic nuns, brothers and priests (not including diocesan priests) in Australia reduced by 67% between 1966 and 2009 (Reid, Dixon, & Connolly, 2010). As one example of the rapid decline in numbers of religious in Catholic schools, statistics from the Brisbane Archdiocese (Gowdie, 2011) are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 *Religious presence in Catholic schools: 1968-2010*

Year	Primary Schools			Secondary Schools		
	Number of Religious	Total Teaching Staff	Percentage	Number of Religious	Total Teaching Staff	Percentage
1968	373	643	58%	363	574	63.2%
2010	27	3375	0.8%	4	1670	0.2%

Note: More recent statistics are unavailable. The National Catholic Education Commission no longer keeps records on the numbers of religious in schools as the numbers are so low.

By 2007 almost all leadership and staff in Australian Catholic schools had not been trained in Religious Institutes, and most staff had not been taught by a member of a Religious Institute (English, 2007). This precipitous decline in numbers necessitated the transfer of leadership and staffing of Catholic schools from religious to the laity. It became increasingly apparent that religious needed to work in collaboration with their lay

counterparts to ensure the future of Catholic education. Indeed, Vatican II challenged all involved to adapt their world view in line with contemporary thinking (Paul VI, 1965a), and commended the rightful position of lay people and their “proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church” (Paul VI, 1965b n. 1).

While the need for staff formation had become increasingly evident, Religious Institutes, newly emerging Public Juridic Persons and Catholic Education Offices themselves, had no blueprint for the development of formation programs. The initial stages of such formation centred on the efforts of Religious Institutes in sharing their charisms with staff, and later, Catholic Education Offices in terms of ensuring capabilities for the teaching of Religious Education.

The rapid and unprecedented swing from religious to lay governance, leadership and staffing of Catholic schools has stimulated a re-conceptualisation of the need, purpose and process of formation, and has involved significant changes in school structure, culture and practice. Staff formation is acknowledged as a priority area and the ultimate basis by which teachers are empowered to pursue the mission of Catholic education (Bracken, 2004). This imperative for formation of staff is widely recognised, and addressed in the following section.

2.1.3 The imperative for formation of Catholic school staff.

Catholic schools are Christocentric and aim to promote a world view based on the teachings of Jesus. As such, the schools are both an academic community and a community of believers (E. J. McDermott, 1997). Central to the culture of the Catholic school is its call to be a living expression of the mission of the Church. The authentic Catholic school is determined by the extent to which the Church is present in the school

and the school is present in the Church (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). Formation is therefore fundamental to the professional life of the teacher in a Catholic school. Aligned with acquiring the necessary qualifications and maintaining accreditation in accordance with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011), there is the added requirement of accessing appropriate and ongoing study and developmental experiences in order to carry out their ministry of teaching (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2011). The need for formation of Catholic school staff has been identified by ecclesial authorities, Catholic education authorities, Catholic school authorities, Religious Institute and Public Juridic Person education authorities, through documentation and in the literature. Each of these aspects is addressed in turn.

2.1.3.1 Ecclesial authorities.

Formation has consistently been acknowledged by ecclesial authorities as vital to the effective mission of Catholic schools (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982). The distinctive role of the teacher has been given particular emphasis by the Second Vatican Council. *The Declaration on Christian Education* defined the Church's understanding of the teacher's role as "a vocation requiring special qualities of mind and heart, careful preparation, and readiness to accept new ideas and adapt to the old" (Paul VI, 1965b para. 5). The Second Vatican Council is also clear in its statement relating to educators in Catholic schools in that they need to be willing to offer a permanent commitment to formation and self-formation regarding a choice of cultural and life values to be made present in the educational community (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997a).

More recently, the Congregation for Catholic Education has reiterated its position that the formation of leadership and staff is critically important in shaping the Catholic identity of schools, and in a school's ability to live in fidelity with its educational mission (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013 nn. 76 and 63). The challenges of ensuring rigour and depth in teacher training and formation of staff to deepen their faith and personal beliefs have also been identified in *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion (Instrumentum Laboris)* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014 nn. 1i and 1j).

2.1.3.2 *Catholic education authorities.*

The requirement that staff participate in formation programs is clearly articulated by all Catholic education authorities across Australian dioceses (Brisbane Catholic Education, n.d.; Catholic Education Western Australia, 2017; Sydney Catholic Schools, n.d.-a), Religious Institutes and Public Juridic Persons (Edmund Rice Education Australia, 2013; Good Samaritan Education, 2011c; Kildare Ministries, 2017a; Marist Schools Australia, 2016). Similar approaches are evident in the United States (Earl, 2013) and England (Miller, 2017). The stance of Catholic education authorities on staff formation is encapsulated in the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) position statement:

Catholic schooling authorities in Queensland will support and promote the provision of quality formation experiences to assist all staff members to grow in understanding of their ministry as part of the mission of the Catholic Church. (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2016, p. 2)

Furthermore, the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSIP) recently adopted in a number of Australian Catholic dioceses, also recommends faith formation for all staff and students in Catholic schools (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2009).

2.1.3.3 Catholic school authorities.

With leadership and governance of Catholic schools now essentially the responsibility of the laity, the role of the principal is pivotal in nurturing the tradition and supporting the spiritual development of all members of the school community. The importance of ensuring appropriate formation opportunities for principals themselves and for their staff has been addressed in the literature. In a qualitative study of six lay principals in a rural diocese in NSW, Belmonte and Cranston (2009) found that successful leadership of a Catholic school is highly influenced by both the professional capacity and spiritual capital of the principal. An interpretive design using a multiple case-study study approach was adopted by Belmonte and Cranston, and the methods of data collection were interviews with the principals, field notes, reflexive journals, direct observation and documentary analysis.

The principals noted that attention to their ongoing formation was lacking and identified personal spirituality and opportunities for retreats as areas of greatest need. Courses in Church teachings, theology and Scripture, as well as opportunities for communal prayer and liturgy were also highly valued. The need for principals to encourage staff to nurture and develop their own spirituality, along with the provision of opportunities to support this development is consistently evident in the literature (Bracken, 2004; Hughes, 2008; Shimabukuro, 1998, 2000; Wallace, 2000). While recognising the pivotal role of the principal in staff formation, the generalisability of the research conducted by Belmonte and Cranston is somewhat limited by its small sample

size and a focus on only rural schools. Immersion as an avenue for formation of principals and staff was not a feature of this research.

Research conducted in the Australian diocese of Parramatta explored a number of spiritual formation experiences provided for staff (Bracken, 2004). Using case study methodology, data were gathered from teachers, principals and Catholic Education Office personnel through individual and group interviews, surveys, documentary analysis and observation. Findings indicated the principal's role in the spiritual formation of teachers in Catholic schools applies at the every-day cultural level of school experiences, at the whole school level and at the diocesan level, and that a fundamental leadership responsibility for principals is to "nurture a spiritual base for their own leadership" (Bracken, 2004, p. iii). Bracken's research provides valuable information regarding the importance of formation programs for Catholic school staff and the crucial role of the principal in this process. While a substantial number of formation programs were explored in this research, the place of the immersion was not addressed.

In a study involving both leadership and staff in one systemic (see Glossary) primary school in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, an adult spiritual formation initiative known as the *Catching Fire Project* was examined (Gowdie, 2011). An evaluative case study methodology was adopted involving 54 participants and a wide range of data gathering methods. The findings emphasised the need for formation of staff and identified its role as being a "pivotal rather than an optional factor in growing Catholic leadership in schools" (Gowdie, 2011, p. 5). It was also suggested that the personal, ecclesial and systemic dimensions of the Catholic school setting need to be addressed so that spiritual formation is "personally meaningful, ecclesially faithful and strategically sustainable" (Gowdie, 2011, p. 5). Gowdie's comprehensive research provides great depth and insight

into the Australian Catholic educational milieu, and a contemporary model for staff formation. Immersions align well with Gowdie's criteria for formation, providing a useful resource for this investigation.

2.1.3.4 Religious Institute and Public Juridic Person education authorities.

Those responsible for governance of RIs and PJPs are also accountable for formation of staff within their schools and systems, where the impact of the decline in religious since Vatican II is also very keenly felt. Formation of staff in these educational settings is nuanced by a particular expression of the Catholic tradition. The immersion programs under investigation in this study are positioned within the charism of *Good Samaritan Education (GSE)*, and are designed to “link people in *Good Samaritan Education* communities to the contemporary mission and ministry of the Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition” (Good Samaritan Education, 2013b, p. 1). As such, examining the literature relating to the ways charism is shared enhances an understanding of formation of Catholic school staff.

Charism has been referred to as providing a particular identity and spirituality, and an entry point to the wider Catholic Church (Kerr, 2009; M. L. McDermott, 2006). It is also seen as both an agent of stability and a vehicle for change (Sanders, 2010). Charism is fundamental to schools governed by Religious Institutes and Public Juridic Persons as it provides a wide ranging platform for currency and agency and a clear foundation for the expression of school culture (Brien & Hack, 2005; Green, 1997). Drawing on the work of Maréchal (2000), the understanding of charism adopted for this research is that it is “a story, a community of mission, a distinctive way of Christian discipleship and a recognised place in sharing in God's mission in the Church” (Green, 2018, p. 36).

The need for a strategic approach to the sharing of charism is addressed in the literature. Religious orders maintain a significant formative influence on English Catholic schools where the transmission of distinctive religious charisms is essential in maintaining the dynamism of the educational mission (Grace, 2002). A study involving 12 Salesian high schools in the United States, describes the extent of the practice of the Salesian educational methodology and determines the characteristics of a Salesian school culture. An 88 item instrument based on elements of the Salesian methodology revealed that even though the charism was well understood by both staff and students, it was necessary to introduce an organised training program and to create a new written resource on the Salesian educational tradition in order to maintain its abiding influence (Shafran, 1994).

Correspondingly in the Australian context, a framework for a comprehensive approach to the transmission of the Marist charism was proposed in a qualitative study which included members of 26 religious congregations involved in education in the Australian state of Victoria (Hilton, 1998). Using data collected through interviews, observation, documentary analysis and participation in a range of programs associated with the sharing of charism, Hilton found that charism is transmitted in both formal and informal ways. The formal ways consist of a range of programs planned to overtly share the charism with lay colleagues, which include in-service courses, extended reflection programs and opportunities to explore personal spirituality. The informal processes include school structures, networks, personal contact and the everyday reality of school life (Hilton, 1998).

Of the 26 congregations involved in Hilton's (1998) study, none included immersion programs as a way of sharing their charism with lay colleagues. This is perhaps

due in part to the study being conducted at a time when immersion programs had a lower profile and were not so widely recognised as a formation opportunity for staff. The importance of a progressive, structured program in the Marist tradition from orientation of new teachers through the various stages of professional development over time is also highlighted by McMahon (2007).

2.1.3.5 Contemporary Australian Catholic landscape.

Ecclesial documentation, and research involving Catholic education authorities and school leadership have all clearly articulated the importance of formation for staff. The attendant reality however, is that the demographic profile of staff in Catholic schools across Australia has changed substantially in recent years, reflecting the general decline in affiliation, Mass attendance and adherence to Church teaching (Dixon, 2006; Dixon et al., 2007; McLaughlin, 2005). The Church's position on issues such as abortion, euthanasia and the role of women; and more recently, the same-sex marriage debate and the devastating revelations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Australian Government, 2017) have alienated many within the Catholic community. At its peak in 1954, 74% of the Australian Catholic population attended Mass on a weekly basis. This is in stark contrast to the 10.6% of Catholics attending Mass weekly in 2011, despite an increase in the Catholic population over this time (Wilkinson, 2013).

These figures mirror the statistics for Church attendance of staff in Catholic schools. In a state wide survey the Catholic Education Western Australia Leadership Project found 10% of staff identified as 'Church Going Believers' (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2016), and there is every reason to believe this figure would be consistent across all Australian states and dioceses. The dramatic decline in weekly

Church attendance amongst Australian Catholics is represented in Figure 2.2 (Wilkinson, 2013).

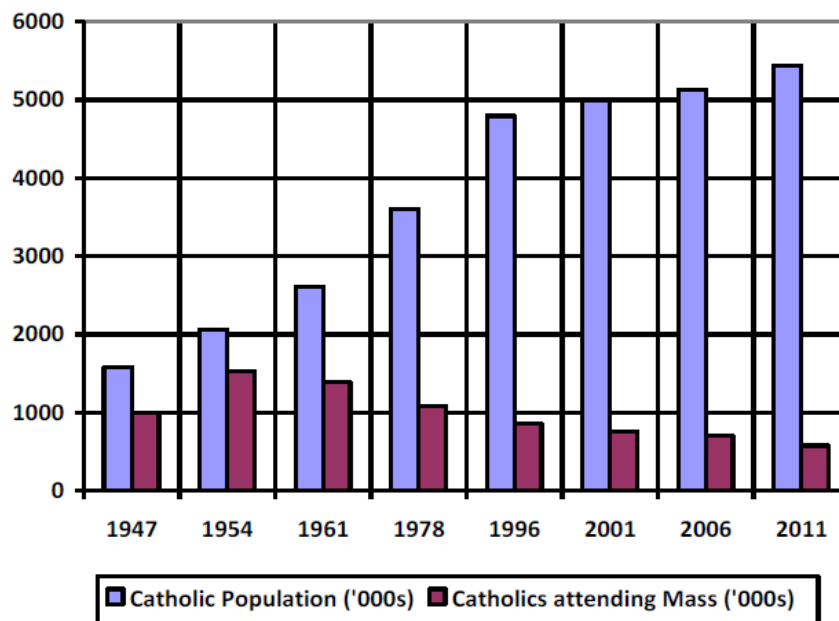


Figure 2.2. Weekly Mass attendance in the Australian Catholic population: 1947-2011.

Within this shifting landscape, the nurturing of the Catholic educational culture is now the work of the laity, and the need for provision of intentional, developmental, ongoing and reflective formation programs for staff is apparent (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). Given the diversity of staff backgrounds, attitudes, experience and willingness to participate in formation, significant challenges emerge for Catholic education authorities and school leadership teams in the development, delivery and evaluation of formation programs.

Although the need for ongoing formation of Catholic school staff has been clearly identified, investigations into formation opportunities have not, as yet, included short-term cross-cultural immersion. This is surprising given that opportunities for participation in immersion programs have increased, and have been enthusiastically embraced (Catholic Education South Australia, 2017; Good Samaritan Education, 2013a; Sydney

Catholic Schools, n.d.-a). Consequently, how the outcomes of immersion for participants align with the aims of staff formation, remains unclear.

This section has focused on formation of Catholic school staff, and has identified aspects evident in the literature relating to a contemporary understanding of formation, and the imperative for formation in the contemporary Australian context. A second key area to be explored in the review of the scholarly literature is short-term cross-cultural immersion.

2.2 Short-term cross-cultural immersion.

While the emergence of short-term cross-cultural immersion in recent years has seen a rapid expansion of the phenomenon across the globe (Priest & Howell, 2013; Wuthnow, 2009), clear definitions are difficult to locate and research in the field is limited (Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, & Skendall, 2012). Common characteristics of immersion trips include “brevity of duration (typically less than one month), intentionally designed learning experiences, and a possible service-learning component” (Jones et al., 2012, p. 201). As language and terminology are not always consistent across the literature, it is important to provide clarity and precision around the type of experience being explored in this investigation.

2.2.1 Definition of the terminology relating to immersions.

In general terms, learning experiences outside the usual environment are referred to as ‘field trips’ or ‘study tours’. In some circles, when the experience includes a cross-cultural or service component, the term used is ‘immersion trip’ or ‘exposure trip’. In the United States, such experiences are generally referred to as ‘mission trips’. In the context of this study, an immersion refers to a period of time during which participants, usually

from the developed world, engage with people in a cross-cultural setting in a Majority World community (Kearney, 2010).

‘Short-term’ refers to periods of 10 to 21 days (Wuthnow, 2009), and those involved in the immersion are ‘participants’. Schools sponsoring a participant are referred to as the ‘sending school’ and the participants visit a ‘host community’ in a cross-cultural setting. While these terms are used consistently throughout this investigation, the terminology of the researchers is used when referring to their findings. Long-term or career mission work, and short-term cross-cultural placements for specific purposes such as overseas aid projects, working for a non-government organisation or improving foreign language skills, are beyond the scope of this review.

2.2.2 Historical perspectives

Short-term cross-cultural immersions began to appear in the 1970s (Swartzentruber, 2008). While recognised as a growing global phenomenon (Anthony, 1994; Corwin, 2000; Edmondson, 2001), the construct has not had a significant presence in the scholarly literature until recently (Priest & Howell, 2013). An increase in the literature over the last decade or so, has provided research on the topic within the disciplines of anthropology (Birth, 2006; Zehner, 2006), sociology (Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009; Ver Beek, 2006), missiology (Brown, 2008; Park, 2008), and education (FERENCE, 2006; Pink & Butcher, 2014; Rodriguez, 2011; Wright & Hodge, 2012).

The literature on short-term immersion experiences during the 1990s tended to be quite critical and to focus on the ‘amateurisation’ (Winter, 1996) or the ‘McDonaldisation’ (Adeney, 1996) of long-term mission work. Immersions were even referred to as ‘drive-by missions’ (Corwin, 2000), as young inexperienced participants on

short-term trips were viewed, particularly in the United States, as undermining the work of long-term career missionaries. With increasing interest in the trend, however, a fairly extensive range of populist literature began to appear in the 1990s, and a significant body of serious scholarly research has emerged since the early 2000s (Probasco, 2013).

2.2.3 Demographic profile of immersion participants.

Typically, the demographic profile of an immersion participant is that of a person who is young, educated, white and affluent (Hawkins et al., 2013). Not surprisingly, this particular group is well represented in the literature (Hawkins et al., 2013; Kennedy, 1994; Linhart, 2006; Pink & Butcher, 2014; Swartzentruber, 2008; Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009; Wright & Hodge, 2012). Investigations into immersions have primarily been situated within the context of mainstream Protestant churches in the United States and involve adolescents and undergraduate students.

The literature provides a helpful perspective on immersion trips for young people with generally positive outcomes in terms of broadened global understandings and changes in attitudes towards international issues, cultural sensitivities and education. In tertiary institutions, globalisation and the articulated outcomes of higher education such as intercultural competence, knowledge and understanding, and global engagement have seen the inclusion of international studies, community engagement and immersion programs in many Australian and international colleges and universities (Australian Catholic University, 2013; Monash University, 2017; Pink & Butcher, 2014; University of California Berkeley, 2017-18; University of Cambridge, 2017; University of East London, 2017; University of Sydney, 2017; University of Technology Sydney, 2013).

2.2.4 Aims of immersion trips.

Increased participation of adolescents and young people in immersion trips has been noted in the literature, as well as growing popularity amongst adults (Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009). The aims of immersion trips vary and can be summarised into four broad categories:

1. charitable service work;
2. cultural, environmental and educational projects;
3. social justice advocacy; and
4. engaging in evangelisation. (Beyerlein, Trinitapoli, & Adler, 2011; Probasco, 2013).

Motivations of participants may include altruism, solidarity, desiring to have a challenging or meaningful experience, wishing to gain greater cross-cultural understanding and adventure (Fogarty, 2009; Lough et al., 2009; Priest & Ver Beek, 2005). The goal of some faith-based organising groups sending participants on immersion is “to transform their attitudes and behaviours about economic, political and social issues” (Beyerlein et al., 2011, p. 781).

As further explored in Section 2.3, transformation through immersion is evident in the literature as both the goal of organising entities and as an outcome for participants. The aim of formation in the Catholic school setting is to facilitate the growth of individuals and communities (see Section 2.1). As immersion trips are invariably reported by participants to be life changing or transformative, an examination of the third key area of transformation of individuals invites exploration.

2.3 Transformation of individuals.

Transformation has been described as one of the most powerful words in the English language (Brookfield, 2012, p. 131). A range of theoretical perspectives underpin human transformation, including spiritual experiences (Dirkx, 2012) and encountering ‘otherness’ through travel (Morgan, 2010). This investigation rests on the understanding that deep learning is the key to transformational change (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005), which is marked by internal shifts in world view and an external moving out of self to others (Wolski Conn, 1999). The deep learning gained from involvement in short-term cross-cultural immersion may operate as a catalyst for internal shifts, and changed perspectives and behaviours in participants.

This research adopts the epistemological approaches of constructivism and constructionism, and therefore expects that learning occurs in complex individual and social environments where learners actively construct meaning by reflecting on their experiences (Bandura, 1997; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). Learning has been described as “the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Jarvis, 1987, p. 164). This investigation aligns well with Jarvis’ approach, and an exploration of knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to the transformative outcomes of immersion is explored in further detail in Section 2.4.

While all learning begins with experience (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984), particularly significant forms of learning are those which encompass participation or emotive involvement (Jarvis, 1987) – two important dimensions of immersion. As the context of this investigation is an educational one within an adult learning setting, two distinctive yet complementary educational paradigms, ‘experiential learning’ and

‘transformative learning’, make a substantial contribution to an understanding of transformation.

First, ‘experiential learning’ is concerned with the potential for participants to undergo personal growth and change and assimilate new learning (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984). It is defined as “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment” (Beard & Wilson, 2006, p. 2). Experiential learning occurs when a person involved in an activity looks back and evaluates it, determines what was useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity. Experiential learning theory defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

Immersion is experiential in nature and involves participants in personal engagement with a situation which requires critical reflection to understand and process the new information. The development of the Circular Model of Adult Learning (Kolb, 1976, 1981, 1984) involves the four elements of ‘concrete experience’, ‘reflective observation’, ‘abstract conceptualisation’ and ‘active experimentation’. While the model is useful in understanding the role of experiential learning, its limitations lie in a lack of recognition of various learning contexts and the role of community in individual learning. The focus of the model is on knowledge rather than praxis (Jarvis, 2004).

The second educational paradigm relevant to this investigation is ‘transformative learning’. Transformative learning focuses on shifts in consciousness or epistemological frames that alter an individual’s previously constructed spheres of reference to make them

more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally capable of change, so that changed perspectives and beliefs trigger action (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). The basis of transformative learning is a “dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 123).

These transformational changes may be epochal or incremental. An epochal transformation is a “sudden dramatic reorienting insight” (Mezirow, 2012, p. 86) that challenges a person’s core identity. Epochal transformations invite individuals to live more deeply, cultivate hope, instil in them a desire to act, and free them from unsustainable attitudes and behaviours (Tisdell, 2012). After an individual experiences an epochal transformation she/he can never see the world in quite the same way again (Mezirow, 2012; O’Sullivan, 1999, 2012).

In mining the literature relevant to participant experience of a meaningful learning event such as immersion, the transformative learning framework developed by Mezirow (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b; Mezirow & Associates, 1990) is illuminative. Pioneering work on transformational learning began in the 1970s and is pivotal to the development of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). Essentially, TLT describes a process through which an individual reframes their worldview after experiencing a cognitive dissonance between previously held beliefs and new experiences (Mezirow, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2000b; O’Sullivan, 1999, 2012). This cognitive dissonance triggers a ‘disorienting dilemma’, followed by ‘critical reflection’ which results in a reframing of beliefs and behaviour (Brookfield, 1998; Ettlign, 2006; Mezirow, 2000a). The theory is constructivist in that it starts from an experience that creates disequilibrium or perturbation within the individual.

In his seminal qualitative study of female college students returning to academia after an extended period of absence, Mezirow (1978a, 1978b) found changes in the ways participants understood their identity, culture and behaviour, which he described as ‘perspective transformation’. As a result of this study, Mezirow identified and developed 10 phases in the process of learning leading to perspective transformation. These phases are presented in Figure 2.3.

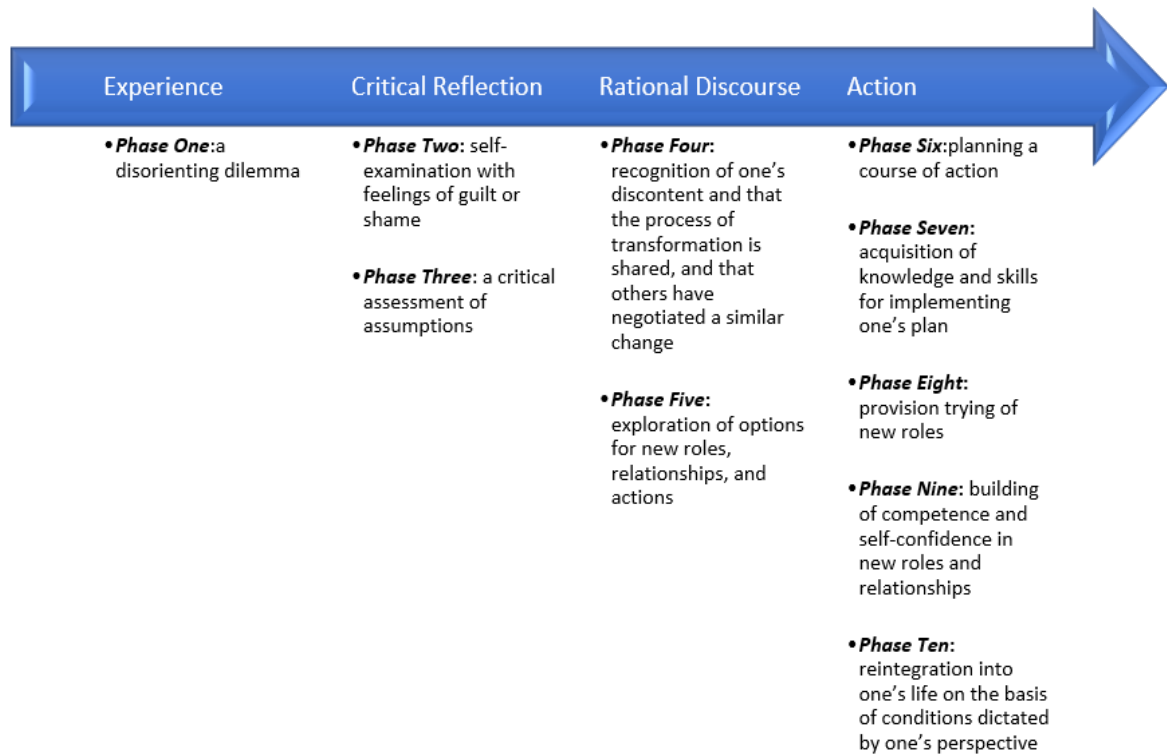


Figure 2.3. Phases of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b).

Of importance to this research is that Transformative Learning Theory proposes that the process of transformative learning influences behaviour. When an individual is involved in transformative learning, she/he is engaged in a process which taps into how she/he views the world. The interaction of the cognitive, emotional, moral, social and spiritual aspects of themselves results in an adjustment of this view, which in turn changes behaviour. Mezirow's theory therefore offers both a way of understanding the

experiences of adults participating in an immersion, and an appropriate framework through which to interpret transformative outcomes.

In exploring the literature relating to transformative learning, Taylor (2007) reviewed 40 studies published in peer-reviewed journals with the aim of identifying new findings and insights relating to transformative learning. Taylor highlighted the increased number of investigations involving the practice of fostering transformative learning and noted that transformative learning “seems to have replaced andragogy as the iconic educational philosophy of the field, offering adult educators proven teaching strategies based on substantive research framed within sound theoretical assumptions” (Taylor, 2007, p. 189).

With respect to fostering transformative outcomes, Taylor identified questions not addressed in the research such as the impact of transformative learning on learner outcomes as a result of fostering transformative learning, and the peripheral consequences such as how learner transformation affects the institution and other significant individuals in the lives of the learner (Taylor, 2007). These important dimensions of immersion have as yet, received little attention in the literature.

In a subsequent review, Taylor and Cranton (2013) claim the growth in the research into transformative learning has been exponential. In the five years prior to their review, 119 articles used the term ‘transformative learning’ in the title and over 1,300 referred to the theory in the text of the article. In calling for more in-depth theoretical analysis in the research, Taylor and Cranton identified five issues as being substantially overlooked in the literature. These issues are a) the role of experience, b) empathy, c) the

desire to change, d) the theory's inherently positive orientation and e) the need to involve positivist and critical approaches in the research.

While critics of Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b, 2000b) transformative learning model maintain it places too much importance on rational critical reflection (Taylor, 1998), it nonetheless offers a theory of learning that is "uniquely adult, abstract and idealised and grounded in the nature of human communication" (Taylor, 2007, p. 173). Other criticisms identified by Bagnall and Howie (2013) include:

1. failure of the theory to deal with context, relationships and affect (Baumgartner, 2012; Taylor, 2007)
2. lack of a coherent, comprehensive theory of social change (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Collard & Law, 1989); and
3. TLT is too modernist and emancipationist (Collard & Law, 1989).

As TLT concerns the progression of individuals through the stages of transformation, the criticism regarding a lack of social change is questionable, and possibly reaching beyond the intended limits of the theory. The bias towards freedom for participants as suggested by Collard and Law (1989), is also uncertain as some experiences may well restrict participants' views, such as possibly eroding stereotypical attitudes towards particular ethnic groups or lifestyles.

Nonetheless, Bagnall and Howie (2013) point out that the theory has great 'staying power' and has remained largely unchanged for over 35 years while retaining its original structure. The strength of utilising Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) framework also lies in the fact that the framework is soundly recognised as one of the most comprehensive ways of understanding adult learning. Of particular importance for this investigation is

that transformative learning influences behaviour, and contextual conditions such as “establishment of relationships, engagement in dialogue, self-disclosure, careful listening and the accessing of alternate understandings are essential to the process (Taylor, 2007). With many issues relating to transformative learning having been identified as yet to be addressed in the literature, an exploration of transformative outcomes for participants through short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff, presents as both worthwhile and timely.

The review of the literature has explored the three key areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and transformation of individuals, but has not as yet addressed the way in which these areas might intersect, or influence each other. This review therefore now turns its attention to an examination of individual experience of transformative outcomes of immersion to illuminate the interplay between the key areas.

2.4 Transformation of individuals through immersion.

The literature relating to transformative learning indicates the potential of immersion experiences to be key entry points to deeper learning and personal growth and change (Kiely, 2005). While no published research has been found relating to transformation of individuals with respect to immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff, studies conducted into transformative learning and travel, volunteer tourism and study-abroad programs have provided rich data in recent years (Gambrell, 2015). Investigations involving immersion trips generally reveal positive and transformative outcomes for participants.

An examination of the literature relating to what these outcomes actually are, and what particular elements of immersion foster these outcomes, will help to guide this investigation. Moreover, as the participants in this study are all professionals working in educational settings at various stages along their career paths, the literature concerning whether the age and cognitive development of participants contributes to transformative outcomes is instructive. Each of these aspects will be addressed in turn.

2.4.1 Transformative outcomes for participants.

In identifying specific transformative outcomes in terms of internal shift and changed perspectives and behaviours, the Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP) model developed by Rockwell and Bennett (2004) is informative. The model has been used extensively in information, education and training programs and describes various program outcomes grouped into like categories. The TOP model outlines seven levels of outcomes for evaluating programs – resources, activities, participation, reactions, KASA (knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations), practices and SEE (social, economic and environmental) outcomes. While this research is not an evaluation, the TOP model provides a useful structure for examining the outcomes of immersion trips. The KASA aspect of the model is helpful for this investigation, particularly as the attributes of knowledge, attitudes and skills align with Jarvis' (1987) approach to learning from meaningful experiences (see Section 2.3).

The KASA (knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations) dimensions of the TOP model offer valuable perspectives on transformative outcomes for immersion participants and are examined in turn.

2.4.1.1 Knowledge.

The TOP model seeks to identify whether participation in a program changes participant knowledge through increased awareness, understanding and problem solving abilities (Rockwell & Bennett, 2004). A study conducted in the United States examining the effects on eight university faculty members of perceived outcomes after a 14 day study tour to Ecuador, found increased participant knowledge of the host country, particularly in relation to social systems, current issues, culture and environment (Gouldthorpe, Harder, Grady Roberts, & Stedman, 2012). Participants also reported that increased knowledge was gained from travelling with a diverse faculty group.

The findings of the study have limited application to other contexts given that it focused on only eight participants to one country on one occasion. Nonetheless, the Gouldthorpe et al. research includes some aspects relevant to this investigation as it involves adult participants from an educational setting, and the researchers used the KASA dimensions of the TOP model to scaffold participant responses to their experiences.

A review of the role of international education in undergraduate study programs also found overseas immersion trips to be a very positive experience and to have increased, for example, pre-service teachers' knowledge, understanding and sensitivities to global and international issues (Rodriguez, 2011). The review focused on the comments and evaluations of one class of predominately Caucasian female pre-service teachers from a North American Jesuit university, after a 10-day study tour to a counterpart school in Bolivia. The course involved a study of the role of education in a non-Western context and the immersion component was found to contribute substantially

to the students' knowledge of the world, themselves and of the teaching profession (Rodriguez, 2011).

Baccalaureate nursing students from a North Carolina university also demonstrated increased cultural knowledge after an immersion to Guatemala, which was designed to increase cultural competency (Larsen, Ott, & Miles, 2010). These studies reveal immersions result in increased knowledge for undergraduate students in various disciplines, which may assist their future careers. The Gouldthorpe et al. (2012) study also provides helpful information regarding outcomes for adult participants. The wider effect of greater breadth and depth of knowledge which can be implemented across a range of key learning areas by professional educators in a classroom setting over a longer period of time, however, is not known. The literature relating to the second aspect of the KASA model, attitudes, is now addressed.

2.4.1.2 Attitudes.

Changes in attitude are determined by changed perspectives or viewpoints (Rockwell & Bennett, 2004) and the evidence would suggest immersions can challenge previously held values and beliefs (Hawkins et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2012; Wright & Hodge, 2012). A survey of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) participants returning home to Britain found 90% reported changes in their values and attitudes, particularly in relation to areas such as patience and tolerance (Machin, 2008). A shift in attitude was also noted in the Gouldthorpe et al. (2012) study. Participants were found to have adopted a broader mindset regarding the people of the host country, a similar response to other participants in other studies as the following demonstrates.

Immersion has been identified as causing participants to experience a worldview modification which involves a realisation that the people in host communities have many similarities to the participants themselves – that ‘they are like us’. A shift in this worldview causes participants to reflect on their experiences and to reframe meaning (Seider, 2007) – the basis of transformative learning. Cross-cultural experiences in teacher education have also been found to be an important part of multicultural education because they allow pre-service teachers to examine their world view and develop culturally sensitive dispositions critical for teaching in a diverse society (FERENCE, 2006).

The practice of engaging undergraduate students in study abroad programs is evident in the United States. One study involved students from Jesuit colleges and universities who participated in two separate community-based immersion trips. One particular trip to New Orleans required students to help rebuild houses after Hurricane Katrina; and another to Pueblo Mexico to stay with host families and learn about the challenges and marginalisation faced by the community. Questionnaires were given to a total of 123 students, comprising immersion participants and a control group of comparison students (who were not involved in the immersion), immediately prior to and after the trips. The findings suggest higher levels of empathy (identified by Taylor and Cranton [2013] as being overlooked in Mezirow’s [1978a, 1978b] Transformative Learning Theory) and compassion were present in the students who had participated in the immersion compared to those who had not (Plante, Lackey, & Hwang, 2009). These findings are helpful in providing insight into shifts in attitudes in undergraduate students as a result of an immersion experience. As the second survey was completed immediately after the trips, however, how these shifts translate into changed behaviours and actions in the longer term was unfortunately not addressed in the study.

One of the few Australian investigations in this area explored the transformational dimension of immersion trips by studying the emotions experienced by students from the University of Newcastle during four geography field work trips involving visits to indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (Wright & Hodge, 2012). The study explored what cross-cultural encounter adds to experiential learning models and emotional geographies, through 11 formal and informal focus groups, 34 surveys and eight interviews. The investigation revealed that deep learning “resides in an intensely emotional moment – in dwelling in disorientation” (Wright & Hodge, 2012, p. 365).

While the research was informed by Mezirow’s (1978a, 1978b, 2000b) Transformative Learning Theory and students reported being inspired and transformed by their experience, the focus of the study captured only the ‘disorienting dilemma’ phase in the stage of ‘experience’ (see Figure 2.3). As the focus of the study was to examine this earlier stage of transformation, the progression of participants through the stages of ‘critical reflection’, ‘rational discourse’ and ‘action’ was not investigated. While most research conducted using TLT is focused on outcomes, (for example, knowledge or attitudes), the theory itself concerns a process that results in change. The findings of the research nonetheless provide information about attitudinal changes in undergraduate students, particularly in relation to increased cultural sensitivity and tolerance. As the students were adults, the findings suggest that outcomes for adult participants involved in staff immersion trips may be similar.

Using previous studies, current literature and personal experience, Johnson (2014) applied the sociological theory of race relations known as ‘contact hypothesis’ to evaluate the impact of participation in short-term immersion on racial prejudice. The findings indicate that while participants generally held more favourable attitudes towards the host

community after their immersion, these attitudes were more likely to be comprised of compassion and affection rather than a commitment to action, and as such did not reduce prejudice according to the research hypothesis. By Johnson's (2014) own assertion, the limitations of this study include it being "largely speculative and not supported by rigorous empirical analysis" (Johnson, 2014, p. 21), it nonetheless has substantial implications for this investigation.

While recognising short-term change in attitude and behaviour as a result of short-term immersion, Johnson (2014) also noted that many scholars are sceptical of long-term shifts in these areas. Johnson proposed that it is possible to increase the likelihood of long-term change by educating participants about "the historical and structural factors that explain why members of the host community may live in poverty" (Johnson, 2014, p. 21). Johnson recommended this type of education be incorporated into briefing and debriefing sessions before, during and after immersion trips, and further suggested the likelihood for long-term change increased when participants become involved in action and advocacy after returning home. Of importance for this investigation also, is that one of the areas recommended for future research by Johnson, is a study to evaluate the long-term impact on individuals who participate in short-term immersion trips – providing further justification for this study.

Along with knowledge and attitudes, the literature relating to skills, the third aspect of the KASA model is informative for this investigation and is explored in the following section.

2.4.1.3 Skills.

A change in skills may be recognised as the development of a new aptitude or an improvement in ability or performance (Rockwell & Bennett, 2004). While some short-term overseas placements result in an improvement in skills in areas such as language development or building and construction, little research has been conducted in this area. Reports prepared by government agencies in relation to investigating skills development in volunteers returning home after cross-cultural postings abroad provide some insight into this aspect of the TOP model.

An Australian Government report on volunteering for international development found self-reported improvement in skills has been identified in relation to areas which translate well to the workplace such as listening, cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution (Hawkins et al., 2013). Also reported were broader skills in evaluation and management, global awareness, adaptability, collaboration, negotiation and persuasion. Similarly, in a report on the impact of a Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) placement on professional development, commitment and retention of teachers in the United Kingdom, participants were found to have been given additional responsibility or leadership roles after returning home (Unterhalter et al., 2002), and it is reasonable to assume this may have been as a result of increased skill development.

Only two participants in the Gouldthorpe et al. (2012) study noted changes in skills, and these related to communication with regard to Spanish language skills and cultural competency. The types of skill development gained on immersion trips by professional educators, and how this might translate into changed perspectives and behaviours in the classroom is not known.

The literature relating to the fourth and final component of the KASA model, aspirations, is explored in the following section.

2.4.1.4 Aspirations.

Aspirations refer to the aims or goals of participants to grow and learn in terms of professional knowledge and experience, and can be best investigated by questioning participants after programs about their ambitions, hopes and desires (Rockwell & Bennett, 2004). A qualitative investigation conducted into secondary-school students' international voluntourism experiences explored the effects on worldviews, behaviours and aspirations (Woloshyn & Grierson, 2015). The research involved two semi-structured interviews with six Canadian adolescent females who had participated in two or three volunteer trips during secondary school. The findings indicated the experiences foster participants' long-term commitment to social justice and equity issues at global and local levels, and some students expressed career ambitions in affiliated areas. Also relevant to this study is that the students reportedly enjoyed being part of a supportive like-minded group.

While very little evidence exists in this particular field, aspirations in their teaching area, research and extension roles were reported by the faculty members in the Gouldthorpe et al. study (2012). In particular, aspirations they reported included developing study abroad programs, integrating global activities into their courses and adopting culturally sensitive textbooks. Although the Gouldthorpe et al. (2012) and the Woloshyn and Grierson (2015) studies provide some insight into the aspirations of participants after an immersion experience, they are both limited by small numbers of participants (six in Woloshyn & Grierson [2015] and eight in Gouldthorpe et al. [2012]), and importantly, as the investigations were carried out soon after the immersions, it is not

known whether participant aspirations were realised in the long-term. As this research involves participants who went on an immersion trip up to 10 years prior to the investigation, it may be possible to uncover whether or not post-immersion aspirations were realised.

One aspect of programs not identified as a growth dimension in the TOP model, yet relevant to the context of this investigation, is that of changes in personal religious beliefs and participation due to an immersion experience. The literature relating to this dimension is addressed in the following section.

2.4.1.5 Religious beliefs and participation.

Extant research into the outcomes of immersions relating to religious beliefs and participation is limited, in that studies have tended to focus on the adolescent and undergraduate perspective rather than the adult. Nonetheless, there are aspects that have relevance for this investigation. The first study of particular interest is one involving data gathered from large numbers of participants who provided feedback on personal religious change at two points in a three-year period. Using telephone survey and in-depth interview methods, the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) began in 2001 and was designed to enhance understanding of the religious lives of American youth from adolescence into young adulthood.

In the first wave of the research, 3,370 adolescents in the United States were randomly selected to participate. In gathering longitudinal data through a follow up phone interview in the second wave three years later, ‘institutionalised religious experiences’ such as faith-based immersion trips were found to increase religious participation and solidify religious beliefs in participating adolescents (Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009). Using

the same NSYR data in a related study, increased participation in religious based volunteer work was also found to be a positive outcome of immersion for youth (Beyerlein et al., 2011). Given the three-year period between interviews, this information about the effects of immersion is useful, although the longer-term outcomes are unclear. Little is known, also, about the effect of immersions on spirituality, religious participation, beliefs and volunteer work for adults.

Transformational learning, as described by Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 2000a) Brookfield (1998), Ettlting (2006) and O’Sullivan (2012) involves internal shifts and changed perspectives and behaviours in participants. Self-reported heightened capacity in the areas of knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations, and a deepening of personal spirituality are substantial gains from a short-term immersion experience. Additionally, Kitchenham (2008) proposes that the phases of transformation do not need to be experienced in sequence nor in their entirety. Kennedy (1994) also notes that perspective transformation during an immersion experience occurs regardless of the length of time the participant spends in a cross-cultural setting – lending support for the short-term dimension of the immersions under investigation in this study.

After reviewing the literature concerning the outcomes of immersion in relation to knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and religious beliefs and practice, it is helpful to explore some of the specific elements or experiences which foster transformation in participants post-immersion.

2.4.2 Fostering transformative outcomes.

Reviews of the scholarly literature that have been undertaken in relation to transformative learning and fostering transformative outcomes for participants are helpful

for this investigation. In reviewing 46 studies, Taylor (1998) identified findings which support the ideal conditions for fostering transformative learning as described by Mezirow (1991). Additionally, other themes were revealed to offer new insight into the nature of transformative learning. These are transformative learning as being: a) group situated, b) experiential, c) time consuming, d) a predisposition, e) affective learning and f) educator and students as transformative learners (Taylor, 1998). The identification of these factors is useful for the immersion context of this investigation, and will help to guide the design of the research method.

In a follow up review of the literature involving 40 empirical studies published after his 1998 investigation, Taylor (2007) found that in the intervening period, the focus of the research had shifted from identifying transformative experiences, towards understanding the factors that shape them and how this could be fostered in practice (Taylor, 2007). Three issues of importance for this investigation are revealed in Taylor's review.

First, one of the most powerful ways of fostering transformative learning was found to be "providing experiences that are direct, personally engaging and stimulate reflection on the experience" (Taylor, 2007, p. 182). Second, is Taylor's identification of the definitive need to conduct research in other settings – particularly where teaching contexts are "more informal, less controlled by the instructor, and more susceptible to external influences" (Taylor, 2007, p. 186). These aspects lend strong support to further investigation of short-term cross-cultural immersion as a transformative learning experience, and the uniqueness of the immersion context lends weight to the evident need to explore participant transformation in this setting.

Third, for some participants, epistemological change alone is not adequate for transformation to occur. Factors such as ongoing institutional support and explicit guidance on how to act on the new understanding in practice is required (Gravett, 2004). This aspect is of particular importance for this investigation as it seeks to discover features of immersion experiences which foster transformative outcomes for participants, and to uncover the short, medium and long-term outcomes of the experience post-immersion. As all participants on *GSE* immersions return to their individual schools after their trip, an understanding of the role of the school, and particularly of the leadership team in supporting changed perspectives and behaviours, will be of importance to those designing and facilitating immersion programs for staff.

The theoretical perspectives offered in the reviews of the scholarly literature (Taylor, 1998, 2007) provide a firm foundation for exploring conditions which foster transformative outcomes for participants. While published research in this area is difficult to locate, the literature concerning travel and volunteer tourism provide some valuable perspectives for this investigation.

2.4.2.1 Travel.

Travel in general and immersion experiences in particular, provide opportunities for transformative learning as the individual is placed outside of daily routines and into an orientation of ‘otherness’, both geographically and culturally (Morgan, 2010; Ross, 2010). Transformation through travel is characterised by respect for the values of the host culture and community, acknowledgment of the presence of difference in privilege, and engagement in environmentally sustainable practices (Ross, 2010). Individuals who travel for purposes which include a dimension of service or spirituality are open to the possibility of change and increase the likelihood of transformative learning (Mezirow,

2000b; Morgan, 2010). This aspect in particular lends strong support for this investigation as immersion trips as a formation opportunity for staff involve service and spirituality, and aim for transformative outcomes for participants.

In exploring the literature which links travel and transformation, Morgan (2010) identified several aspects of travel conducive to transformation, and found it to be important that the experience:

1. occurs in environment and contexts associated with a powerful ‘spirit of place’, or have the potential to elicit a strong and positive ‘sense of place’;
2. provides experiential learning opportunities that are directly focused on encountering the ‘otherness’ of nature and wilderness;
3. provides experiential learning opportunities focused on encountering the ‘otherness’ of, and dialogue with, other cultures;
4. permits interactions with fellow colleagues and the host community and encourages, through mutual learning and dialogue, the development of ‘communitas’; (see Glossary)
5. provides opportunities for solo experiences that allow space for reflection and contemplation; and
6. provides opportunities for meaningful ‘service’ or volunteer work (whether focused on addressing environmental or social issues or both). (Morgan, 2010, pp. 263-264)

The work of Ross (2010) is instructive for this investigation as factors in travel which increase opportunities for transformation and positive behavioural change were found to be:

1. a destination that pulls the individual as far as possible from known experiences;

2. intimate intercultural experiences involving in-depth discussions;
3. activities that stimulate contemplation resulting in meaning-making of the traveller's experiences; and
4. post-travel activities that help the sojourner to continue to reflect upon and extract meaning from the travel. (Ross, 2010, p. 56)

The research conducted by Morgan (2010) and Ross (2010) provide evidence of dimensions of travel which promote opportunities for transformation. An understanding of the importance of these aspects in the transformative process may be helpful in exploring how transformation of individuals might occur in short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for staff.

The four stages of Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b, 2000b) Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), 'experience', 'critical reflection', 'rational discourse' and 'action' (see Figure 2.3), are also reflected in the literature relating to transformation through travel. In systematically reviewing 53 travel and tourism articles, Stone and Duffy (2015) used TLT as the criteria for selection of articles for inclusion in the review. Their recommendation of TLT as a framework to guide facilitation of theory-driven transformational education provides robust support for using TLT as a lens in this investigation.

It would seem the more different geographically and culturally the host community is, the more likely it is that transformation will take place (Morgan, 2010; Ross, 2010). The stronger the sense of being an outsider, the more likely the occurrence of a disorienting dilemma will be (Mezirow, 2000b; Morgan, 2010). Transformation is also more likely to occur if the learner has the opportunity to reflect on their experience

either individually or collectively for the purpose of re-evaluating perspectives (Morgan, 2010). In an examination of the transformative dimension of tourism, Pritchard, Morgan and Ateljevic (2011) go one step further by proposing that tourism and travel not only can allow time for critical reflection and activism, but that these experiences should be intentionally designed to be transformative, and to allow space for the tourist to participate in social action.

The provision of opportunities for debriefing during and after an immersion has also been identified as being central to the experience (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Fanning, 2009; Stone, 2014), and as a pathway to transformative learning. The notion that debriefing promotes the reflection and discourse phases of transformation was noted by Stone (2014), and Fanning (2009) concurred in stating that “people need to be led through their experiences to consciously understand the meaning and impact on their lives” (Fanning, 2009, p. 19).

The scholarly literature reviewed in this section substantially increases an understanding of the aspects of travel which foster transformation, and in so doing, provides a suitable lens through which to explore the transformative outcomes of short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences for adult participants. A second area which helps to illuminate the construct is that of volunteer tourism.

2.4.2.2 Volunteer tourism.

An increasingly popular form of immersion is the volunteer tourist experience, commonly referred to as ‘voluntourism’ (Corti, Marola, & Castro, 2010), and often taken by young people during a gap-year break. The model combines aspects of an outward-bound experience with time spent on a volunteer projects in Majority World countries.

Transformative learning as an anticipated outcome of volunteer tourism, began to appear in the literature in the late 1990s and gained momentum in the 2000s.

Early investigations focused on developing positive social and environmental objectives by offering tourists opportunities to engage with local communities by ‘giving something back’ and highlighting the importance of equal partnership (Brightsmith, Stronza, & Holle, 2008; Howell, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007). While participant motivations for involvement in immersion trips often include ‘giving back’, there is also a general expectation that individuals will be changed by the experience, and the intentional provision of transformative learning experiences may assist in facilitating these anticipated outcomes (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011). Features identified as being critical to the process include the importance of constructive engagement with ‘otherness’ (Daloz, 2000) which results in the challenging of assumptions and crossing of boundaries (Jones et al., 2012). Critical reflection needs to accompany the experience, and must happen in discourse with others (Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

In exploring the scholarly literature in social learning and education, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) identified elements of volunteer tourism which align with transformative learning. These include that:

1. the participant seeks a deeper engagement with the world;
2. the change in context places the learner in a position where disorienting dilemmas are more likely to occur; and
3. the desire of the learner to reach their full potential increases capacity for transformative learning (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011).

Of particular interest to this investigation is that the research relating to travel and volunteer tourism has highlighted that the intentional provision of experiential learning activities fosters transformative outcomes for participants. This emphasises the need to uncover adult participant perspectives on the dimensions of staff immersion trips which foster transformative outcomes.

Also relevant in informing the research design of this investigation are the limitations in methodology noted in the research involving short-term cross-cultural immersion trips.

2.4.2.3 Limitations in immersion research methodology.

Limitations in methodology found in investigations into short-term mission trips have been noted by Ver Beek (2006). In a review of the research into participant outcomes of short-term mission trips, Ver Beek analysed 40 research initiatives published in the 20 years prior to his review. Common weaknesses in methodology were identified as being small sample sizes, surveying participants immediately after returning home and a lack of triangulation with secondary sources like organisational donation records. Ver Beek argues that the emphasis in investigations on these three aspects of research design increases the likelihood of results showing positive outcomes to be exaggerated. The methodological issues of small sample size and interviewing participants immediately after their immersion experience are of considerable import for this investigation, and the research design of this study will address Ver Beek's critique of previous investigations.

2.4.2.4 Synthesis of the literature relating to fostering transformative outcomes.

In mining the literature relating to fostering transformative outcomes, an emerging consensus becomes apparent. The selection by an organising entity of a destination and

host community that take the individual as far as possible from known experiences (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Morgan, 2010; Ross, 2010) for example, appears to foster in participants, a strong sense of being an outsider (Mezirow, 2000b; Morgan, 2010), which may be the catalyst for a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow 1978a, 1978b). Similarly, provision of intimate intercultural experiences involving in-depth discussions and activities that stimulate contemplation resulting in meaning-making of participant experiences (the ‘critical reflection’ and ‘rational discourse’ stages of TLT) (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Fanning, 2009; Morgan, 2010; Pritchard et al., 2011; Ross, 2010; Stone, 2014) would seem to foster constructive and culturally respectful engagement with ‘otherness’ and equal partnership through mutual learning and dialogue (Daloz, 2000; Morgan, 2010).

Inclusion of dimensions of service, social action or spirituality focused on the dignity and worth of the person and an emphasis on the importance of human relationships (Mezirow, 2000b; Morgan, 2010) is linked to an orientation of ‘giving back’ through meaningful environmental or social service and engagement in environmentally sustainable practices (the ‘action’ stage of TLT) (Brightsmith et al., 2008; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Ross, 2010). Similarly, intentional provision of transformative learning experiences through opportunities to reflect on the experience individually or collectively for the purpose of re-evaluating perspectives both during and after the immersion (the ‘critical reflection’ stage of TLT) (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Fanning, 2009; Morgan, 2010; Pritchard et al., 2011; Ross, 2010; Stone, 2014) would appear to foster interactions and critical discourse with fellow colleagues (the ‘rational discourse’ stage of TLT), and a desire for deeper engagement with the world and to reach one’s full potential (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011).

As evidenced above, this synthesis of the scholarly literature reveals a critical correlation between the intentional inclusion by an organising entity of design elements which foster transformative outcomes, and the potential for transformation in individual participants. A summary of the alignment of the research between organising entities and participant experience in relation to fostering opportunities for transformative outcomes is provided in Figure 2.4.



Figure 2.4. Synthesis of the literature relating to fostering transformative outcomes.

Dimensions relating to both organising entities and participants in fostering transformative outcomes have been identified in the literature, and offer distinct but complementary contributions to an understanding of the construct. Research findings such as these provide both a helpful perspective for this investigation, and a solid foundation for organising entities to design immersion trips which increase the likelihood of transformative outcomes for participants.

2.4.2.5 Inhibiting factors.

Factors which inhibit transformative outcomes for participants and have a negative effect on the host community have also been identified. ‘Poverty tourism’ which has come under scrutiny for its questionable ethical stance and criticised as voyeurism, (Rolfes, 2010), involves tourists visiting poverty stricken areas in Majority World countries, without interaction with the local people. While the experience may be ‘life-changing’ for some participants, the outcomes for host communities have often been found to be less than favourable, as the visits have been criticised as highlighting the unequal encounter (Moodie, 2013). One of the most damaging criticisms is that short-term visitors may encourage a ‘hand-out’ attitude in developing communities and “engage in activities that displace local labourers and professionals... and that they may encourage economic and ministerial dependency” (Zehner, 2006, p. 510).

The literature also reveals that some participants report only a small, positive lasting change in their lives as a result of their immersion experience (Ver Beek, 2006). Some return home disillusioned due to perceptions of inefficiency and corruption within the host country (Department for International Development, 2011) and still others thought their presence may have had a negative impact on the host community (Lough et

al., 2009). Research into the outcomes for host communities is extremely limited (Ver Beek, 2008).

In a study involving 162 short-term mission participants who travelled to Honduras to assist in a house construction project after Hurricane Mitch, Ver Beek (2006) found that while participants reported positive changes in their lives, including in areas such as financial giving, this was not reflected in their donation records – calling into question self-reported changes in other areas. Ver Beek used the analogy of a sapling to describe the transformative outcomes for participants in this study, in that they can be bent for a short period of time but return to their original state very quickly after being released.

Student volunteer programs are primarily concerned with broadening the mindsets of privileged young people who may have little or no experience outside their own locality. In a qualitative study of 20 community-based practitioners, Curry-Stevens (2007) referred to ‘pedagogy of the privileged’ in exploring how to assist the transformation of privileged learners on issues of race, class, and gender. An understanding of the ethical dimensions of the transformation process were examined in Curry-Stevens’ research and a new model for this pedagogy based on ‘confidence shaking’ and ‘confidence building’ was proposed (Curry-Stevens, 2007).

Concerns raised by both researchers and journalists have also highlighted issues in which foreign interests have been prioritised over local ones, and critical reflection on poverty has not been encouraged (Palacios, 2010). More recent developments have seen various agencies advocating an end to students volunteering in orphanages in countries

such as Cambodia and Vietnam due to the exploitation of children and families (ReThink Orphanages, 2017; World Challenge, 2017).

Factors inhibiting transformative outcomes for participants such as an unequal encounter and a lack of critical reflection have been identified in the literature and need to be carefully considered by organising entities. Less evident in the literature, but of even greater importance is the potential for damage to fragile host communities.

The research is helpful in identifying factors which foster and hinder transformative outcomes in the areas of travel and volunteer tourism. The dimensions of immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff which foster or hinder transformative outcomes for participants however, remain unknown. While adolescents and undergraduate students (who may be mature age) are well represented in the literature (Jones et al., 2012; Plante et al., 2009; Probasco, 2013; Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009; Woloshyn & Grierson, 2015; Wright & Hodge, 2012), adult participants, particularly those who are in their mid-20s or older, are not. Whether or not the age, life experience and cognitive development of immersion participants affects the potential for transformative outcomes is of interest to this research, therefore the relevant literature is examined below.

2.4.3 Age and cognitive development of participants.

The life context and personal development aspects of the adult learner have been linked to transformative learning and are evident in the literature (Cranton, 2005; Hansman, 2008). As the focus of this investigation is an exploration of the experiences of adult participants, Merriam's (2004) assertion is of particular interest:

It appears one must already be at a mature level of cognitive functioning to engage in the transformational learning process. For transformational learning to occur, one must be able to critically reflect and engage in rational discourse; both of these activities are characteristic of higher levels of cognitive functioning. (Merriam, 2004, p. 60)

In exploring the role of cognitive development in Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), Merriam argues that Mezirow's (1991, 1995, 1998, 2000b, 2003) premises and presuppositions relate to 'problem solving' as opposed to 'problem posing', which requires a more advanced level of cognitive function than is present in adolescents and young undergraduate students. Psychologists maintain this level of cognition is not possible until individuals reach their 30s or even 40s (Merriam, 2004). As research into short-term cross-cultural immersion has primarily focused on adolescents and undergraduate students, an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of adult participants, who have greater capacity for critical reflection and rational discourse, would provide greater depth of understanding of the way in which immersion trips foster transformative outcomes.

The view that the advanced level of cognition required for transformative learning to occur is not possible until individuals attain the ages of 30 or 40 (Merriam, 2004), has important implications for this investigation. First, the selection of adult participants for this research (particularly those older than early 20s), is well justified. Second, as most participants would have attained the appropriate level of cognitive function for transformative outcomes to occur, it lends further support for the inclusion of short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff.

In this section (Section 2.4), the review has examined transformative outcomes of immersion, conditions which foster or inhibit these transformative outcomes, and the place of age and cognitive development in participant capacity for transformative outcomes to occur. The review now turns its attention to identifying areas of consensus and deficit in the literature relating to the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff.

From the areas of consensus in the literature, the relationships between the three key areas explored in the review become apparent and the final iteration of the conceptual framework of the literature review is presented. From the areas of deficit, research questions are generated to address this somewhat neglected area in the body of knowledge, and to guide the conduct of the investigation.

2.5 Conclusion.

In order to illuminate the purpose of the investigation, which is to explore the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff, the three key areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and transformation of individuals, have been examined. The key areas themselves and the relationships and interactions between them have been analysed, to offer new insights and understanding of how the constructs of formation and immersion lead to transformation in adult participants.

A contemporary understanding of formation of Catholic school staff has been presented, underpinned by the imperative for formation in the current Australian landscape. The immersion paradigm has been examined in different contexts with a particular focus on transformation of participants. Transformative Learning Theory

(Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000a) as an apt lens through which to view the process of transformation for adult participants of immersion, and *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) have been shown to be appropriate scaffolds to assist an understanding of the purpose of the investigation.

The literature relating to fostering transformative outcomes has been analysed resulting in a synthesis of the interplay between organising entities and participants on immersion trips. As this research aims to explore the potential and power of immersion trips for adult participants, the dimension of age and cognitive development in relation to transformative outcomes has also been examined.

The review has revealed areas of consensus and deficit in the literature which are critical to the design of the research. The areas of consensus inform the completion of the conceptual framework provided in the introduction to the chapter (see Figure 2.1), and the areas of deficit lead to the generation of research questions to direct the investigation.

2.5.1 Areas of consensus in the literature.

The review of the literature demonstrates that this investigation is able to build on substantial existing knowledge in the three key areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and transformation of individuals. In seeking to understand how short-term cross-cultural immersion might contribute to the formation and transformation of Catholic school staff, the review has revealed important areas of consensus in the literature:

1. formation of staff is central to the ongoing life and mission of Catholic schools;

2. the aim of authentic staff formation programs is transformation of individuals and educational communities with respect to this mission;
3. immersions are revealed to have transformative outcomes for participants;
4. particular elements of immersion have been identified as fostering transformative outcomes; and
5. the capacity for transformative outcomes has been linked to the age and cognitive function of participants.

Uncovering these areas of consensus assists an understanding of the relationship between the three key areas identified in the review of the literature.

At the outset of the review the three key areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and transformation of individuals were identified, and a conceptual framework of these discrete areas of the research was provided (see Figure 2.1). The exploration and synthesis of the literature throughout the chapter has revealed the relationships and the interplay between the key areas as they relate to participant experience of immersion and transformative outcomes post-immersion to be:

Formation of Catholic school staff
through
short-term cross-cultural immersion
fosters
transformation of individuals.

2.5.2 Areas of deficit in the literature.

Similarly, the review has also revealed areas of deficit in the extant literature, particularly in relation to aspects of immersion that have been researched, and weaknesses in methodology. Some of these deficits include:

1. short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff has not been researched;
2. how immersion trips align with the aims of formation for Catholic school staff is not known;
3. the particular elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes for staff are unclear;
4. the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for professional staff members in an educational setting have not been researched;
5. very few investigations into immersions have been conducted in the Australian context, which may differ from findings in studies conducted in other countries;
6. research into immersion trips has primarily focused on adolescents and undergraduate students; and
7. weaknesses in methodology include small sample sizes and gathering data from participants immediately after their immersion trip.

Examination of these areas of deficit informs the generation of the research questions which will guide the conduct of the investigation.

2.5.3 Generation of the research questions.

The short-term cross-cultural immersion trip has increased in popularity, however, its contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff remains largely unknown. As the purpose of formation is transformation of individuals and communities,

exploring the elements of immersion that foster or promote transformative outcomes, will both contribute to the current body of knowledge, and provide a platform for informing practice in the design and facilitation of short-term cross-cultural immersion programs for staff. Therefore, the first research question guiding this investigation is:

What elements of immersion foster transformative outcomes for individuals?

Identification of transformative outcomes in the context of immersion as a formation opportunity for staff is particularly important, and serves as a rationale for the significance of research in this area. Exploration of these aspects through the operative use of a contemporary understanding of formation (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9) and Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) model of Transformative Learning Theory (see Figure 2.3) aims to build on current knowledge and assist the capacity of educational authorities and school leadership teams to provide appropriate formation opportunities for staff which nurture their ongoing growth and development.

The aim of formation is growth of individuals and communities, and immersion is revealed in the literature to promote transformative outcomes. It is important therefore, to examine in detail the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for participants, as whether these outcomes increase, remain static or dissipate over time, is unknown. Consequently, the second research question which shapes the conduct of this research is:

What are the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for individuals?

The purpose of these two generated research questions is to further illuminate the key areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and

transformation of individuals, and in so doing, provide answers to the Major Research Question:

How does short-term cross-cultural immersion contribute to the formation of Catholic school staff?

2.5.4 Final iteration of the conceptual framework.

The synthesis of the relevant scholarly literature has revealed areas of consensus and deficit, leading to the completion of the conceptual framework and the generation of the research questions. The final iteration of the conceptual framework of the literature review is presented in Figure 2.5.

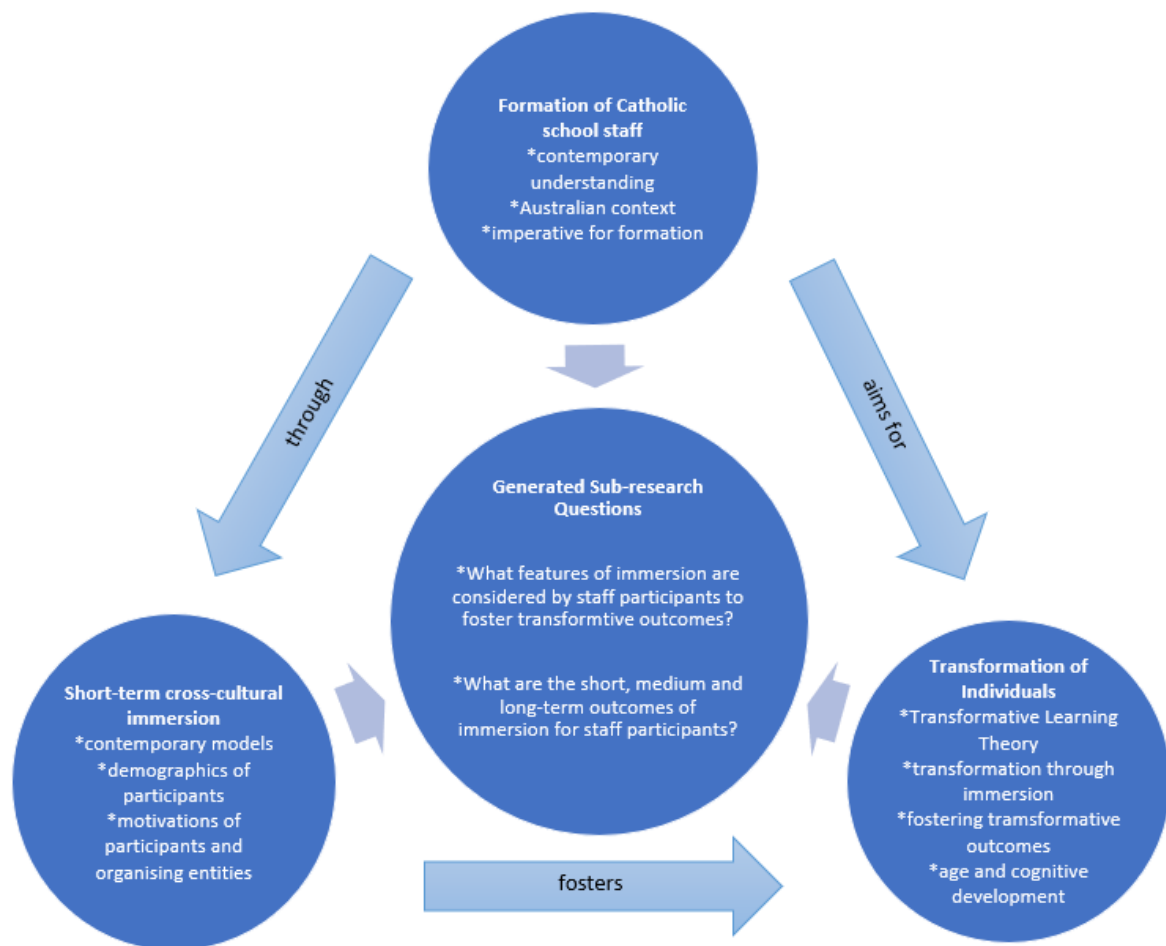


Figure 2.5. Final iteration of the conceptual framework from the review of the literature.

The review of the scholarly literature has served to:

1. explore the literature relating to the three key areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and formation of individuals;
2. identify the relationships between these three key areas;
3. illuminate the areas of consensus and deficit in the extant literature;
4. provide a conceptual framework of the literature review; and
5. generate the research questions which will guide the conduct of the investigation.

Informed by the review of the literature, Chapter Three explains the research design adopted to answer the research questions and to add to the body of knowledge by exploring the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff.

Chapter Three

3 Design of the Research

In Chapter One, the purpose of the research was identified and the Major Research Question posed. In concluding the review of the literature in Chapter Two, two research questions were generated and justified to provide a scaffold for the study and the basis for analysis of the data. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the interpretive research design adopted for the investigation, and to provide clarity and congruency between the purpose of the research, the research questions and the research design. The relationship between these central aspects of the investigation is presented in Figure 3.1

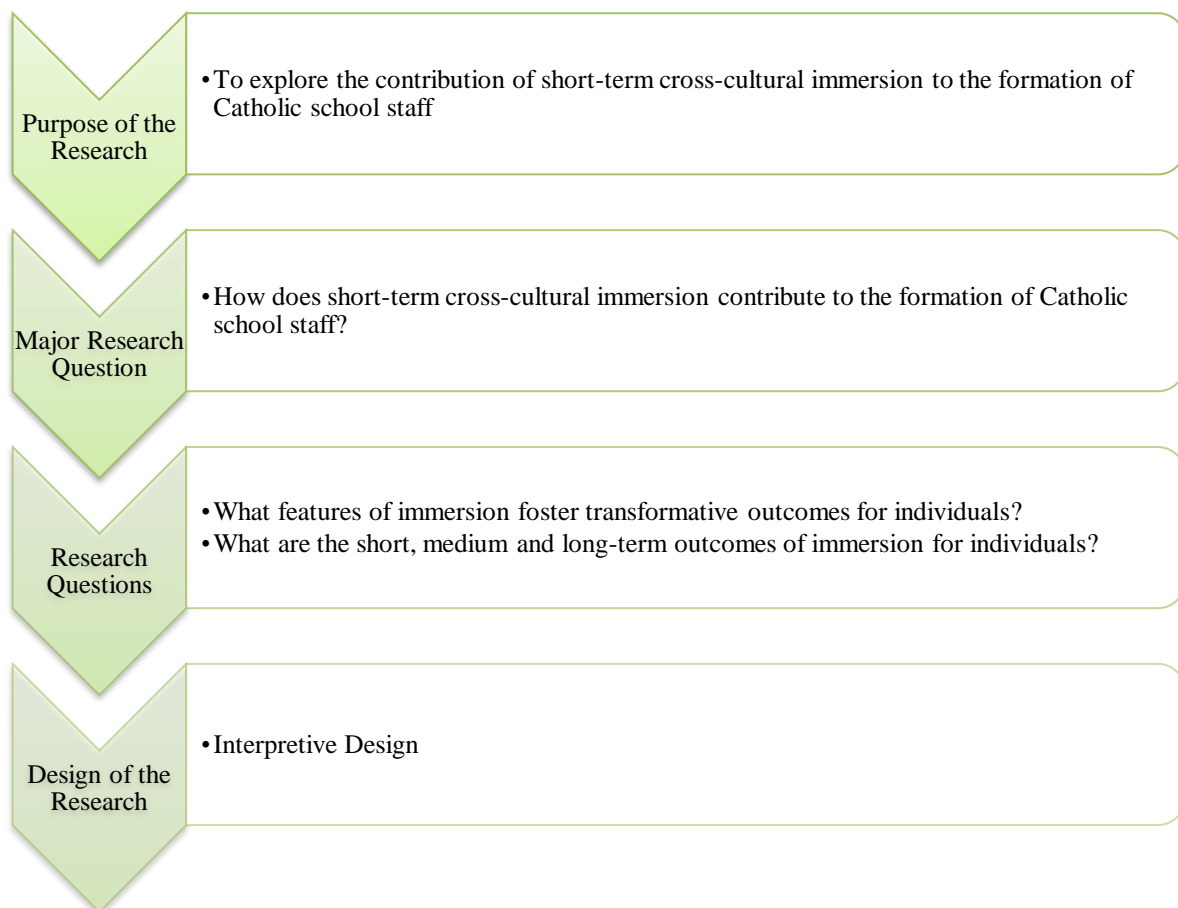


Figure 3.1. Alignment of the research purpose, questions and design.

The chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical framework and an explanation of the research methodology. This is followed by a description of the processes and procedures used in the selection of participants and data gathering. Outlines of verifications, ethical considerations, the role of the researcher and limitations of the research are provided, before concluding with an overview of the research design. Each of these aspects will be addressed in turn.

3.1 Theoretical framework.

The theoretical framework of a research project relates to the philosophical basis underpinning the study and provides a link between the theory and practice under investigation. As such, the theoretical framework has implications for every aspect of the research process (Mertens, 1998).

In essence, the theoretical framework provides a schema for the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods underpinning the research. As the focus of this investigation is on the individual and collective experience of immersion, it is highly contextualised and specific in nature. As such, the study requires the selection of a research design which enables the experienced reality of the participants and the group to emerge. The dual epistemological approaches of constructivism and constructionism are therefore both relevant to this investigation. An interpretive theoretical framework using the lens of symbolic interactionism guides the study as this approach maximises opportunities for the researcher to understand individuals and the group, their experiences and insights, and the meanings they attach to them.

This study seeks to explore significant features of a particular phenomenon within a bounded system, specifically the *Good Samaritan Education* Staff Immersion Program.

The phenomenon under investigation is ‘short-term cross-cultural immersion’, the case is the *Good Samaritan Education Staff Immersion Program*, and the embedded units of analysis are the 10 *GSE* staff immersion trips conducted between 2004 and 2014. The study explores the experiences of adult participants involved in short-term immersion trips in a range of cross-cultural settings – namely Japan, Kiribati, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Western Australia. As such, case study is an appropriate research methodology, and the method used to gather rich, complex data is the semi-structured interview. The relatively large sample size (53 participants) and the exploration of 10 different immersion trips to five different host destinations over a 10-year period provide unique insight into, and perspective on, the phenomenon of short-term cross-cultural immersion, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the research. An overview of the research paradigm is provided in Table 3.1 and each of the aspects is then addressed in turn.

Table 3.1 *Research framework: An interpretive design*

Epistemology	Constructivism and Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Symbolic interactionism
Methodology	Case study
Method	Semi-structured interview

3.1.1 Research paradigm: interpretivism.

In the world of research, the theoretical perspectives of positivism and interpretivism have been arguably the most influential (Gray, 2014), along with the relatively newer paradigm of critical theory (Asghar, 2013). Interpretivism is a research paradigm which values subjective experience and personal insight. It provides researchers with an opportunity to understand “the complex world of lived experience from the point

of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). As the focus of this investigation is to understand participant experiences in a particular social context, an interpretive design is most apt.

An interpretive approach to research assumes that the world is socially constructed and different people or groups of people make meaning of it based on a range of variables within their social context – such as culture, experience and personality. Interpretivism aims to explore meaningful social action (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Neuman, 2006), not just external or observable behaviour. It attempts to see the world from the perspective of the participants and to discover how they have constructed meaning from events and experiences in their lives (Crotty, 1998; Kirk & Miller, 1986).

Involvement in an immersion trip situates participants in a particular social construct which is disconnected from their usual lived experience. There is a need to construct or reconstruct meaning in a reality that is often beyond participants’ understanding. In this case, an interpretive approach enables the researcher to uncover deep realities of the problem under investigation because it documents the participants’ perspectives and provides an interpretation that can be clearly understood by readers (Neuman, 1997). The role of the researcher then becomes one of a conduit for revealing this lived reality (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001).

The application of an interpretive approach is also relevant to this investigation as the researcher has a professional interest in immersion programs, and is known to the participants. While the close interaction between participants and researcher could be viewed as a drawback to the study, Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe the researcher in this situation as a ‘passionate participant’ in that they are not merely a detached observer.

Additionally, interpretive research enables the researcher's own constructions to be presented as well as those of all the participants (Andrade, 2009). The researcher's interpretations play a key role in this type of study as they bring subjectivity to the fore and are therefore supported by quality arguments rather than statistical exactness (Garcia & Quek, 1997). The dimension of insider research, which adds a layer of complexity to this investigation, is also acknowledged here, and explored further in Section 3.9.1.

Consistent with this interpretive approach, it is important to situate the investigation in an appropriate epistemological paradigm. A fitting epistemological perspective can assist in clarifying issues of research design, and incorporate the overarching structure of the research including the kind of evidence that is being gathered, from where, and how it will be interpreted (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2002). The following section explains the selection of relevant epistemologies for the design of this investigation.

3.1.2 Epistemologies: constructivism and constructionism.

In its narrowest sense, epistemology is concerned with the study of knowledge and justified belief. More broadly, it relates to the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge in a particular area of investigation. Adoption of an appropriate research methodology therefore involves critical analysis of theories relating to the purpose of the research, the belief and value systems of the researcher, individual and social construction, and knowledge itself. Implementation of a suitable research method is therefore fundamentally grounded in ontology and epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Ontology concerns the nature of being. As such, the individual participant is understood to be a free agent who, while constructing his/her own knowledge, is greatly

influenced by social constructs. Epistemology on the other hand, concerns itself with the theory of knowledge and 'what it means to know'. Epistemology therefore provides a philosophical basis for decisions regarding the types of knowledge that are reasonable and adequate (Gray, 2014). Epistemology relates to different forms of knowledge of reality and concerns itself with the essence of the relationship between the researcher and participants.

The nature of this research is such that the epistemologies of both constructivism and constructionism are relevant to the investigation. Constructivism holds that knowledge is constructed as a result of an individual's experiences of the world, either alone or with others, while the focus of constructionism concerns the characteristics of social participation and relationships (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). As such, the epistemology of constructivism relates to the personal construction of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the experience of short-term cross-cultural immersion, and the epistemology of constructionism concerns the collective, or group construction of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the immersion phenomenon. Both epistemologies align well with the research purpose of this investigation.

Essentially, constructionism holds that "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). It involves the individual interpretive nature of meaning construction for humans; the recognition of historical, social and cultural perspectives in the process of that meaning-making; and the essentially social and interactive nature of the research process (Crotty, 1998). A constructionist approach recognises the subjective and transactional elements of the setting in which meaning is constructed rather than discovered, facilitating the voices of individuals as they make sense of their world (Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 1998). As this

investigation involves exploring the experiences of people attempting to interpret reality and construct meaning in a setting which is historically, socially and culturally different from their own, it aligns seamlessly with a constructionist epistemology.

Constructivism holds that meaning is constructed from an individual's experiences, which are adapted to form a coherent worldview. Each individual, "using perception, and thinking, creates his or her meaningful knowledge and interpretations of the world" (Zajda, 2018). These meanings are built up rather than received passively and may be constructed individually or with others in social contexts (Hyde, 2015). Constructivism emanates from the work of Piaget (1967) who proposed that all knowledge arises from "the active individual's activity, either physical or mental, and it is goal-directed activity that provides knowledge with its organisation" (Hyde, 2015, p. 290). Central to Piaget's constructivist theory is the 'active individual's activity' and the related terminology of 'assimilation' and 'accommodation'. While 'assimilation' occurs when an individual is able to consign an experience to an existing meaning structure, the concept of 'accommodation' has particular relevance for this investigation. When an individual is unable to place a new experience (such as visiting a Majority World host community) into an existing conceptual structure, a disturbance or disorientation commonly occurs, producing a new scheme, resulting in the accommodation of the new knowledge (von Glaserfeld, 1995).

The research purpose of this study seeks to explore the experiences of participants in a particular social setting, that of a short-term cross-cultural immersion. Such immersion trips are a relatively new phenomenon, particularly in an educational context. They engage participants in conversation with people in host communities, an exploration of traditional cultures and values, and require personal engagement and reflection

(Kearney, 2010). As there is a wide range of predispositions and motivations amongst participants (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011), no two immersion experiences are the same. The interplay of personal, professional and spiritual engagement of participants in the encounter provides a context for the highly social and extremely specific nature of an immersion to be experienced both individually and communally. A shift in understanding that goes beyond the individual and becomes positioned within a wider social unit is the basis of social learning (Reed et al., 2010). As such, the dual epistemologies of constructivism and constructionism support the researcher in gaining insight into the experiences of participants, how their 'realities' are constructed and how they attach meaning to their experiences.

As the meaning individuals assign to the reality of their experience is constructed over time (Crotty, 1998), critical reflection is essential. The immersion trips under investigation in this study have been operating since 2004, and the opportunity therefore presents itself to explore responses from participants who have been able to process their experience and construct meaning over various timeframes. In this context, the epistemologies of constructivism and constructionism both have distinctive contributions to the purpose of this research.

First, as this investigation aims to explore purposeful meaning in complex interactions, with a particular focus on subsequent changed perspectives and behaviours, constructionism is valued as one epistemological approach. Second, as immersions are dynamic, multi-faceted experiences which demand much from participants as they attempt to make meaning from situations which are at odds with their beliefs, values and constructed realities, constructivism has much to offer.

Also relevant to the selection of an appropriate epistemology for this research is the work of Hyde (2015). In seeking to provide clarity in constructivism and constructionism in Religious Education, Hyde notes that case studies which describe a phenomenon in its essence align well with constructivism. The case study methodology is also closely aligned with constructionism and is relevant to this investigation in terms of challenging assumptions and inviting a social response (Hyde, 2015).

After outlining the epistemologies underpinning the investigation, the selection of an appropriate theoretical perspective is required.

3.1.3 Theoretical perspective: symbolic interactionism.

The theoretical perspective of a study provides the philosophical basis in which the epistemology is situated, and reveals more clearly how the generated knowledge is understood. It also recognises the assumptions about knowledge and knowing that are embedded in the research design (Crotty, 1998). The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism addresses language, communication, interrelationships and community where the researcher places himself/herself in the place of the other (Crotty, 1998). Symbolic interactionism also allows the researcher to explore participant understanding of individual experiences in a particular time, place and situation as a ‘meaningful matrix’ (Crotty, 1998). As such, symbolic interactionism presents itself as the most appropriate theoretical perspective through which to view the interpretivist paradigm underpinning this investigation.

Symbolic interactionists investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self (or ‘identity’) and how they define situations in the company of others. Central to this perspective is the idea that people act

as they do because of how they define situations (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism has its origins in the work of Dewey (1933), Mead (1934) and Cooley (1956). Blumer (1969) produced a significant review of the approach and the term itself is attributed to him. More recently Stryker (2000) has developed symbolic interactionism as a theoretical basis for research in the field of education, particularly in the area of commitment to identity. The purpose of this study aligns well with symbolic interactionism's underlying principles of the centrality of meaning, subjectivity, and the social construction of reality, thereby offering further validation for its use in this investigation.

The symbolic interactionist approach does not place human beings in fixed or rigid patterns of behaviour. Instead, it positions individuals as reflective and responsive to the cues, contexts, actions and experiences of those around them, through which they find meaning. Symbolic interactionism recognises that as the 'self' is socially constructed through interactions with significant others and groups, there are multiple realities in any given situation. As this research seeks to understand individual constructions and definitions of participants' short-term cross-cultural immersion experience, the semi-structured interview emerged as the most appropriate method of data collection.

The thick description required for data analysis in an interpretive investigation is not possible when gathering data through the use of a survey instrument. The research questions posed in this investigation sought to understand participant experiences and perceptions of reality from their perspective in a cross-cultural setting, which is a valuable context for generating data rich in symbol and language. Generating meaning in this study through presenting participants' subjective accounts obtained through semi-structured interviews, rather than utilising objective research methods, aligns well with the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism.

Positioning the study within an interpretive research design using the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, facilitates an understanding of how each participant engages with, and makes meaning from, their experience individually, with others and in society. Having situated the investigation within an interpretive design, a complementary research methodology needs to be considered. The following paragraphs argue the selection of a case study approach.

3.2 Research methodology.

This investigation is characterised by:

1. a search for meaning and understanding;
2. the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis;
3. an inductive investigative strategy; and
4. a richly descriptive product, (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

These factors provide the basis for selection of case study methodology outlined below.

3.2.1 Case study.

A case study is a qualitative inquiry that investigates “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). As the case study approach is directed within a natural setting in order to understand the nature of processes in which little previous research has been conducted (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987), it allows the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998). This investigation aligns well with these characteristics as it explores the experiences of participants in the real-life context of a cross-cultural setting and allows a comprehensive description of the whole phenomenon.

The highly contextualised nature of the locations and communities encountered by participants during immersion trips lend themselves well to the case study approach. A case study allows an investigation of what can be learned about a particular subject, and assists the researcher to understand the complexity of a phenomenon and its effects on participants (Grogan Putney, 2010). Each of the immersion trips (the embedded units of analysis) is a unique experience in that the defining social, physical and cultural parameters, and the interplay between participants, are different in each one.

The characteristics of a case study evident in this investigation are that it is exploratory, intrinsic, a bounded system, an embedded single-case design, descriptive in nature and one in which the researcher has an inherent interest in the case itself (Stake, 2005). Each of these dimensions will be addressed in turn to further justify the appropriateness of a case study approach for this investigation.

3.2.1.1 Exploratory.

The exploratory case study investigates distinct phenomena characterised by a lack of preliminary research and hypotheses that can be tested. This approach is often adopted when the researcher is studying a relatively new field of investigation and the data for hypothetical formulation have not been obtained (Streb, 2010). The nature of this investigation situates itself well within this definition as it seeks to understand what can be learned about the issue (Grogan Putney, 2010). While immersion trips themselves have rapidly increased in popularity in recent years, published research exploring the experiences of adult participants is somewhat limited.

3.2.1.2 *Intrinsic.*

Case studies can be categorised as intrinsic, instrumental or collective (Stake, 2005). This study is intrinsic in that the case itself is the major interest in the investigation (Grandy, 2010). The particular entity, the *Good Samaritan Education Staff Immersion Program*, is the singular focus of the study and comparisons are not being made with other programs. The case was selected based on its uniqueness in the field and the interest of the researcher.

3.2.1.3 *Bounded system.*

Case studies are also characterised by the researcher being able to impose clear limits or boundaries around the system under investigation (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005). In this study, the phenomenon being explored is the short-term cross-cultural immersion trip, through the experiences of individuals involved in the *Good Samaritan Education Staff Immersion Program*. The entity is naturally bounded as the participants have come together independently for purposes not connected to the research (Grogan Putney, 2010). The participants in the immersion trips are a naturally occurring group and are bounded by both temporal and contextual factors – that is, the finite timeframe and location of their respective immersion experiences.

3.2.1.4 *Embedded single-case design.*

The case study allows for naturalistic, every-day, cultural and interactional phenomena to be studied in their own right and in their own territory (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The approach allows the researcher to examine an issue in a holistic manner and the design may be that of a single case, multiple cases or several cases embedded in a larger system or over a defined period of time (Grogan Putney, 2010). In this investigation the case is a particular program (the *Good Samaritan Education Staff*

Immersion Program), comprising 10 embedded units of analysis (namely the 10 *GSE* staff immersion trips conducted between 2004 and 2014, involving 53 individual participants). The particular immersion trips are therefore likely to have more commonalities, such as purpose, effect and source of participants, than differences such as destination or year of participant involvement. The use of the relatively large sample and the multiple trips to five different sites over a 10-year period offer both the opportunity for a unique insight into the phenomena of cross-cultural immersion, and a strengthening of the internal validity of the research. Figure 3.2 provides a diagrammatic representation of the embedded single-case design adopted for this research.

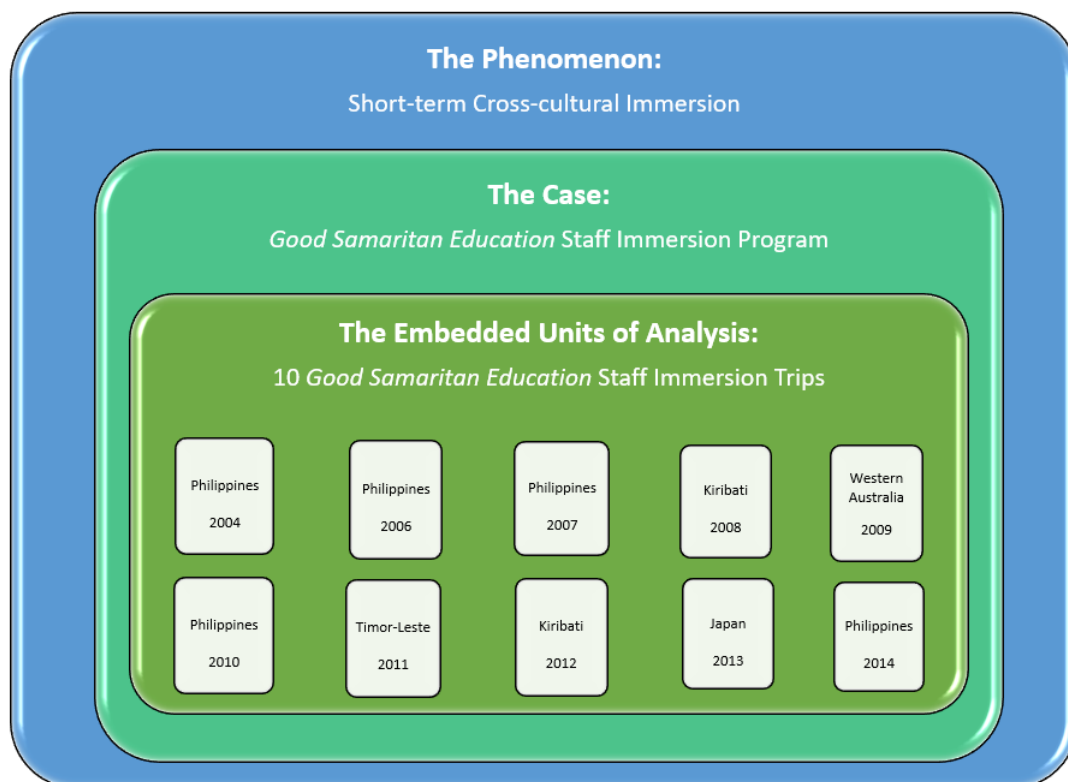


Figure 3.2. Embedded single-case design of the research.

The case study approach attempts to uncover the story of a particular aspect of social behaviour in a specific setting, and the factors influencing the issue. The particular

nature of the short-term cross-cultural immersion experience and the embedded contextual variables are interconnected with the personal and professional narrative of each participant. Situations such as this, in which the variables cannot be separated from the context, are well suited to the single-case design.

In the course of the research, 10 separate immersion trips to five different host communities involving 53 participants were explored. Despite the variation between contexts, trips, and individuals, the case (the *GSE* Staff Immersion Program) is the singular feature under investigation. Exploring the experiences of participants on different trips over a period of time offers a diverse sample and the ability to record the extent to which participants reconstruct their experience over time. In providing an opportunity to observe the phenomenon longitudinally rather than studying just one immersion trip, themes emerge and become clearer, and common elements become apparent, regardless of where the participant's host community is located and in what year she or he visited.

3.2.1.5 Descriptive.

The case study approach allows the researcher to focus on a particular incident, a single event or a series of linked cases over time (Grogan Putney, 2010), as in the case of this investigation. The rich description of the context generated by the research provides a comprehensive platform for exploring the variables and their interplay in great depth. The extensive description and analysis of phenomena also means that the case study design provides a deeper understanding of the issues and the meaning participants construct in relation to their experiences.

After justifying the case study as the appropriate methodology to explore the purpose of the research, it is also important to consider the limitations of this approach.

3.2.1.6 Limitations of the case study approach.

While the case study approach is the most appropriate research methodology for this investigation, the limitations of the design must also be acknowledged. Case studies can be time consuming and difficult to replicate, and may encounter issues such as the volume of data, reliability, validity, generalisation and bias.

While the rich, thick data generated in a case study is one of its greatest strengths, the multiplicity of interwoven detail can be overwhelming (Merriam, 1998). Also, unlike the positivist research design, the findings of a case study cannot be easily generalised (Yin, 2013). The difficulty in maintaining the integrity of the participants' perspectives has been described by Gall and Borg (1999), and there is criticism that the case study approach is open to bias, particularly in relation to the subjectivity of the researcher (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

The position for qualitative case studies, on the other hand, is strongly argued by Shields (2007) who refutes the arguments around the limitations of the case study approach and refers to it as the new 'gold standard':

The strength of qualitative approaches is that they account for and include difference – ideologically, epistemologically, methodologically – and most importantly, humanly. They do not attempt to eliminate what cannot be discounted. They do not attempt to simplify what cannot be simplified. Thus, it is precisely because case study includes paradoxes and acknowledges that there are

no simple answers, that it can and should qualify as the gold standard. (Shields, 2007, p. 12)

Nonetheless, the limitations of the methodology in this particular study are recognised and acknowledged by the researcher. The issue of volume of data is evident in case study methodology. In this research, the data were categorised through an emergent coding process and stored using the NVivo software program (QSR International, 2012). In order to safeguard the integrity of the data, participant responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Merriam, 1998). The risk of bias in the interpretation of data is recognised by the researcher, and mitigated through:

1. recognition of the researcher's own bias and how it might influence choices and decisions throughout the conduct of the research;
2. representing the data objectively; and
3. identifying and acknowledging the limitations of the study (Fanelli, 2009).

The paradox inherent in the case study methodology is that “by studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal” (Simons, 1996, p. 231). The issue of generalisation takes on a different meaning in case studies as opposed to positivist statistically based studies. A theory can be developed or tested in case studies without any claims that it applies to other situations. Bearing this in mind, the particular characteristics of this case have been presented to add to the body of knowledge, so that readers may take from the research aspects that are relevant to their situation. The criticism of the subjectivity of the researcher is addressed in Section 3.9.

After justifying the adoption of the case study research methodology, it is now appropriate to consider the method used to gather the data.

3.3 Method.

The particular procedures adopted for the gathering and analysis of data are driven by the research purpose and support the questions generated by the literature review and the design of the research. With an interpretivist design in place and the adoption of case study methodology, the focus turns to the selection of an appropriate method of data collection. As gathering data relating to personal experiences of immersion is central to this study, the method which provides the most useful and reliable answers to the research questions posed, is the semi-structured interview. As such, the data collection process in this particular case study is based on semi-structured interviews.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interview.

The interview is a rich source of data in qualitative research. It involves a purposeful conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee to obtain information on a specific issue. It provides in-depth information relating to participant experiences and viewpoints on a particular topic (D. W. Turner, 2010). As such, the interview protocol is an apt strategy to employ in gathering data relating to participant experience and perspectives of immersion trips.

The semi-structured interview allows participants to fully express their viewpoints and experiences while maintaining a level of question consistency (D. W. Turner, 2010). The researcher establishes an initial rapport with the participant and the process involves open-ended questioning in which the interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewee's feelings, experiences and perceptions (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). It is essential that the researcher follow up with clarifying and probing questions to ensure that the intended meaning has been understood (Bachman & Schutt, 2008). This aspect of the interview is relatively unstructured as the questions are in response to participant

reflections on personal experience. Essentially, the purpose of using the semi-structured interview is to establish a relaxed atmosphere for discussion rather than a formal ‘question and answer’ interview (O'Donoghue, 2007). It allows the researcher freedom to follow up or clarify previous comments or to ‘go with the flow’ and let the interviewee lead the conversation into new areas (Patton, 2002).

The strength of this approach is that the data provided is rich and detailed, however, Creswell (2007) identifies a limitation in the difficulty of coding of the data. The coding of the data in this investigation was managed through the processes of constant comparative analysis (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000) and a three-phase coding process involving open, axial and selective coding (O'Donoghue, 2007). In using the semi-structured interview, the researcher must accept the need to balance the risk of bias with the quality and depth of the data gathered.

After examining the most appropriate method for this study, it is necessary to consider the selection of participants involved in the exploration of the purpose of the research, and provided data to illuminate the research questions.

3.4 Participants.

This case study is bounded within one immersion program in the *Good Samaritan Education* Formation for Mission Framework – the Staff Immersion Program (Good Samaritan Education, 2011c), and participants are representatives of the 10 schools which comprise *GSE*. Purposive sampling was used based on participants’ specific knowledge in relation to the nature, experience and outcomes of immersion trips. This sampling method ensures rich, in-depth information with high quality, detailed descriptions and important shared patterns (Patton, 1990).

While most research into transformative outcomes of immersion trips has been conducted using participants who are adolescents or undergraduate students (see Section 2.4), psychologists maintain the advanced level of cognition required for transformative learning to occur is not reached before the ages of 30 or 40 (see Section 2.4.3). This limitation identified in the scholarly literature is addressed in this research by using adult participants who are professionals at various stages along their career paths. The increased capacity of adults for critical reflection, enhancing the possibility for transformation has been noted in the literature (Merriam, 2004).

3.4.1 Sample characteristics.

The research involves a study of the experiences of staff members participating in *Good Samaritan Education* immersion experiences over a 10-year period. The schools share a common Catholic identity, tradition and spirituality in that they were all founded by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict. The schools are spread across three states and five Catholic dioceses on the eastern seaboard of Australia. Eight are secondary colleges for girls, one is a co-educational secondary college, and one is a Kindergarten to Year 12 school for students with mild to moderate intellectual disability.

Participants were invited based on their involvement in one of 10 immersion trips between 2004 and 2014, to one of five host communities linked to the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, located in the Philippines, Kiribati, Timor-Leste, Western Australia and Japan. Participants included individuals in governance, leadership, teaching and administrative roles. As the focus of this research is formation of staff members in Catholic schools, those involved in the *GSE* governance structure were not included in the sample.

All *GSE* immersions visit communities in a different cultural setting. Kiribati, the Philippines and Timor-Leste are all Majority World countries. As the immersions to Western Australian and Japan share the same context and meet the criteria of being cross-cultural immersions, data from participants on those trips were included in the research. The immersion to Western Australia engages participants in visits to indigenous communities, and the Japan immersion involves both tracing the history of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan in Japan, and participation in their contemporary mission and ministry. The different contextual features of the five host communities may provide helpful data relating to whether the location of immersion is a contributing factor in fostering transformative outcomes for participants post-immersion.

3.4.2 *Sample size.*

In the initial stages of the research, 79 staff members were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Given the 10-year timeframe involved, some staff members were no longer contactable due to retirement, taking leave or moving to other employment. A total of 56 staff members from nine schools responded to the invitation (representing a 71% return rate), and 53 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Forty-seven participants are female and six are male, which reflects the gender ratio of staffing across participating schools. Three participants were no longer available to be interviewed due to retirement and/or relocating in the intervening period. Table 3.2 provides a summary of participant details relating to sending school, host community and year of immersion experience.

Table 3.2 *Sample characteristics*

Sending School	Philippines 2004	Philippines 2006	Philippines 2007	Kiribati 2008	Western Australia 2009	Philippines 2010	Timor-Leste 2011	Kiribati 2012	Japan 2013	Philippines 2014	Total Invited	Total Accepted
School 1		Gail	Leah				Sarah	Jamie	Sally	Erin	7	6
School 2					Jan						4	1
School 3	Michelle Nina	Annabelle							Kim	Heather Moira	8	6
School 4		Gina		Joan	Ruth	Evie	Chris				8	5
School 5											4	0
School 6	Kylie			Karina							7	2
School 7		Trish Bernadette	Alex Geraldine	Anna	Brenda Patricia	Helen Kathy Nerida		Olivia	Dawn	Rosanna	16	13
School 8		Nikki	Sam		Molly		Philippa Ella	Bernie Naomi Pat		Deb	11	9
School 9			Cheryl			Imogen	Caz Connie	Ariane	Bethany	Angie Jess	11	8
School 10	Margaret				Wendy					Michaela	3	3
Total Invited	5	9	7	4	7	8	9	8	10	13	79	
Total Accepted	4	6	5	3	6	5	6	6	4	8		53

Note: All names used are pseudonyms

3.4.3 Participant Profiles.

In the following section, four participant profiles are presented to provide a clearer understanding of the types of individuals who involve themselves in *Good Samaritan Education* staff immersion trips. In order to further protect the privacy of participants, each vignette is a composite picture of a number of staff members who would typically participate, and does not relate to specific individuals.

3.4.3.1 Participant A.

Participant A (A) is single, in her early 30s and has been teaching History, Geography and Religious Education for 12 years. She has been working in her *GSE* school for the last five years and has recently been appointed to the middle-management position of House Coordinator. She is fit, well-travelled, particularly in the region of South East Asia, and is confident in her ability to manage the challenges of an immersion experience.

A is energetic and enthusiastic, and is enjoying the diversity of experiences provided by her new role. In the school's mission structure, her House is partnered with the work of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan in the Philippines, which provided the impetus for her to apply for a place on the immersion. A is keen to discover more about the Philippines and the work of the Good Samaritan sisters, and is particularly keen to work on strengthening the partnership between the school and the host community after she returns.

3.4.3.2 Participant B.

Participant B (B) is in her early 60s and has been working at her *GSE* school for the last 26 years. B teaches Design and Technology and is well-respected by staff,

students and parents. B went to a Good Samaritan school herself and is very supportive of the sisters and the mission life of the school. She intends to retire within the next two years and would like to spend more time with her grandchildren, and to become actively involved in volunteer work in her local community.

While B is extremely excited about the prospect of the immersion trip, she has never travelled to a Majority World country and is somewhat anxious about managing her various food allergies, and her medication which requires refrigeration. B is extremely grateful for the opportunity to visit Kiribati, and has organised for her Year 8 Design and Technology students to make colourful felt finger-puppets representing various numbers and letters of the alphabet.

3.4.3.3 Participant C.

Participant C (C) has previously worked in two *GSE* schools and currently holds a senior leadership position in a third. C has a strong commitment to the Catholic ethos and to the Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition, and prioritises the implementation of initiatives which support the integration of the charism into all aspects of school life. C has been asked by the principal to participate in the immersion trip to Timor-Leste as she believes it will be an important formation opportunity for him.

C has travelled widely throughout Europe, South America and Asia, and has expressed reservations about the immersion in terms of not wanting to engage in a voyeuristic ‘poverty tourism’ type of experience. C aspires to become a principal in the near future and is willing to involve himself in any available formation or professional learning experience.

3.4.3.4 Participant D.

Participant D (D) has worked in an ancillary position at her *GSE* school for the last 15 years. D has no particular religious affiliation, but likes the staff and students at her school and enjoys the community ‘feel’ in the workplace. D is a single parent of three adolescent children and is very grateful for the school and family support she has received over the years.

D was surprised to be selected for the immersion trip and is a little concerned about travelling with a group of teachers as she feels they will be much more knowledgeable than she is with respect to travel and the host community. She is also anxious about leaving her children, even though she knows they will be well-cared-for by her sister. D is open to the opportunity of the immersion, but has not considered possibilities and options beyond the experience.

3.4.4 Addressing the shortcomings relating to methodology.

In seeking to address some of the shortcomings identified in the literature regarding methodology in relation to research into short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences (Ver Beek, 2006), this investigation involved:

1. a relatively large sample of 53 staff participants who are professional educators, rather than the more typical focus on adolescents and undergraduate students.
2. participants from nine *Good Samaritan Education* schools, providing diversity of experience, gender, age, state, diocese, religious affiliation and sending school.
3. five host communities located in the Philippines, Kiribati, Timor-Leste, Western Australia and Japan, offering diversity of immersion groups and cross-cultural host communities.

4. an opportunity to explore the short, medium and long-term outcomes for participants. In most previous investigations, data collection is limited to the immediate post-immersion phase. As data in this research was gathered from participants involved in 10 separate immersion trips between 2004 and 2014, some individuals' immersion experiences had been up to 10 years prior to their interview.

3.5 Data collection.

Data were gathered using the semi-structured interview. The timing of interviews in qualitative research has been addressed in the literature and a limitation has been identified in that for most investigations, interviews are conducted immediately after participants return from their trip (see Section 2.4.2.3). As participants are often 'on a high' after returning home, conducting interviews at this time increases the possibility of exaggerating the positive outcomes (Ver Beek, 2006). This limitation is addressed in this research by interviewing individuals up to 10 years after their experience. The need to explore the long-term outcomes of short-term immersion has also been identified in the literature and recommended for future research by Johnson (2014).

The data were gathered over a period of 12 months from May 2014 to May 2015. The semi-structured interviews were limited to when staff members were available during school terms. The large amount of data collected in an interpretive investigation requires particular methods of analysis. These methods are addressed in the following section.

3.6 Data analysis.

Data analysis forms part of the research method used in an investigation, and therefore, must be consistent with its philosophical underpinnings. In interpretive studies,

the object lies not in the quantification of facts, but rather in the identification of the meanings attributed by individuals to their real-life experiences. Thus, the volume of raw data generated by qualitative research requires systematic techniques to provide structure and order (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

3.6.1 Qualitative data analysis.

Essentially the process of data analysis involves identifying and categorising underlying patterns and principles and critically examining and assessing the gathered data. As analysis seeks to make meaning from the data, it is a complex, eclectic process (Dey, 1993; Glesne, 1999; Tesch, 1990), and occurs simultaneously and iteratively with data collection, data interpretation and report writing (Creswell, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1984). The researcher's task in this process is to organise the data and represent it systematically using a particular schema, so that it is clearly understood by the reader (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

From the raw data, the researcher produces a report which draws together the themes and descriptions identified in the data, and provides answers to the research questions. During the process of analysis, the descriptions presented are based on the data, while the final interpretations presented are those of the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.6.2 Stages of data analysis.

The process of data analysis was informed by a three-stage process – data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the first stage, data were collated, coded, summarised and sorted. In the second stage, data were organised, categorised and represented visually. The third stage involved

interpreting the gathered data and assigning meaning according to themes, patterns and shared perceptions. The process of constant comparative analysis was applied to the data gathered in this investigation.

As data analysis includes data reduction and interpretation, data were constantly being broken down into smaller units of meaning, analysed for patterns, coded and categorised. This de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation of the gathered data was a process of continuous refinement which allowed new relationships and key themes to emerge and be affirmed (C. Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Tesch, 1990). Qualitative data analysis has been summarised in terms of:

1. preparation of the data for analysis;
2. reading the data; and
3. coding the data in terms of themes and description (Creswell, 2012).

Each of these phases is addressed separately, as it applies to this investigation.

3.6.2.1 Preparation of data for analysis.

After transcription of the recorded interviews to a Microsoft Word document, data were uploaded to a qualitative software program – NVivo Version 10 (QSR International, 2012), which was used for storage and analysis of data. Utilisation of electronic systems for managing data in qualitative research increases efficiency and consistency in processing the data, and decreases the chance of data loss. The NVivo program facilitated the process of cataloguing, and the locating of relevant data during the intensive period of data analysis (Merriam, 2009). NVivo also allowed ease of access to information, and the possibility of interim categories and linkages between emerging themes.

3.6.2.2 *Reading the data.*

Prior to analysis of the data, it was necessary to complete a preliminary exploratory analysis to obtain a general sense of the data, determine ways of organising the data and consider whether perhaps more data were required (Creswell, 2012). Reading the transcripts in their entirety to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts is recommended by Agar (1980), and writing memos in the form of short phrases, concepts or hunches is suggested by Creswell (2012). Both of these strategies were adopted in this investigation.

3.6.2.3 *Coding the data.*

All interpretive data analysis methods involve coding data into nodes and categories to allow themes to emerge from the data. It is a technique that aims to organise the data so that the emerging themes and the links between them become apparent, and involves assigning a label or 'code' in the form of an abbreviation, word or phrase. A three-phase coding process involving open, axial and selective coding outlined by O'Donoghue (2007), and based on the work of Corbin and Strauss (1990) was used in the analysis of data in this investigation. Each of these stages of coding is designed for a different purpose and builds on the previous one (Saldana, 2013).

Open coding is typically used in the first stage of data analysis and involves the initial labelling and coding of words and phrases found in the text from which categories and sub-categories are determined (Lichtman, 2010). Axial coding results in a reduction of the number of codes and the emergence of relationships between and across the data (Moghaddam, 2006). Selective coding involves selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, and validating those relationships (O'Donoghue, 2007). In summary, in open coding the data remain discrete, axial coding

relates and integrates the data, and selective coding allows the researcher to select and integrate emerging themes (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

This research aims to explore the experiences of staff members participating in short-term cross-cultural immersions and to generate connective links to significant dimensions and impact, so the use of the analytic process of coding is appropriate. The data were categorised through an emergent coding process and a summary of the prevalent codes, a discussion of the similarities and differences between the codes, and a comparison of the relationship between them, is included in the findings (Saldana, 2013).

3.6.2.4 Constant comparative analysis.

The process of ‘constant comparative analysis’ was applied to the data in this investigation to test for consonance or dissonance with preceding and emerging data (Dye et al., 2000). The interpretive research design which guided the procedures for data collection and analysis throughout the investigation relied on inductive reasoning and therefore ensured that the patterns and themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed on them before data collection and analysis (Patton, 1990).

3.7 Verifications.

The value of the interpretive research design lies in its authenticity and accuracy in reflecting the true state of human experience (Polit & Beck, 2004). Its rigour and trustworthiness can be ascertained by verification of its credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The procedures utilised to ensure validity of the research process in this investigation are outlined in turn.

3.7.1 Credibility.

While positivist researchers address issues of internal validity, investigators in the interpretive paradigm seek to establish credibility for their study by asking “how congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is there?” (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the data, and ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing the trustworthiness of the investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is enhanced by the use of procedures which involve a range of people who view the research from differing perspectives (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The benchmarks for credibility employed in this investigation are member checking, peer review, audit trail and rich, thick description.

3.7.1.1 Member checking.

To enhance the validity in this investigation, and to reduce interviewer bias, the researcher used member checking to verify the authenticity of data collected, and interpretations formed. Participants were invited to read and critique records of interviews and clarify meaning as necessary. Member checking is argued to be the single most crucial strategy for establishing credibility of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Hearing the same event recounted by different participants is also useful in confirming validity. Follow-up interviews were not required in this research as participants verified the transcripts as an accurate account of their semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1.2 Peer review.

In order to provide further credibility and validity for the investigation, strategies involving people external to the study were employed. Confidentiality of participant data was maintained throughout the process. Peer reviewers, auditors and readers who examine the narrative account from an external perspective are able to attest to its

credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Peer review involves discussions around the data and research process with a colleague who is familiar with the phenomenon under investigation and yet is external to the study. The peer reviewer provides support, plays devil's advocate, challenges the researcher's assumptions, pushes the researcher to the next step methodologically, and asks hard questions about methods and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Regular meetings with the supervision team were therefore held to discuss the conduct and progress of this investigation.

3.7.1.3 Audit trail.

The development of an audit trail provided access to tracking, collection and analysis of data, and the emergent findings in the investigation. This allowed the researcher to guide the reader through the work from beginning to end, so that the process by which patterns were revealed and conclusions drawn, was made apparent (O'Donoghue, 2007). In establishing an audit trail, the researcher kept a journal for the duration of the research, recording personal reflections on the progress of the study, emails to the supervision team and critical friends, and notes on participant interviews and responses (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The research journal provides clear documentation of all research decisions and activities and enables the audience to judge the dependability or trustworthiness of the outcomes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Examples of decisions made throughout the research journey included in the researcher's journal are:

1. the process of selection of the theoretical framework to provide a lens for analysis of the data (see Appendices H and I); and
2. whether or not to include the data gathered from documentary evidence in the data analysis (see Appendix J).

The process relating to these decisions is outlined in the following paragraphs.

3.7.1.3.1 Selection of the theoretical framework.

In the initial stages of data analysis, the concept of liminality based on the work of Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967) was considered as a lens for analysis, with the immersion experience being the 'liminal space'. This approach was developed further using both liminality and Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) as dual lenses for data analysis (see Appendices H and I). As the analysis and synthesis of the data progressed however, it became increasingly apparent that:

1. the use of the combined approaches was becoming very cumbersome;
2. the alignment between the two theories and the emergent data was becoming less apparent; and
3. the use of the two approaches was diminishing the strength of both.

These factors, in conjunction with the themes emerging from the data, led the researcher to the decision to discard the concept of liminality in relation to the research question and adopt TLT as the singular most appropriate lens through which to view the data.

3.7.1.3.2 Documentary evidence.

Similarly, decisions regarding sources of data gathering were noted in the researcher's journal. Documentary evidence, for example, was originally included as a method of data collection. These methods were initially considered to be important aspects of the research, in both contributing to the selection of the case study methodology, and providing triangulation of data sources. However, over time it became increasingly evident that:

1. while samples of newsletter and yearbook reports were obtained, due to the systems used to catalogue and archive such materials at the schools, locating the relevant evidence was extremely time-consuming, unproductive and cumbersome for administrative staff;
2. as the reports located were largely pictorial in nature and travelogue in style, the data did not make a substantial contribution to answering the research questions;
3. very few participants took up the invitation to bring an artefact to the semi-structured interview. Most preferred to reflect upon and recount their experiences throughout the course of the discussion;
4. post-immersion feedback sheets completed by participants on previous trips were also not found to be particularly useful. The evaluation questions had been constructed many years earlier and largely addressed organisational issues relating to the trip, rather than the research questions of this study; and
5. only the semi-structured interviews provided credible, trustworthy and consistent data concerning the focus of the investigation. The breadth and depth of the data gathered from the interviews provided unique insight and into the construct of immersion, and proved to be the most useful in answering the research questions (see Appendix J).

The research journal makes a significant contribution to the audit trail and provides documentation relating to the decisions made throughout the course of the investigation, allowing the readers to assess the dependability or trustworthiness of the findings (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

3.7.1.4 Rich, thick description.

Rich, thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts (Denzin, 1989) and the purpose is to create a narrative that instils in the readers a feeling that they too could experience the events described in the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility is therefore established through the lens of readers who read an account and feel transported to a setting or situation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It may involve describing a small slice of interaction, experience, or action; locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or an interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel (Denzin, 1989). The vivid descriptions in this research provided by participants involved in cross-cultural encounter, assist readers to come to their own conclusions regarding the credibility of the narrative.

3.7.2 Dependability.

Dependability refers to the extent to which the research itself can be relied upon for its truthfulness and trustworthiness. An audit trail as previously outlined was used to check plausibility of data reconstruction. Constant comparative analysis was also used throughout the process of data gathering and analysis. Codes were applied and reviewed, and as the data was re-read, deeper understandings and patterns emerged, which contributed to the dependability of the research (Anfara et al., 2002).

3.7.3 Confirmability.

A major consideration in the concept of confirmability is that the findings of the research are objective and do in fact reflect the experiences of the participants, rather than the bias and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). A key strategy to ensure this aspect of trustworthiness was the development of a comprehensive audit trail (see Section 3.7.1.3). Other provisions used to ensure confirmability of the investigation are admission

of the researcher's beliefs and assumptions and a recognition of the shortcomings of the study (see Sections 3.9 and 3.10).

3.7.4 *Transferability.*

Transferability, or external validity, refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other settings (Merriam, 1998). As the findings of interpretive research investigations are particular to specific individuals, groups and environments, some argue that it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations (Firestone, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Bassey (1981) however, argues that if the researcher provides sufficient contextual information about the participants and the site, it will enable the reader to assess the transferability to their own particular situation. Therefore, theories can still be developed that other researchers may apply to their own context.

The major technique for establishing the degree of transferability is thick description (Guba, 1989). While Shenton (2004) also advocates the provision of background data to establish the context of the study, and detailed description of the phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made, he questions whether "the notion of producing truly transferable results from a single study is a realistic aim or whether it disregards the importance of context which forms such a key factor in qualitative research" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

The purpose of this investigation is not to develop generalisations about short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff, although it may well have the potential to be of use to other groups involved in organising such programs. Rather, it is to examine human experience within a particular context, and

to explore perceptions and descriptions within that setting from the perspective of the individuals selected to participate (Bachman & Schutt, 2008).

The participants in any site may influence the transferability of any conclusions from the site of the study to any other setting (Anfara et al., 2002). When purposive selection of participants takes place there may be an element of representativeness (as in this case), however, the findings cannot be used to generalise about the wider population. The researcher recognises that this aspect is one of the limitations of the case study approach. Table 3.3 provides a summary of the criteria used for verification of the investigation and the strategies used to address each one.

Table 3.3 *Summary of verification criteria and strategies*

Verification	Criteria	How addressed in the investigation
Credibility	member checking	semi-structured interview transcripts critiqued by participants
	people external to the study	use of peer reviewers and a critical friend
	audit trail	use of researcher journaling semi-structured interview audio files and transcripts
Dependability	constant comparative analysis	used throughout the process of data gathering and analysis
	coding	codes were applied and reviewed as patterns emerged same coding strategy used across data gathering methods
	audit trail	use of researcher journaling semi-structured interview audio files and transcripts
Confirmability	researcher bias	bias and subjectivity of the researcher is acknowledged
	audit trail	use of researcher journaling semi-structured interview audio files and transcripts
Transferability	rich, thick description	semi-structured interview audio files and transcripts clarity and attention to detail

3.8 Ethical considerations.

Ethical considerations in research originated in the medical field, but have broadened in recent years to include all research with human subjects (Gallagher, 2005). Research ethics can be defined as “the application of moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects, in particular, active acceptance of subjects’ right to privacy,

confidentiality and informed consent” (G. Marshall, 1998, p. 566). As ethical issues are important to this study, the investigation is underpinned by the standards for educational research identified by Howe and Eisenhardt (1990):

1. the fit between research questions and data collection and analysis techniques;
2. the effective application of specific data collection and analysis techniques;
3. alertness to and coherence of background assumptions;
4. overall warrant; and
5. value constraints (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990, pp. 6-8).

These principles and the principles which govern the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Research Projects Ethics Committee were adhered to throughout the course of the study (see Appendix F).

3.8.1 Ethical considerations in data gathering.

Ethical considerations in data gathering include privacy, confidentiality, protection from harm, informed consent, ownership of data and care in reporting (Bassey, 1999). Ethical considerations addressed here include general ethical issues in research and specific issues that relate to the site or participants involved (C. Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

3.8.1.1 Informed consent.

Informed consent was evident in this investigation via an Information Letter and a Consent Form sent to principals of the 10 *Good Samaritan Education* colleges requesting permission to approach staff members in their schools to participate in the investigation (see Appendix A). Information Letters and Consent Forms were then sent to 79 staff members who had participated in one of the 10 *GSE* staff immersion

experiences between 2004 and 2014 (see Appendices B and C). The Information Letter outlined the nature and purpose of the research and the process for participation. It also advised that ethical clearance had been obtained from the ACU Research Projects Ethics Committee (see Appendix F). Written informed consent was received from the 10 college principals and from all participants. These forms were securely kept on file and form part of the audit trail for the investigation.

3.8.1.2 Privacy and confidentiality.

Throughout the investigation, various procedures were established to ensure the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, specifically through the use of coding. Each participant was assigned a code containing information regarding their gender, sending school, host community and year of participation in their immersion trip. The codes were replaced by pseudonyms in the final report and all were stored electronically on a password protected hard drive in a secured site. To further protect anonymity of participants due to the gender imbalance of the sample, gender-neutral pseudonyms were randomly assigned. Access to the data, codes and pseudonyms was restricted to the researcher.

3.8.1.3 Beneficence and 'no harm'.

It is incumbent upon the researcher to ensure all participants are treated in an ethical manner which respects and secures their well-being. In relation to 'no harm' (Sieber, 1992), it is noteworthy that the participants in this investigation were all adults, and experienced professional educators, who freely chose to be interviewed as part of the research project. The possibility of an extreme emotional response to the poverty and living conditions particular to the Majority World, and evident in the host communities visited on immersion, is very real. Involvement in research relating to such experiences

may have evoked memories and feelings that remained unresolved for some participants. Bearing this in mind, the researcher was prepared to remind participants that they were free to discontinue their participation at any time, and had acquired information regarding counselling agencies through their school, and external service providers as required.

Another important ethical consideration particular to this study is the context of the investigation. The experience of informed, consenting adult participants who have been involved in a *GSE* immersion trip is the focus of this research, and not the lives or experiences of people living in the host communities. Respect and protection of privacy for these communities remain of paramount importance to this investigation. Individuals in host communities referred to by participants during the data collection process, were assigned pseudonyms in the final report (Sieber, 1992).

3.8.1.4 Ethical considerations in data analysis and reporting.

While the process of conducting a research investigation may be viewed as an objective task, a range of ethical issues have been identified relating to data analysis and reporting. Difficulties associated with the subjectivity of the researcher have been noted, and described as an unusual problem of ethics (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). It has been argued that an unethical researcher could “so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 378). Ethical difficulties involved when the research is funded by an organisation in that they do not want to be portrayed in a negative light in published works, adds yet another layer of complexity to the issue. While this predicament is understandable, it “raises again the moral dilemma of truthful reporting against expedient reporting” (Walsham, 2006, p. 328).

The researcher is aware of these ethical issues and sought to produce a credible, trustworthy investigation of staff perspectives on their experiences of immersion. The funding issue is not applicable to this study and the question of researcher bias is addressed in the following section.

3.9 Role of the researcher.

The very nature of the interpretive design means that the researcher is an active participant in the process of analysis – it is not possible to remain neutral. The researcher makes decisions regarding inclusion or exclusion of data and is able to “intervene, manipulate, act on, conceptualise, and use specific techniques” (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 550), and suggest how these pieces of information might link to the research questions.

It is acknowledged that the personal and professional background of the researcher influenced the selection of the research area and the associated perspectives that came to light as the investigation developed. The researcher needs to “systematically reflect on who he or she is in the inquiry and be sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). In this study, this aspect was addressed by regular meetings with the supervision team, and the use of a peer de-briefer or critical friend (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

It is also acknowledged that the researcher had a short-term professional relationship with the participants prior to the investigation. The potential for possible bias and the influence this may have had on the research findings has been identified by Gilham (2005). The researcher was very aware of her rapport with participants and of achieving a balance between gathering useful, meaningful data while maintaining the integrity of the investigation.

3.9.1 Insider research.

The term ‘insider research’ is used to describe investigations where the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting (Robson, 2002). The type of insider research evident in this study is known as ‘practitioner research’ as the researcher carried out the study in a work setting, in that the researcher was responsible for the coordination of six of the immersion trips under investigation.

The problematic nature of insider research has been noted in the literature (Costley, 2010; Kvale, 1995; Shah, 2004). Issues such as promising anonymity and confidentiality to colleagues, possibly challenging the value systems of the organisation or professional field in some way, interviewing colleagues, and managing the power implications as a researcher and a practitioner within the research project are examples of issues that may occur (Costley, 2010).

Concurrently, advantages are also cited in the literature. The idea that insiders have a wealth of knowledge to which the outsider is not privy is argued by Jones (in Tedlock, [2000]). Tierney (1994) also maintains that interviewees may feel more comfortable and freer to talk openly if they are familiar with the researcher. The essential element is not ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ status, but “an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

In the case of this investigation, the question of the power imbalance in insider research is minimal as the researcher has no authority within individual *GSE* schools and no involvement in operational matters, employment, performance review or appraisal processes of the participants. This is very important to the integrity of the research. The

participants were not asked to evaluate the immersion programs, rather to reflect upon and report their own personal experiences of immersion, and perceptions of subsequent internal shifts and changed perspectives and behaviours. Participants were encouraged to speak openly and honestly in a private setting with confidentiality assured, and the freedom to discontinue their involvement at any time. They were secure in the knowledge that involvement in the study would not in any way jeopardise their ongoing employment, professional standing within *GSE* schools or involvement in future immersion trips.

Conversely, insider research requires the researcher to consider the possibility of ‘overly compliant’ participants, who feel compelled to provide positive responses to interview questions. As the researcher has played a significant role in *GSE* immersion programs over a 10-year period, and formed relationships with participants whilst on the trips, it is possible that participants may have chosen to select only the positive aspects of the trips to share, or emphasise only the benefits rather than the negatives.

To minimise this possibility, participants were reminded at the outset of the interview that the focus of the investigation is the perspectives of participants, and not the program itself. It was also emphasised that all responses are valuable and valid and complete honesty would assist the researcher most to understand different participant’s perspectives on the experience. The semi-structured interview questions were designed to minimise the role of the researcher in the data gathering process, and to focus on the personal stories and perspectives of the participants. The interview process focused on bringing participants back to their own personal stories, feelings and perspectives. Participants were assured of anonymity in the final report and all identifiable data and references were removed.

The researcher had easy access to information, an understanding of the structure, processes and protocols of the schools involved and a familiarity and rapport with the potential participants. This ensured that the process of data collection was less time-consuming (Mercer, 2007). From an interpretive perspective, insider research has the potential to increase validity due to the added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired (Rooney, 2005).

No research is free of researcher bias. This is acknowledged and the researcher has identified and outlined her involvement and interest in the immersion program central to the investigation and how this has been addressed during the course of the study.

3.10 Limitations and delimitations.

Identification of limitations (aspects of the research beyond the control of the researcher), and delimitations (choices made by the researcher to set boundaries for the investigation), further define the quality of the research.

3.10.1 Limitations.

This investigation seeks to explore the experiences of adult participants on short-term cross-cultural immersion trips. Participants are from schools which share the same values and spiritual tradition, have similar professional interests and are predisposed to involvement in an immersion experience. These factors mean the findings will be highly specific to this particular context and population, uncovering the action of significant factors characteristic of that phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). These factors may be informative in assisting other faith-based and secular organisations in planning and facilitating immersion trips in their own context.

The choice of research area and the particular perspective evident in the study was influenced by the professional interest of the researcher. Every effort was made to ensure the rapport with participants maximised the capacity for gathering rich data while maintaining the integrity of the research.

The research provided information about a specific group of people over a defined period of time and cannot be generalised beyond the boundaries of this case. However, the research strategies employed, in line with their epistemological and theoretical underpinnings, sought to provide an in-depth and thick description and an integrated interpretation of the findings. Generalisations and possibilities for transference of information gleaned from this case study are derived by the reader.

3.10.2 Delimitations.

The participants and the short-term cross-cultural immersion trips represented in this study have been purposively selected. The selection is not considered to be comprehensive or generalisable, but rather, one example of the broad types of immersion experiences currently available. The research does not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips for staff, but to explore their experiences by focusing on examples in practice and to derive key elements or factors that have contributed to transformative outcomes.

3.11 Overview of the research design.

This chapter has offered an examination of the relationship between the theoretical framework, the purpose of the research and the research questions. The research design, strategies and methods used in the investigation have been justified and they reflect the interpretive paradigm in which the study is positioned, the epistemologies

of constructionism and constructivism, and the lens of symbolic interactionism through which the research is viewed. The use of case study methodology focuses the research design on validly addressing and providing answers for the research questions which were generated by the review of the scholarly literature.

The use of an interpretive design and the symbolic interactionist perspective allow the researcher to explore participant perspectives and actions over a particular period of time (O'Donoghue, 2007). The researcher was involved in the collection of data and clear processes for analysis have been identified. This investigation also provides an opportunity to potentially generate new and more sophisticated understandings in the field (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Table 3.4 provides an overview of the research design and its relationship to the research questions, and forms a bridge from the design to a set of data and analysis that seeks to validly address and answer the Major Research Question.

Table 3.4 *Overview of the research design*

Major Research Question				
<i>How does short-term cross-cultural immersion contribute to the formation of Catholic school staff?</i>				
Research questions	Data source	Data collection strategy	Data analysis	Timeframe
What features of immersion foster transformative outcomes in individuals?	Participants from <i>GSE</i> staff immersions	Semi-structured open-ended interviews	Collation, analysis and coding of data Verification Pattern matching Confirming themes Constant comparative analysis	July 2014 – June 2015
What are the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for individuals?	Participants from <i>GSE</i> staff immersions	Semi-structured open-ended interviews	Collation, analysis and coding of data Verification Pattern matching Confirming themes Constant comparative analysis	July 2014 – June 2015

The overview of the research design concludes Chapter Three. In Chapter Four the findings relating to the experiences of participants whilst on immersion are presented, and Chapter Five addresses the findings involving participant experiences in the post-immersion phase.

Chapter Four

4 Presentation of Findings: Immersion Phase

In Chapter Three the interpretive research design utilised in this investigation is outlined and the method of data collection described. In Chapters Four and Five the findings of the research exploring the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff are presented. The case under investigation is the Australian *Good Samaritan Education (GSE)* Staff Immersion Program and the findings are derived from participant interviews.

In presenting the findings, participants' voices are heard as the most direct way to connect with the unique personal experience of each individual (see Appendix G). The data was collected through 53 semi-structured interviews with participants being representative of 10 *GSE* short-term cross-cultural staff immersion trips between 2004 and 2014. In Chapter Four the reader is invited to journey with participants as they bring to light their reactions and responses to the rawness and complexity of an immersion experience. Correspondingly, Chapter Five presents the findings relating to the post-immersion phase.

The findings presented in this chapter relate to the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes. The scaffold for the presentation of the data emanates from the three-phase coding process involving open, axial and selective coding. In exploring participant experiences of immersion, five key elements which appear to foster transformative outcomes in individuals were uncovered. These elements are:

1. an authentic encounter with the host community;
2. situating the immersion within a meaningful context;
3. experiencing the immersion with a supportive like-minded group;

4. provision of opportunities for reflection and debriefing; and
5. safety and well-being.

The process of data coding for the immersion phase is summarised in Figure 4.1.

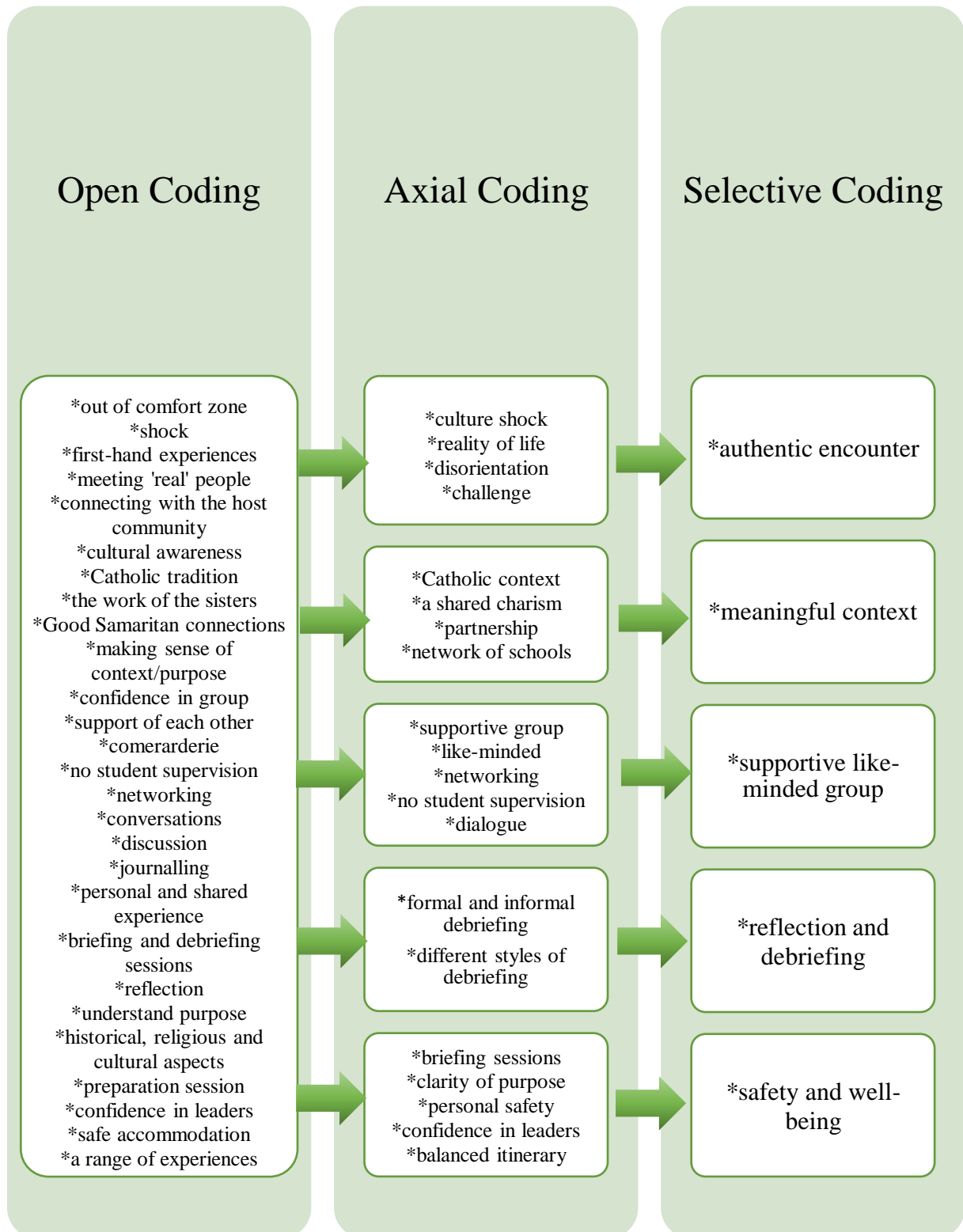


Figure 4.1. Data coding process for the immersion phase

In the first stage of data analysis (open coding) words and phrases relating to participant experiences were labelled and coded, and categories determined (Column One). The number of codes were reduced in the second stage (axial coding) and relationships between and across the data became apparent (Column Two). In the third stage (selective coding), core categories were selected and related to other categories, resulting in the five emergent themes (Column Three). In presenting the findings against the coding structure that emerged, the links to the various stages of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) become apparent.

An authentic encounter with the host community for example, is the trigger point for a disorienting dilemma for many participants in this investigation. Similarly, the presence of a meaningful context for the experience, feeling safe in a supportive group of like-minded colleagues, and being provided with regular and varied opportunities for reflection and debriefing, appear to be enabling factors in the TLT stages of critical reflection and rational discourse. The findings relating to ‘action’ (the fourth key stage of TLT) are presented in Chapter Five.

An example of the three-tiered coding process is provided in Chris’s and Imogen’s reflections on their experiences of immersion.

*Nothing can replace **first-hand experiences**. You can watch all the documentaries and videos and read all the letters you like. But, until you see it... until you see that den where the sisters sleep, with the rats and the mosquitoes and the ants, and the classroom without windows, and the kids who walk three hours to get to school, and the village that gives you every bit of food they have after Mass; until you see **the reality**, you just do not know. (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011)*

*On an immersion you get to know **the nitty-gritty, the people**. There is **no façade**. We saw **real, everyday life**. We got to know the local people. We got to know the mums outside the school. You do not often go to a country and get to meet school mums. We were talking to the canteen ladies, and got the jeepney to the market.*
(Imogen, Philippines 2010)

Open coding in this investigation involved identifying and labelling concepts, and defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions, revealing similarities and relationships. Chris and Imogen commented on the importance of seeing the reality of life for people in the host community whilst on their immersion trip (“**first-hand experiences**”, “**see the reality**”, “**the nitty-gritty, the people**”, “**no façade**” and “**real, everyday life**”).

In the second stage of the process (axial coding), the number of codes were reduced and relationships emerged between and across the data, resulting in sorting the initial codes into the categories of ‘first-hand experiences’ and ‘meeting real people’ (see Figure 4.1). Selective coding was then applied by the researcher, resulting in the core category of ‘authentic encounter’, and relationships with other emergent categories such as ‘a meaningful context’ and ‘reflection and debriefing’, became apparent.

The findings relating to each of the five key elements of immersion fostering transformative outcomes in individuals are presented in turn.

4.1 Authentic encounter with the host community.

In reflecting on their immersion trip, participants in this study indicated very clearly the importance of an authentic encounter with the host community. Significant aspects of the experience were revealed to be:

1. exposure to ‘otherness’;
2. encountering the realities of life in the host community;
3. experiencing disorientation; and
4. engaging with challenge.

The findings relating to each of these dimensions are presented in the following sections.

4.1.1 Exposure to ‘otherness’.

For many participants, the jolt of the reality of life in a Majority World context is often as unexpected as it is unsettling. Expectations of the immersion experience prior to the trip, even if barely formed, often clash with the veracity of the actual experience. Aspects such as population density, poverty and lack of sanitation had an immediate and disturbing impact on participants.

We arrived at night with all the lights and noise and traffic and everything, and it was just such a shock, it was just so ‘in your face’. From the moment we got on the ground, it just got to a point where nothing would surprise you. There is nothing like it - you just cannot prepare for it. (Deb, Philippines 2014)

The lack of order and infrastructure to cope with disaster relief was very disturbing for Trish.

I think it was just the shock of it. I remember there was a typhoon when we arrived, and the shock of physically what we were seeing, just the shock of it all was so different to what I expected. I had never been to a developing nation. So, I had never seen that first-hand. It was the sheer shock of all that, and I think a bit of fear, that, "Gosh, what if we have to live like this?" (Trish, Philippines 2006)

The initial experience of ‘otherness’ upon entering a different culture can be disconcerting for many participants. An encounter with the realities of life in the host community may also be quite a disturbing experience. For many participants this encounter with ‘otherness’ is the trigger for a ‘disorienting dilemma’ – the first phase of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b).

4.1.2 Encountering the realities of life in the host community.

A visit to an area housing the urban poor provided an opportunity for participants to witness the rawness of daily life in the slums of the Philippines. Jess, Leah and Sam described the profound and unsettling impact the experience had on them.

We went down to help with the feeding program, and most of the children lined up with only a Styrofoam cup that was falling apart. They could only get a small amount of food because that is all their broken Styrofoam cup could hold. It was heartbreaking. But you need to see it. It is those harsh realities. That is what always stands out in my mind. It was not the lack of shoes, or the lack of clothes. For me, it was the fact of not even having something to put your food in, not even having a bowl to take your bread roll home in. I just think, "Oh." (Jess, Philippines 2014)

We walked in through these tiny little alleyways to get to someone's house. I remember it was so stinking hot, it was dripping. When we were coming back out again, we heard a baby crying and some girls said to us, "Come in, come in, here is a new-born baby." There, on the dirt floor of this tiny little hot, hot, sauna like hot shanty, was a lady who had just given birth. She was just lying there exhausted, with all these other women around her. So that was just, "Wow!!" Again, it was another one of those moments. It was just like, "I cannot believe this!" (Leah, Philippines 2007)

Sam was part of the same immersion group as Leah and remembered the stark and jarring contrast of going to an air-conditioned shopping mall just after seeing the new-born baby in the heat of the tiny shanty.

We then left the shanty area, and they took us to what I can only explain to be the equivalent of a Westfield, which was a grand building, air conditioned, luxurious shops, cafés, fast food and so on. I think that had an impact on everyone in the group to the point of tears; to the point where everyone was quite emotional. From the mall, you can still see out of the window to where the shanties are. So just the contrast from where one group of people lives to where the other group lives was probably one of the biggest impacts of that trip; to see the contrasts in how the people live, the experiences they have. (Sam, Philippines 2007)

Despite the confronting scenes, participants valued these authentic encounters and reported appreciating being provided with an honest view of the circumstances affecting the lives of the local people. Participants believed there was no 'glossing over' of situations or attempts to sanitise the daily realities for people in the communities they visited.

Not being sheltered from the nasty details and being actually told the truth about the really difficult scenarios that these people are facing, that had a big impact.

(Molly, Western Australia 2009)

The significance of first-hand experiences on immersion was also noted by participants, and expressed in the reflections of Chris and Imogen:

Nothing can replace first hand experiences. You can watch all the documentaries and videos and read all the letters you like. But, until you see it... until you see that den where the sisters sleep, with the rats and the mosquitoes and the ants, and the classroom without windows, and the kids who walk three hours to get to school, and the village that gives you every bit of food they have after Mass; until you see that, you just do not know. (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011)

On an immersion you get to know the nitty-gritty, the people. There is no façade. We saw real, everyday life. We got to know the local people. We got to know the mums outside the school. You do not often go to a country and get to meet school mums. We were talking to the canteen ladies, and got the jeepney to the market. (Imogen, Philippines 2010)

While appreciating the authentic encounters and the first-hand experiences, initial experiences of the extreme ‘otherness’ in the lives of the people in host communities often results in an emotional response, distress and disorientation for many participants.

4.1.3 Experiencing disorientation.

Feelings of disorientation were clearly described by Rosanna when reflecting on her time in the shanty area.

Well, honestly, I felt like I was a spirit walking through this whole thing. I could not feel anything. I could not feel me. But it was like this person that was just travelling through this place. People were saying, "The ground is hot" and I am thinking, "Oh, is the ground hot?" It felt like a total disconnect in a way. I was trying to take it all in, but I just felt at that point... I do not remember the heat, I do not remember the flies, I do not remember the smell. I just remember this kind of feeling, like watching it and seeing these people... and the images are with me all the time. (Rosanna, Philippines 2014)

Despite feeling unsettled and sometimes disoriented by the deeply disturbing scenes, participant responses indicated a level of preparedness for engaging with the challenge of an immersion experience. Rosanna's reaction also demonstrates that if a participant is too overwhelmed (*It felt like a total disconnect in a way*), then they may withdraw from the experience completely, thereby compromising the possibility of transformation.

4.1.4 Engaging with challenge.

Experiencing some level of discomfort and having preconceived notions challenged are also seen by participants to be necessary components of an authentic encounter. Michelle typified participants' comments.

An immersion does take you out of your comfort zone and it is good to be shaken up. It is good to be awoken and reminded of your place in the universe and this world of privilege. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

Geraldine echoed Michelle's view and raised the notion of authentic immersion trips having the potential to open up a transformative space.

I think immersions actually look for those places and people that will challenge us a bit to shift how we see things, to change those attitudes. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

The places visited by participants in this research are not tourist destinations, and as such, enable authentic access to aspects of life which are unique to the particular location and host community. In spite of experiencing personal confrontation, and challenges to preconceived concepts and worldviews, participants nonetheless consider an authentic encounter to be pivotal to the immersion experience.

A second area revealed to be of importance is that the immersion is situated in a meaningful context, which provides some sense of familiarity, and offers points of connection for participants.

4.2 Situating the immersion in a meaningful context.

While some participants had travelled previously to different parts of the world and had experienced other cultures, there was a perceptible awareness of the different focus of an immersion trip. Many compared their experiences of tourism with immersion and commented that while travelling as a tourist, they had never encountered the reality of daily life in the culture they were visiting. Alex made this distinction in comments about the difference between the two experiences, and recognised that participants look for something more in an immersion trip.

An immersion is very much about always linking back to the 'why', or the aim of the trip, to give it some foundation, to give it some context. Otherwise, it becomes a touristy 'Contiki' sort of thing. It is being exposed to the mission, the work, and

the community that gives it the context, otherwise, it becomes just a holiday. (Alex, Philippines 2007)

In the intensity and disorientation of entering a foreign medium, providing clarity of purpose and context for participants offers familiar anchor points which allow them to make meaning of their individual and shared experiences. The data revealed participants highly valued the unifying features of their immersion that enabled them to readily connect with each other and to the people in the host community. These meaningful features were revealed to be that their immersion trips were contextualised within:

1. an understanding of the host community;
2. the Catholic tradition;
3. a shared charism;
4. a spirit of partnership; and
5. an educational context.

Each of these aspects is addressed in turn.

4.2.1 The host community.

The interviews revealed that information provided to participants at the preparation session provided a context for the lives of the people in the host community. Coming to an understanding of the historical, geographical, political, cultural and religious aspects of the lives of the local people provided some sense of order and understanding, particularly in the initial stages of disequilibrium and disorientation.

I think the preparation and finding out a little bit about the people and a little bit about the historical context and those sorts of things is really important. (Sally, Japan, 2013)

I think the most important thing is preparedness for the trip, so actually talking through what is going to be there and what you are going to be exposed to – knowing what you are up for, and knowing what is expected of you. (Nikki, Philippines 2006)

When you prepare for an immersion in my opinion you need to prepare on different levels. So, you need the preparation of the briefing around the culture differences and all the rest of it. But I think it calls for a preparation where you are at a point where you can be open to what is about to happen. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

As well as important contextual information provided to participants at the preparation sessions regarding the host community (Johnson, 2014), Nina's reflection indicates an understanding of the need for preparedness to being open to being changed by the experience of immersion – that is, to being open to the possibility of personal transformation.

4.2.2 *The Catholic tradition.*

The Catholic tradition is foundational to *GSE* immersion experiences. The rationale for the trips is contextualised from within theological and scriptural perspectives, and grounded in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Participants engage with people in Catholic host communities, participate in Catholic prayer and liturgy, and the itineraries include visits to places of religious and spiritual significance for the local people. The importance of the Catholic context is recognised by participants and clearly articulated by Olivia.

The whole invitation to immersion in my context is that it is very much a journey of faith and spirit, and it is offered because we are a Catholic school. (Olivia, Kiribati 2012)

The interviews indicated participant understanding and appreciation of the meaning and relevance of the Catholic context of their immersion experience. Areas of significance for participants were identified as:

1. experiencing the Catholic tradition in a different cultural setting;
2. participating in prayer and liturgy;
3. witnessing the faith of the host community; and
4. personal spirituality.

Each of these aspects is outlined in the following section.

4.2.2.1 Experiencing the Catholic tradition in a different cultural setting.

The findings revealed that for this group of participants, situating the immersion within the Catholic tradition, and the experience of encountering that tradition in a different cultural context, offered familiarity and points of connection.

I think our immersions are an encounter with a very Catholic culture. I work in a Catholic community, with a particular charism at its core, and I think immersions do open that to you. It is an encounter with God in a different way, in a different language, in a different cultural expression. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

This Catholic faith that can be pretty rocky, it has got some beauty, absolute beauty to it. I thought how liturgy can be so rich in such a different way, thousands of miles away. (Bernadette, Philippines 2006)

Despite differences in language and culture, the Catholic tradition provided a sense of familiarity for participants.

4.2.2.2 *Participating in prayer and liturgy.*

Many participants describe the experience of sharing in prayer and liturgy in another cultural setting as having a significant impact.

The Mass at the beginning in Manila, I felt... I mean, I have gone to church my whole life, but I do not go anywhere near Mass on a Sunday now, but that was beautiful. (Imogen, Philippines, 2010)

Michaela's reflection indicates joining the host community for Mass provided a point of connection for her.

Going to Mass was a very good idea because you have that sense of, "Well, we are all in it together actually". (Michaela, Philippines 2014)

Participating in the prayer life of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan during an immersion trip was also important for participants as expressed by Karina and Nina.

Having that deep opportunity for that kind of spiritual experience was a great benefit for me. I guess I struggle with more traditional forms of prayer and spiritual expressions. So, for me, that is something that was a really powerful experience to live and observe. It was built into the program in things like our welcoming prayer, for example, and going to Mass; just the seamless way that prayer was involved with the sisters before meals and things like that. (Karina, Kiribati 2008)

The Japanese sister was walking us through the shanty area and introducing us to the various families. We went into one room, which was their home, and there we sat with these people and just shared laughs, and laughed with the children and all the rest of it, but at one point, she then led the Rosary. It was one of the probably top three moments of my spiritual life, I would have to say. It was one of the most moving things I have ever experienced. And it just took me to another level... I do not know, to something else. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

Opportunities to join the local people in prayer and liturgy and to come to a deeper understanding of the charism of their schools through prayer with the sisters appears to have been significant for many participants.

4.2.2.3 Witnessing the faith of the host community.

In a similar way, the interviews revealed that witnessing the faith of the people in the host communities was also a very meaningful experience for many participants.

The Mass we went to, the open-air church. That was all just fantastic. I did not feel confronted there by the church. I just felt that was a really meaningful experience for those people and, therefore, observing that was meaningful for me too. (Helen, Philippines 2010)

There was that real sense of specialness, and of privilege, and of sacredness, and it is something that I think I definitely take for granted here in my own life. For these people, who had suffered such horrendous things, or had lost family just to senseless brutal violence, and yet they still had such a strong faith in their God. (Ella, Timor-Leste 2011)

There was, for me, a real movement of the Spirit in that time. One morning we woke up and could hear bells. It must have been the first morning in Bacolod, so down we went and it was Mass. The place was packed. It was a weekday. It was early, early dawn. We did not know what was going on, because it was all in Ilonggo, but I think the thing that hit then was the universality of church. There were moments of grace, of meeting people, and what stood out was that contrast of the haves and the have-nots, and yet there was this beacon of faith, that the people had. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

Displays of religious fervour are not within the experience of most participants. Observing and participating in the religious practice of people in the host communities, whose lives are often defined by violence and poverty, had a profound impact on a great many participants, and provided a point of connection through a shared understanding of the Catholic tradition.

4.2.2.4 Personal spirituality.

The Catholic context of GSE immersions invites participants on a spiritual journey as well as the physical one. Immersions appear to be a powerful spiritual experience for some, and this aspect expressed in the identification of different facets of their encounter.

Hugely spiritual! I felt, probably, never before and never since, as heightened as I did at that point in terms of a spiritual connection to why we are here, what is this all about, big picture stuff. (Gina, Philippines 2006)

Certainly, very spiritual. I think for a lot of us, the opportunity to go to Mass every morning was wonderful. Now, I would not do that here, but over there, because of the beauty and the church, that beautiful hexagon shape looking out over the

ocean, it was just such a time for calm, meditation, reflection, quiet reflection. It was just fantastic. (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

Participants who were not Catholic, also reported the spiritual dimension to be an important aspect their immersion experience.

Oh, gosh yes! Well, yes, certainly for me. I do not know if it was for everybody, but certainly for me. You know, I am not the sort of person who is going say "I saw God" or "I saw Jesus" in that trip, that is not me. However, I saw spirituality, and I believe I am a spiritual person. I saw love, I saw human sacrifices to better people. There were so many spiritual levels that I could have accessed. I felt moved by that ox journey to the church and then by the food the people prepared for us after Mass. I think that is the closest I have gotten to understanding worshipping something else, and thanking somebody for something else, so yes, totally spiritual. (Nikki, Philippines, 2006)

When we went to the Mass up in the mountains... I do not know why, but that just totally... I was in tears. Just the whole thing, that moved me more than anything and I cannot really pin-point why, but I know that I was in tears for most of that. But it was just incredibly moving and there was some sort of realisation of the reason I was supposed to have been there... that is what it did. It has broadened my overall views, perhaps on religion and... we will call it spirituality. (Heather, Philippines 2014)

Conversely, the findings also revealed that other participants did not consider the immersion trip to be a personal spiritual experience for them:

Even though there were religious elements and going to different churches and everything... like, fantastic. But not really, for me, no. (Cheryl, Philippines 2007)

Not that spiritual so much, for me, just... I suppose more an inspiration or an example of, this is what people put their adult life to. The nuns do not have to really be there, that is how they are. So, maybe to just understand something about calling, whatever that is, and maybe to reflect on, "Okay so in my life what am I going to respond to? What am I going to do?" But in terms of something more spiritual, not really. More that it was a practical expression of what these people are doing with their lives, and that is wonderful. (Nerida, Philippines 2010)

Spiritual in the sense that there is a lot of hope in those places, but I would not say I am spiritually transformed. I am Catholic. The culture is Catholic. There is obviously spirituality, and religion plays a big part in their lives and in many ways, they are happier than us. I do not think it has changed my spirituality so much, other than just knowing that there is hope out there. (Jess, Philippines 2014)

Being immersed in the Catholic tradition in a different cultural setting provided opportunities for participants to reconnect to their own faith and spirituality. It was familiar enough to be an anchor point for them in periods of uncertainty, yet different enough to be enriching. As individuals are always at different stages in their own personal and spiritual journeys, the Catholic context also provided various access points as at different times during the immersion experience.

There are many different expressions of the Catholic tradition. The charism of the Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition is foundational to *Good Samaritan Education*, and

is a unifying feature for participants as they all come from GSE schools. Involvement in an immersion trip underpinned by a shared charism was also identified by participants as being a significant part of the experience.

4.2.3 A shared charism.

The interviews revealed that the opportunity to connect to the Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition through engaging with the contemporary mission and ministry of the sisters in another cultural setting was another point of connection, which had a profound impact for many.

The sisters are just amazing. I think walking into the Community Centre, walking into the Kinder school and seeing how they live out that parable, in really, really practical ways, it just makes the story come alive. They are the Good Samaritan and Jesus in those places. The way that they give such dignity to these people and they do not discriminate. They give dignity and hope to anyone who is in need. I just saw Jesus in these people. (Angie, Philippines 2014)

“Go and do likewise”. They just do it. They see a need, they have gone and done it. And they are continually doing it. It is not static. It is such a dynamic process that they have got. Even the acquisition of the Community Centre. There is always something new starting, whether it be visiting prisons or the shanties or things within the Kinder School. They are living out that Gospel through and through, 100%!! (Jess, Philippines, 2014)

Going on a trip like this, you see what is going on in the greater scheme of things with the sisters and the school, and you feel more a part of a big community with the sisters. It is knowing what the work of the sisters is, that it is much wider than

just schools. It is wider than just being a sister, but actually out there in communities serving. And so, trying to share that with the rest of the school when you come back, that connectedness between the schools and with the sisters, what the whole mission is about. (Ariane, Kiribati 2012)

As the work of religious orders is no longer primarily in education, most participants would not have been taught by a religious, nor worked with a religious in their school setting. An opportunity to connect with the contemporary mission and ministry of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan was an important element of the immersion experience for many participants.

4.2.4 A spirit of partnership.

Good Samaritan Education immersion trips are also situated within the context of partnership with the host community. The trips are arranged in consultation with the Sisters of the Good Samaritan who work in ministry with the communities, and the people of the host community themselves.

I think the unifying thing for us is beautiful. We only go to this country to visit these people in this place because they share that same spirit that we do. And I think that is a wonderful and really quite a lovely connection to have. That they welcome us into their community because we have the same foundation story that they do. I think it is a lovely thing. We would not do that if that connection was not there. So, I think that is a great thing. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

In the immersion itself, the partnerships are so important. That it is not just the little tourist bus coming through. And in fact, in the diversity there was so much beauty and learning. I think the partnerships with the people who live that life,

whether it is those working in ministry with the people, and as well as the local people themselves. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

The findings revealed that participants perceived the development of a strong partnership between their school and the host community to be an important contextual feature and a further point of connection whilst on their immersion trips.

4.2.5 An educational context.

Along with an awareness of the work of the sisters, the Good Samaritan Benedictine context of the immersion experience provides participants with a sense of belonging to the wider educational endeavour of *Good Samaritan Education*.

Meeting up with people from other Good Sam schools and having community in that – that was so amazing. (Angie, Philippines 2014)

It was also nice meeting other people from Good Sam schools, and to know that we are the same and have the same ideals in the goals that we are hoping to achieve. (Cheryl, Philippines 2007)

For school staff members, the opportunities to visit schools and educational facilities whilst on immersion also provided a familiar context for the experience.

I think visiting the school was really important, because obviously, we work in schools and I think everyone can get a real benefit out of seeing schools in other communities. (Ariane, Kiribati, 2012)

I really felt the education part was very worthwhile. (Caz, Timor-Leste 2011)

Chris also believed the educational context was an important dimension of the immersion trip.

Getting us into the classroom, is definitely one of the important elements of the immersion, because we are teachers and I think seeing students was where we connected. Whilst it was very difficult environment, we had empathy for those teachers as well when I saw the facilities that Science was being taught in. And to be honest, the poor quality of the teaching and the resources. And I can hear [sister] complaining about that particular teacher, and how he does not always show up. That definitely brought things home for me. I think that was a very important part of it. (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011)

As reported by Chris, the connection with students was an important aspect for participants and provided a link, or an anchor point to something well-known.

As well as situating the immersion trips within a meaningful context which offered familiarity and points of connection, participants appreciated the opportunity to engage with colleagues from other *GSE* schools, providing a wider context for their professional life. Travelling with a supportive group of like-minded colleagues who have a shared understanding of the experience, provided both a unifying feature which contributed to the engagement of participants in the immersion experience, and an enabling factor in the Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) stages of critical reflection and rational discourse.

4.3 A supportive group of like-minded colleagues.

Aspects of travelling with a supportive group of like-minded colleagues appreciated by participants were revealed to be:

1. being part of a supportive group;
2. freedom from student supervision; and
3. opportunities for networking and dialogue.

These aspects are addressed in turn in the following section.

4.3.1 *Being part of a supportive group.*

Being part of a supportive group and feeling comfortable and emotionally ‘safe’ within the group was reported as being highly important to participants. The comments made by Ella, Nerida and Sally typify the responses.

It was important that we went as a group, and for the group to have some sort of relationship. I think having a strong group made it a more meaningful experience rather than just fractured individuals going somewhere. (Ella, Timor-Leste 2011)

One thing that was very important in our group was that people felt that they could be emotional in front of each other. It would be terrible to have a group of colleagues you did not feel comfortable with, and at the same time confront these feelings that you have, and have nothing that you can do with them. So, it is pretty important that the groups ‘gets’ you. (Nerida, Philippines 2010)

The dynamics of the group are really important, and I think the way [the group leaders] set that up as a learning experience where we are sort of out of our comfort zone, but we are all in it together type of thing, creates an atmosphere where people feel safe enough to kind of let down their guard a bit and be changed by the experience. (Sally, Japan 2013)

While immersion is an individual experience and different for each participant, the importance sharing that experience is recognised by participants. In line with a constructionist approach, having a common purpose and being able to support each other through times of disorientation and distress also appear to be important aspects in the transformative process.

4.3.2 Freedom from student supervision.

Good Samaritan Education Staff Immersion Program trips do not involve students, giving participants some measure of freedom and discretionary time to critically reflect on their experiences. Participants who have also had the opportunity of being involved in student immersion trips commented on the difference in the experience of a staff trip.

The staff trip was very different. It felt more focused on me and my development and my experience. It is very different when you are leading a trip to when you are a participant on a trip. (Sarah, Timor-Leste, 2011)

When you are on a staff trip you only have to worry about yourself, and so you can allow yourself to relax, get into it, and get the most out of it. The stress and anxiety around student trips make it a very different experience. (Jess, Philippines 2014)

Being able to experience an immersion without the work involved in oversight of the trip, daily planning and organisation, and the added responsibility of student supervision, allows participants freedom to completely immerse themselves in the experience, increasing the potential for transformation.

4.3.3 *Networking and dialogue.*

Another benefit of travelling with like-minded people identified by participants was in terms of connecting with other professionals working in *GSE* schools, and an awareness of the wider network of schools.

Networking, and feeling that you are part of something bigger is really important.

That we are not the only Good Sam college, but there are a whole lot of us. (Molly, Western Australia 2009)

Dialogue with people who share the experience (an element of constructionism), was also articulated as being a significant component of a staff immersion trip.

Going with a group of other teachers who you have never met before, you are thrown into a situation. Obviously, you have chosen to be there, but those interpersonal skills are really important. Being able to communicate with people, being able to sit down have a discussion with them, because the things that you are experiencing there, they are experiencing for the first time as well. (Sam, Philippines 2007)

The opportunity of travelling with a supportive group of like-minded colleagues who have a shared understanding of the experience also invites participants to engage in personal and communal reflection and debriefing sessions throughout the immersion.

4.4 Reflection and debriefing.

In order to make meaning of their experiences, the interviews revealed participants highly valued the process of critical reflection, through regular opportunities for reflection and debriefing. Significant aspects of the debriefing process for participants were revealed to be:

1. formal debriefing;
2. informal debriefing;
3. personal time;
4. journaling; and
5. provision of regular opportunities involving a range of different styles.

The findings relating to each of these aspects are presented in turn.

4.4.1 Formal debriefing.

On *GSE* immersions, formal group debriefing sessions occur on a daily basis. These are facilitated by the group leaders and participants are led through guided questions for reflection and discussion.

You are grounded consistently with that daily reflection and debrief, absolutely wonderful and a necessity. (Kylie, Philippines 2004)

I think the debriefing at the end of the day was worthwhile, because everyone was at a different stage. It gave people the opportunity to say what they thought and you find different perspectives based on the experience. (Caz, Timor-Leste 2011)

I think the journaling and reflection times that we had each night were really good because along the way, people's 'crisis-point', if I can put it that way, is all at different points. I do remember those little reflection times each night, that it was very important. (Bernadette, Philippines 2006)

Nerida also believes formal debriefing sessions assisted quieter members of the group to reflect without feeling pressured to contribute to the discussion.

For me, I think it needs to be a bit formal and it needs to be in a group. Also, in the group, some people might not want to share, but you could listen to enough that made you think, "That is exactly what I thought", so that I can debrief by not even having to say it. (Nerida, Philippines 2010)

It would seem the inclusion of formal debriefing sessions in the daily program is of benefit to participants. At various times participants may need support from the group, and at other times, they may be able to lend support to others.

4.4.2 Informal debriefing.

As well as the formal sessions, debriefing also occurs between participants throughout the day through casual conversations and small group discussions. Imogen reported preferring casual conversations to the more structured sessions.

I would not like to have it structured like, "Let's go and sit in a room in a circle and debrief", but over a meal, yes, definitely, really nice. I would also like to hear if someone else did something I did not do. I do not need to go and do what they did, but just to learn what they learnt, to share that experience. It is just nice to know that other people think the same way about the experience. (Imogen, Philippines 2010)

The importance of debriefing, both formal and informal is recognised by the participants in this research and provides further support for the significance of critical reflection and rational discourse in the process of transformation.

4.4.3 Personal time.

Also evident in the data, and aligned with the epistemology of constructivism, is the need expressed by some participants for quiet, personal space in order to reflect on their experiences.

I think we have got to allow for the time for reflection to happen. You just do not know when this is going to catch up with people. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

I wanted more quiet time after some of those experiences. I was not always down there at dinner. I just needed that space; some people need that. (Rosanna, Philippines 2010).

Well, even on the bus, like when you are sitting by the window, I like to be quiet and look out the window and think about things. (Connie, Timor-Leste 2011)

Michaela's comment also points to the importance of quieter moments for group members.

We were walking very quietly in a group. And I just sort of thought, people were thinking about their experience and probably trying to make sense of it, all of us in our own way, whatever that took. (Michaela, Philippines 2014)

The need for personal space and quiet time whilst on immersion is apparent in the comments above. In designing a program which recognises the needs of different participants, it would appear the inclusion of quiet personal time for reflection is an important consideration for organising entities.

4.4.4 Journaling.

Participants on GSE immersions are provided with journals for personal reflection, and the practice is encouraged by setting aside times throughout the day for journaling. The opportunity was valued by many participants, and encapsulated in Deb's response.

Just journaling every night, just sort of writing down all those ideas and experiences that you had that day. Just putting it all down was just such a relief.

(Deb, Philippines 2014)

Chris had not journaled previously, and clearly articulated the personal benefits.

One skill I developed, is probably the ability to reflect. Because that trip was the first time I kept a journal in 20 years of travel. And I have re-read that journal every year since we have been back. And I re-read it again probably a week before I had to do a presentation for Year Eight this year. And it is detailed. Every thought I had, everything that happened is in that journal. It talks a lot about my emotions and what I was feeling at the time, and I know I have never done that before. I also went to Europe last year. I took a blank book and did not write a single thing. It was very exciting to write things down [in Timor-Leste]. So, the things that are on that page were me actually truly reflecting. So, it is my little secret. It is sitting in my book case, and no one else has ever read it, except for me, probably a half a dozen times, and that shocked me. (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011)

The significance of debriefing through journaling is revealed in the level of critical self-reflection evident in Chris's comment on a journal entry whilst in Timor-Leste. Chris had experienced an epochal disorienting dilemma, leading to a disconnect between

internalised meaning structures and the new environment. Critical reflection through journaling enabled Chris to review the validity of previous assumptions in the light of new experiences.

I wrote in my journal how petty I was for complaining about the mould in the toilets, and I felt weaker as a person for that. Even at the time, even in that environment, I felt weaker for complaining about that. But it was just so foreign to me, and, in hindsight, I regret that a lot. So that was a turning point for me. I reflected on that, and it is in my journal. The next day, I wrote about it. I actually think what I wrote there was 'pathetic', because it should not have been like that. There were people in Timor in a lot of worse situations. (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011)

Chris's reflection is an example of Phase Two in the Transformative Learning Theory (1978a, 1978b) stage of critical reflection, 'self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame' (see Figure 2.3). Chris may not have shared this reflection whilst debriefing in a group setting, yet journaling afforded the opportunity for personal candour in a 'safe space' without risking the judgement of others in the group.

Participants in this research appear to have appreciated the opportunity for journaling as a way of reflecting and debriefing. Journaling provides an outlet for participants that is both unbounded and private. The process allows complete honesty without the need to filter thoughts or explain feelings and reactions to others. Journaling also provides a personal record of movement through the stages of the transformative process.

4.4.5 Provision of regular opportunities involving a range of styles.

While some participants expressed a preference for one form of debriefing over another, Nina, Olivia and Leah appreciated the opportunity for a range of different forms of reflection and debriefing.

Whether it is journaling or whether it is conversation, or whether it is whatever type of prayer or reflection, that is where you go deeper. So, processes for that, I think, are very important. (Nina, Philippines. 2004)

Olivia's comment reflected an awareness of the value of hearing the experiences of other participants.

I liked that over the course of the time, that you would be exposed to a range of ways of debriefing. I like journaling, I do a lot of that anyway, but when you are with a community, I think it is important to have opportunities to hear from the other people that you are going with. Part of the revelation of that experience, is that you can go through exactly the same day with someone and then at the end of the day when you are asked to reflect on it, they come up with a completely different response, they have had a completely different experience of that day than you have, even though you sat on the same seat on the boat going over to the island or whatever. (Olivia, Kiribati 2012)

Leah also articulated the value of critical reflection, and related it to the aspect of meaning making.

Really focusing on the impact, or reflection is another big thing as well. I think that is really important for the participants, to able to engage and take meaning from the experiences that they have, and to really think about it. So, whether it be

journal writing, or being able to sit down as a group and reflect on the things that have happened; to process things is very important. (Leah, Philippines 2007)

Participants in this research identified the need for structured daily debriefing time to be built in to the immersion schedule, and to avail themselves of opportunities for more informal conversations. It would appear to be important that a range of different styles and opportunities is offered and that individual needs and preferences are accommodated. The different forms of reflection and debriefing described all serve the purpose of enabling the crucial process of the critical reflection stage of TLT. The final element revealed in the data as being of importance to participants is that of safety and well-being.

4.5 Safety and well-being.

The interviews revealed that for participants to be able to fully engage in the immersion experience, organisational factors relating to safety and well-being are of high importance. For some participants, the immersion trip is a first encounter with another culture, and feeling secure and confident in an unfamiliar setting appears to alleviate anxiety and allow individuals to freely involve themselves in the experience. Organisational aspects shown to be of importance in relation to safety and well-being are:

1. preparation sessions;
2. clarity of purpose;
3. personal safety;
4. confidence in group leaders; and
5. a balanced itinerary.

Each of these aspects is addressed in turn.

4.5.1 Preparation sessions.

Preparation sessions involve gathering the group together before the trip and engaging participants in preparation and briefing relating to the rationale, context and underlying philosophy of the immersion experience, cultural sensitivities, getting to know each other, the practicalities of travel, and personal health and safety.

The pre-meeting was absolutely crucial, because there were cultural awareness issues. [The group leader] went through so many things and that was absolutely great, because even if people have travelled a lot, maybe they have travelled and only been to Europe. Also, having met people, at least when you got on the plane, you knew something about them, because you are thrown in to a group of people for a hugely emotionally challenging time. (Bernadette, Philippines 2006)

When you prepare for an immersion, in my opinion you need to prepare on different levels. So, you need the preparation of the briefing around the cultural differences and all the rest of it. But I think it calls for a preparation where you are at a point where you can be open to what is about to happen. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

Michelle has been involved in organising student immersion trips since her own experience, and emphasised the three-phase process of immersion:

An immersion, I believe, has three phases. The preparation, the immersion and re-entry. I have come to understand that through my personal experiences. If I had not been a participant, I do not know if I would be able to articulate that as well. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

Preparation sessions before an immersion would seem to be an important element of the experience for participants. Preparation involves providing ‘information’ relating to ‘the who’, ‘the what’, ‘the when’, ‘the where’ and ‘the how’ of the immersion, and ‘formation’ opportunities relating to ‘the why’. Preparation sessions also allow organisers to establish points of connection for participants by situating the immersion within a meaningful context (see Section 4.2), and clearly outlining its purpose.

4.5.2 Clarity of purpose.

A common understanding around clarity of purpose within the group is identified as being an important element of an immersion trip. Comprehensive preparation sessions before the immersion and the briefings and debriefings throughout the trip, contribute to this understanding and provide a unified purpose for the individual and shared experience.

It is important that there is great clarity, that real sense of purpose, and being very transparent about that from the beginning. (Kylie, Philippines 2004)

The specific purpose was always to raise awareness and to have an experience and be able to come back and be that witness to others. The fact that we all came from the same perspective was really helpful. I think it would have been difficult if you had people in the group with different ideas about what our role and what our purpose was there. (Ella, Timor-Leste 2011)

Conversely, disparate understandings or misinterpretation of the purpose of the immersion may lead to divisiveness and tensions within the group. Ella’s awareness of this aspect is reflected in Nina’s experience.

I do recall being in some moments where I felt very uncomfortable. Some of the others I was with would impulsively pull out cameras, and I just felt

uncomfortable. Because for me, that is a key difference; the voyeurism, the stepping outside and looking in, and I just cannot bear it. As opposed to an immersion, which for me, in my mind, is the walking with. It is the walking along. It is the listening to the stories. In some ways, you become part of somebody's story. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

A common understanding of context and purpose would appear to be an important element of immersion for participants. As well as providing points of connection, a common understanding assists in alleviating situations as described by Nina. A common purpose also promotes group cohesion and the feeling that 'we are all in this together', which assists participants in engaging more freely in the TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) stages of critical reflection and rational discourse.

4.5.3 Personal safety.

An important dimension of immersion articulated by participants is feeling personally safe throughout the trip.

We stayed in a place where we felt safe and comfortable, so that we actually had energy to be able to pour into absorbing this experience. I think that was really important, even though some people may argue that you should rough it with the local people, I thought that made it possible to actually process things a bit better. (Angie, Philippines 2014)

On her immersion to the Philippines in 2006, Gina had expressed reservations and feelings of guilt to her group leader about staying in moderately comfortable accommodation while the local people lived in poverty. She clearly recalled the explanation she received:

"In order for you collectively to take in what we need you to take in, you have to be sure about your personal safety and your personal comfort. That needs to be out of the equation, because if you are feeling unsafe that will be the overriding emotion and you cannot be open to what we want you to experience and be immersed in". Those words really stayed with me. So, I do think there needs to be an element of feeling personally safe, so that you can be open to what is going on.

(Gina, Philippines 2006)

Adequate accommodation also allows staff members to attend to matters of personal hygiene so as to remain healthy for the duration of the trip and to resume work at their schools after the term-break without suffering the effects of illness or exhaustion. While being housed in local accommodation may appear to be a more authentic experience, it places a considerable burden on the host community and risks depletion of precious resources such as food and water. Local people also commonly go beyond their means in welcoming and accommodating a guest, to the detriment of themselves and their families. Margaret, an experienced group leader, explained her position on this issue.

When we are going [to the Philippines], we do not expect our teachers to go and live as the people there do. I talked to one of the missionaries there about accommodation and I remember him saying to me, "Remember you are guests in the country. You do not ask for home-stay of any kind, or presume you will go to people's homes, because the level at which they would try to provide for you is well beyond their means. So, do not even look for a home visit. If you are invited, go. If not, do not ask". When I asked about accommodation, he said, "Get good accommodation for your teachers, they need to come back well, and they need to be sure that they are safe". (Margaret, Philippines 2004)

Attending to personal safety through the purposeful planning of appropriate transport and accommodation aims to both minimise personal risk to participants, and to lessen the burden on the host community, thus enhancing the encounter for all involved.

4.5.4 Confidence in group leaders.

Experienced group leaders who have visited the host community on previous occasions, have reliable contacts in-country, and an understanding of local culture and conditions are also reported as being important to participants.

You need experienced leaders, leaders who know the place. They need to have experienced the place before they take a group there (Joan, Kiribati 2008).

We always felt like there was someone who had local knowledge who was going to keep us safe and not put us in a dangerous situation. (Gina, Philippines 2006)

The interviews also revealed that leaders who prioritise the health, safety and well-being of group members, and are skilled in managing group dynamics, increase participants' confidence in involving themselves in the planned itinerary.

I think having good leaders is really important. They need to be very organised and accommodating of everyone's needs because with some of these trips you can get some people who struggle with some of the hardships. (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

I think having leaders who are easy-going and do not pressure people into responding in a certain way, but giving people opportunities to talk was very helpful. I think it makes a huge difference who is running the immersion experience, because people need to feel comfortable, and not pressured, and that makes all the difference. (Angie, Philippines 2014)

The importance of experienced, highly skilled and knowledgeable group leaders on immersion is noted by participants. Meticulous planning, intimate knowledge of the host community through the development of partnerships, and balancing the needs of individuals and the group, are critical in maximising opportunities for participant engagement and ultimately, transformation.

4.5.5 *Balanced itinerary.*

A final aspect perceived by participants to be an important element of an immersion trip is a broad range of experiences. A balanced itinerary which includes opportunities for engagement with the host community, visits to schools and sites of historical, religious and cultural significance, and time out for personal reflection, shared dialogue and debriefing were named as elements which contribute to the experience.

It was really important to have that balance, which I think was struck really well, between having some quite dramatic and confronting experiences, mixed with quite light-hearted, everyday experiences. That is important because an immersion is really emotionally draining. (Philippa, Timor-Leste 2011)

It is good to have a fair amount of history and culture in the program. If you had spent the whole time in the slums, I would say that would have been completely overwhelming. So, a nice balance, and preparation is important. Leading in from being in a city that is a bit more familiar, doing the history stuff first, get used to the heat, and then, do the more challenging parts of the trip later because you are prepared. I think that is essential. (Angie, Philippines 2014)

Regardless of the culture of the host community, or the year of the immersion experience, the interviews revealed participants highly valued opportunities to visit educational facilities during their immersion experience.

We went into the Business Services classes and we were doing some work there, and there were three books between 30 of them. We then asked about the calculators, only to be told that there were two amongst all these kids. And they did not have a teacher, because all the teachers had been pulled out. And so, I am looking at myself going, "Where would you start trying to address this?" (Pat, Kiribati 2012)

Visits to a range of sites was also perceived by participants to provide a broader understanding of the religious, cultural and economic factors influencing the host community.

We walked to the top of Cristo Rei and that was very peaceful. We visited Santa Cruz cemetery, and to see what happened there really makes you think. We went to so many different places, stayed in different places, we visited schools and cemeteries, and museums and art galleries. It gives you a better idea of the people. (Connie, Timor-Leste 2011)

We have a greater liberal awareness of what the Kinder School supplies and provides, and the ministry of the sisters, so that is good. We have a greater awareness of what is happening in the Philippines as well. Going to the museum I think, certainly gave us a very clear understanding of why the country is where it is, and greater levels of frustration around government decisions and policies. (Evie, Philippines 2010)

Thorough and rigorous planning of organisational details so that participants have a clear and shared understanding of the purpose of the immersion, that they feel safe and have confidence in the group leaders, and that there is a balanced itinerary have been found to be important aspects of an immersion experience. When these particulars are in place, participants feel reassured, which enables them to engage fully with the process of immersion and more open to the possibility of personal, professional and spiritual transformation.

4.6 Conclusion.

In Chapter Four the findings relating to the elements of immersion fostering transformative outcomes have been presented. The participants in this research highly valued an authentic experience of immersion, situated within a meaningful context, which offered familiarity and points of connection. The participants appreciated travelling with a supportive group of like-minded colleagues and recognised the importance of regular reflection and debriefing sessions. The data also revealed that for participants to be able to completely involve themselves in the immersion process, planning and organisational details relating to safety and well-being needed to be in place.

The findings presented in this chapter provide a scaffold for the discussion relating to the immersion phase of the research in Chapter Six. In the context of the literature reviewed for this investigation, the discussion of the Chapter Four findings provides answers to Research Question One: *What elements of immersion foster transformative outcomes for individuals?*

In Chapter Five the findings relating to the experiences of participants in the post-immersion phase are presented.

Chapter Five

5 Presentation of Findings: Post-immersion Phase

This research explores the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. Chapter Four documents the findings relating to the experiences of participants whilst on immersion. Chapter Five is a complementary chapter presenting the findings concerning participant experience post-immersion.

Anecdotally, participants often describe their immersion experiences as being ‘life-changing’ or ‘transformational’. In the case of adult participants in the educational setting however, precise details of what these changes might involve, are often unclear. This research seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge by uncovering specific actions undertaken by adult participants after an immersion trip, and the timeframe in which these actions occur.

As this investigation involved 53 adult participants representative of 10 *Good Samaritan Education* staff immersion trips between 2004 and 2014, an opportunity presented itself to explore the short, medium and long-term outcomes of the experience. Data derived from the interviews revealed participants were able to identify specific outcomes of their immersion experience, and to provide concrete examples of subsequent actions over different time periods in the whole of life and the professional domain. As changes in personal spirituality were not defined by a particular timeframe, these findings are presented separately at the end of the chapter.

As in Chapter Four, the framework for the presentation of the data emerged from the three-phase coding process involving open, axial and selective coding. As the synthesis of the data progressed, trends became apparent. As this investigation is set in

an educational context, and the participants all work in Catholic schools with a shared founding charism, the study set out to explore the experiences of short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity in the personal, professional and spiritual domains. The findings clearly indicated however, that separation of the professional life, or the spiritual life from the whole of life, is a false division. As expressed by Imogen, the personal and professional dimensions of participants' lives, experiences, beliefs and practices are inextricably linked, each to the other.

My profession is teaching, and I do not see the divide between my classroom and my life, really. So, what I experience in my life, I bring into the classroom.
(Imogen, Philippines 2010)

The interviews revealed that participants reported outcomes which related to the whole life, within which approaches to their profession and personal spirituality have also benefitted. Accordingly, the findings relating to whole of life outcomes are presented first, followed by reported outcomes and actions in the professional and spiritual domains.

For the purposes of this research:

1. 'whole of life outcomes' relate to actions or changes made in the sum total or entirety of life;
2. 'professional outcomes' refer actions or changes made in an individual's work or workplace; and
3. 'personal spirituality' relates to an inner search for meaning which enlightens and enlivens an individual's way of being.

In exploring the experiences and reflections of participants, it also became apparent that reported outcomes and changes occur over different time periods, and that

they can be grouped according to short, medium and long-term. The process of data coding for the post-immersion phase is summarised in Figure 5.1.

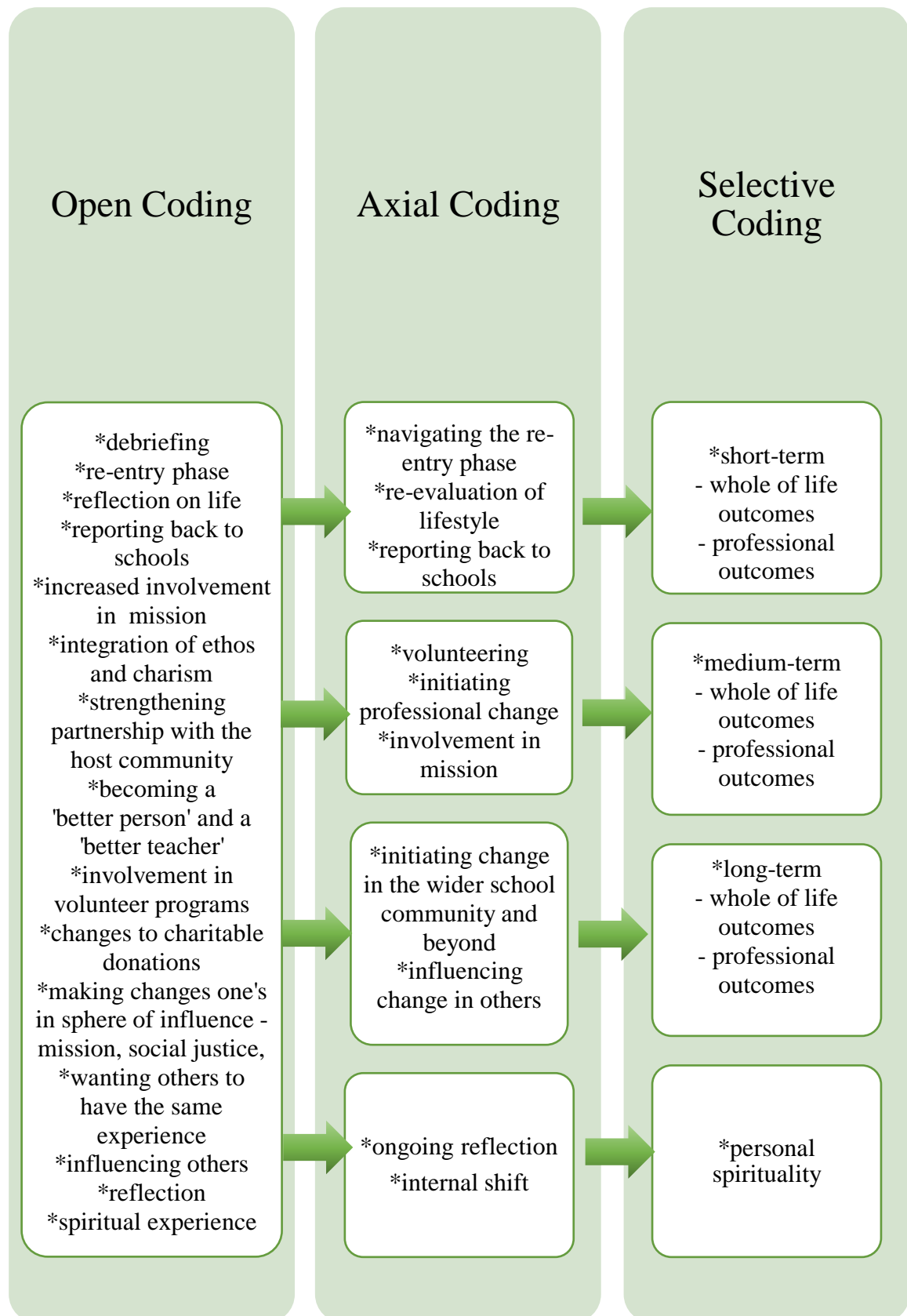


Figure 5.1. Data coding process for the post-immersion phase.

The initial open coding of the data revealed words and phrases relating to self-reported outcomes for participants in the post-immersion phase (Column One). Axial coding reduced the number of codes in the second stage (Column Two), and relationships between and across the data were brought to light. It then became apparent that the outcomes could be grouped according to short, medium and long-term timeframes (Column Three), as selective coding was applied.

An example of the three-tiered coding process is provided in Nikki's and Annabelle's reflections in the post-immersion phase.

*[The immersion] gave me the impetus to **change my life**. So, I think yes, it was life-changing in that sense. And from that **personal perspective** of just **clearing things up**, saying "You have been with people who have nothing, you are doing things that do not make you happy, go back and **clean your life up**". And that is pretty much what I did. And I think it took me out of being too self-aware, too selfish maybe. (Nikki, Philippines 2006)*

*I had this strange urge to **de-clutter my life**. I just felt like I needed to **take a step back** and work out what is really **important in life**. My attitude has definitely changed. And hopefully I am more thankful for my life. (Annabelle, Philippines 2006)*

In open coding concepts in the raw data were identified and labelled, and similarities were discovered. Both Nikki and Annabelle reflected on the impact of the immersion experience in their lives ("**take a step back**", "**important in life**" and "**personal perspective**" **clearing things up**") and decided to take action ("**change my life**", "**clean up your life**" and "**de-clutter my life**").

In the next stage of the process (axial coding), the number of codes were reduced and the emergence of relationships between and across the data resulted in grouping the initial codes into the category of 're-evaluation of lifestyle'. In the third tier of the coding process (selective coding) the researcher selected the core category, ('whole of life outcomes in the short-term'), systematically relating it to other categories, (for example, 'professional outcomes in the short-term' and 'whole of life outcomes in the medium-term'), thus integrating the emerging themes.

The delineations for the timeframes used in this investigation are explained in the following section.

5.1 Post-immersion timeframes.

While the timeframe for changes in perspectives and behaviours in the post-immersion phase are not, and cannot be, absolute, for the purposes of this research, short, medium and long-term time periods are defined as follows:

1. Short-term – within three months of returning from the immersion trip.

As the immersion trips under investigation in this study took place in the September/October term break, short-term refers to changes in perspectives and behaviours reported by participants between returning from the immersion trip, and the end of the same academic year.

2. Medium-term – between three and 18 months after returning from the immersion trip.

This period includes changes in perspectives and behaviours reported by participants during the academic year following their immersion trip.

3. Long-term – more than 18 months after participants have returned from the immersion trip.

This period includes changes in perspectives and behaviours reported by participants from 18 months after returning from their immersion trip until the time of their semi-structured interview.

The timeframe for each participant as it relates to these definitions is apparent in Table 3.2. As previously mentioned, the timeframe for changes in the spiritual life were not clearly defined by participants.

In the immediate aftermath of their immersion experience, participants reported fluctuating between feelings of elation and exhilaration, to being overwhelmed, some to the point of inertia. In most cases, participants reported having experienced a significant shift within a very short period of time, and there was an evident self-awareness around the need to process their individual responses to their immersion. Collectively, participants felt a strong need to respond to their experience through some form of action, and that the action needed to influence others.

The findings of the research reveal patterns in the way participants responded in the short, medium and long-term after their immersion trip. In the short-term, participants primarily engaged in navigating the re-entry period, re-evaluating lifestyle and reporting back to their schools. The medium-term was a period of high energy and enthusiasm. Most participants involved themselves in using their experience of immersion as a catalyst to initiate change within their sphere of influence in the school community, such as teaching and learning and the mission life of the school.

The long-term was the period during which participants continued to reflect on the ongoing impact of the immersion in their lives, with many considering options for

involvement in future action. In all cases, the actions engaged in by participants were directed at influencing others. Although the timeframe was less defined, some participants also reported an awareness of changes relating to personal spirituality. Table 5.1 summarises the types of outcomes reported by participants in the short, medium and long-term in the post-immersion phase.

Table 5.1 *Short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion*

Timeframe	Time period	Outcomes
short-term	within three months of returning from the immersion trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole of life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - navigating the re-entry phase - re-evaluating lifestyle • professional domain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reporting back to schools
medium-term	between three and 18 months after immersion trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole of life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - planning/making lifestyle changes • professional domain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - influencing others in one's sphere of influence -through teaching and learning and the mission life of the school
long-term	more than 18 months after immersion trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole of life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ongoing reflection on the impact of immersion • professional domain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - considering options for involvement in future action
undefined timeframe		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal spirituality

Due to the number of immersion trips under investigation and the 10-year period over which they occurred (see Table 3.2), the numbers of participants represented in each timeframe varies.

5.2 Overview of self-reported post-immersion change.

In documenting the findings of this research in the post-immersion phase, it is important to note first, that all 53 participants reported being changed by their experience. In the semi-structured interview, participants were asked to place their degree of change on a scale between ‘zero’ (representing no change at all as a result of the immersion) and ‘five’ (representing the immersion being a ‘life-changing’ event) (see Appendix D). Of the 53 participants in the study, 49 allocated a rank, two were unable to provide a specific number, as for them, the change continued to fluctuate, and two chose not to allocate a rank. Table 5.2 presents a summary of the self-reported rankings on the ‘zero’ to ‘five’ scale.

Table 5.2 *Self-reported change post-immersion*

Ranking	0	1	2	3	4	5
Percentage of participants	0%	3%	5%	19%	63%	10%

On the basis of the self-reported allocation, 92% of those who provided a rank described their post-immersion change as being three or more on the ‘zero’ to ‘five’ scale. None of the participants ranked his/her change as a ‘zero’. The findings would appear to indicate that immersions are indeed a catalyst for change in participants. Uncovering what these outcomes are, what their significance is in the lives of participants, and how they change over time is the focus of this chapter.

The findings from the interviews regarding post-immersion change are unambiguous. All staff members who participated in the research reported being changed by their experience, and these changes were evident in all aspects of life. Participants

commonly reported feeling compelled to act as a result of their immersion, and the type of action individuals involved themselves in, changed over time.

A number of salient points emerged from the data in relation to self-reported participant action after a short-term cross-cultural immersion experience. These points are:

1. In the early stages after their immersion trip, participants reported feelings of disorientation and a sense of being compelled to 'do something', although in many cases they experienced difficulty in identifying what the action might be. There is also a sense of euphoria and enthusiasm for some participants in the immediate post-immersion phase.
2. In the medium-term, after having had more time to process the experience and engage in further critical reflection and rational discourse, participants described being highly motivated to look for ways to actively respond to the immersion experience. It appears to be a period of high enthusiasm and high energy amongst participants, during which they seek out opportunities to integrate the learnings from their immersion experience into their own lives and into the lives of others.
3. In the longer-term, participants reported an awareness of the ongoing impact of the immersion in their lives. While the effect of the immersion does not appear to dissipate, participants are generally more circumspect with regard to the place of the immersion in their lives, and more considered in making plans for future action.
4. The collective impact on school communities of greater numbers of individuals who have experienced an immersion, appears to also become more apparent in the longer-term.

Each of these points will be expanded upon throughout the chapter, using data gathered from participant interviews. The outcomes presented are typical of the examples provided by participants, but by no means exhaustive. All participants reported engaging in some form of action in the post-immersion phase, however, not all participants reported changes in all timeframes. Some reported engaging in a range of diverse actions post-immersion, while others were more limited in their response. In general terms, the medium-term was the timeframe during which participants reported being most highly motivated, and most highly engaged in action as a response to their immersion experience. The self-reported post-immersion outcomes for participants in the short, medium and long-term are presented in the following sections.

5.3 Short-term outcomes.

The interviews revealed a range of post-immersion outcomes for participants in the whole of life and in the professional domain. The findings relating to each of these dimensions are presented in turn.

5.3.1 Whole of life outcomes.

In the short-term, participants typically reported whole of life outcomes such as navigating the re-entry phase and re-evaluating lifestyle.

5.3.1.1 Navigating re-entry.

During the re-entry period, the majority of participants typically fluctuated between euphoria and being overwhelmed by their experience. After such a significant time away, this roller-coaster of emotions can create difficulty for some participants in readjusting to everyday life.

I think when you first come back you are pretty fired up; you have been to the mountaintop! (Olivia, Kiribati 2012)

You feel pretty passionate, like you want to change the world when you come back from a trip like that. (Imogen, Philippines 2010)

When you come back, the first thing you want to do is just talk about it. You come back and you have got idea, after idea, after idea, after idea about what you can do, and how you can do it and so on. So, you are definitely on a high and people want to hear about it, as well, which encourages you to do so. (Sam, Philippines 2007)

The comments made by Olivia, Imogen and Sam are typical responses, and point to the impetus for action generated by an immersion experience. Other participants reported being somewhat overwhelmed and expressed some level of anxiety about how they might process and respond to their experience.

When I first came back there was an anxiety about, "What am I going to do with all this now? How am I going to unpack all of this? What am I going to do with it? Am I going to be of any use to anyone, in any way after having such a wonderful trip?" And at first, I was feeling guilty that I was not doing enough. (Kathy, Philippines 2010)

Many participants also reported experiencing feelings of exhaustion, disorientation, frustration and even sadness. Some experienced an overwhelming desire to return to the host community, combined with feelings that people at home did not really understand what had happened for them.

I think you go from having all that time away and the excitement, and then after you have been home for a while, you drop down into a bit of “Oh, my God, reality. I wish I could go back there”. And then I think there is a frustration, I had a frustration... I still have a frustration that you feel like you have taken, but you want to give back something. And I often feel “Oh, man, I am throwing all these textbooks away!” And I remember having a very long conversation with freight companies about sending the textbooks over to Kiribati and just feeling a bit defeated. “Why can't we do more?” (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

While the disparity in socio-economic and living conditions between Australia and the host communities may be evident on an intellectual level, the reality of the first-hand experience can be devastating. This period of adjustment is likely to be very unsettling for participants as the indicators of disorientation and feelings of helplessness are similar to those of culture shock itself. Michaela and Michelle describe their feelings of disorientation after returning home.

If something has disturbed me, I can be quite detached and just sort of go through life, just sort of do what I have to do, but I have got that sort of detachment. It is like it puts a barrier between me and the rest of the world for a little while, even though I am still moving through the world. I did find that I had that feeling after coming home. It has dissipated a bit now, but I am still wary. I think the trip probably had a bigger impact on me than I ever thought. (Michaela, Philippines 2014)

I came back in a state of lethargy. So physically it was really tiring to get up. I think it must be what depression feels like. So, the inertia of doing daily life, it felt that I was trudging through things, that I was carrying a huge weight physically,

like I just felt that I had put on 25 kilos and that I was carrying a 25-kilo backpack. I did not understand what it was at the time. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

The juxtaposition of these two comments is telling. Despite the fact that Michelle's experience was 10 years earlier, her recollection of her feelings during the period of re-entry are just as vivid as Michaela's more recent memory.

Re-entry is a critical time for participants in making sense of their experience post-immersion. The dissonance between the recent experience of immersion and the reality of life at home can be a particularly unsettling time for many individuals. Critical reflection through ongoing debriefing sessions (see Section 4.4), dialogue with those who have shared the experience (see Section 4.3) and reporting back to schools, appear to be important steps in assisting participants to make meaning. Whilst navigating the re-entry period, participants typically engaged in a re-evaluation of their priorities and lifestyle.

5.3.1.2 Re-evaluation of lifestyle.

In the short-term, whole of life outcomes for participants extended to a personal reassessment of values and lifestyle, a realignment of goals and priorities, and a greater appreciation of their own lives.

I had this strange urge to de-clutter my life. I just felt like I needed to take a step back and work out what is really important in life. My attitude has definitely changed. And hopefully I am more thankful for my life. (Annabelle, Philippines 2006)

It gave me the impetus to change my life. So, I think yes, it was life-changing in that sense. And from that personal perspective of just clearing things up, saying

“You have been with people who have nothing, you are doing things that do not make you happy, go back and clean your life up”. And that is pretty much what I did. And I think it took me out of being too self-aware, too selfish maybe. (Nikki, Philippines 2006)

It has made me more patient and more appreciative of what I have. (Cheryl, Philippines 2007).

Participants who reported a reassessment of priorities and lifestyle were clear in attributing the change in perspective to their immersion experience.

The interviews revealed that in the short-term after an immersion trip, participants were predominantly engaged in whole of life outcomes relating to negotiating the re-entry phase, and reassessing lifestyle. Outcomes in the professional domain were also evident and are outlined in the following section.

5.3.2 Professional domain.

Immediately after a *GSE* immersion trip, group debriefings and reconnections to the experience are facilitated by the group leaders, while in the school setting, avenues to assist participants with this process are managed by the individual schools. The activity most commonly reported by participants in the short-term was engaging in dialogue about the experience through formal and informal debriefing, and reporting back to their schools.

5.3.2.1 Reporting back to schools.

Most participants commonly felt a sense of responsibility to report back something of their experience to the school community in some way. As participants had usually been chosen as the sole representative from their school for the immersion, and the trip had been substantially subsidised by their school, they felt a strong sense of obligation to give something back.

You go on these immersions, knowing that the school substantially funds it. So, you expect that you need to return with something to offer the community. Feedback is important because people do not go on these trips simply for a personal reason, they go for a professional encounter as well. (Ruth, Western Australia 2009)

Many participants also initiated feedback sessions in their schools as they felt the need to honour the stories and the hospitality of the people in the host community.

It shows a sign of respect for the country you have been to. (Caz, Timor-Leste 2011)

If you are going to go and walk in host communities like that, you have a moral imperative to make a difference somehow when you come back, not necessarily to the same host community, but in your life elsewhere and in the community that you are in. (Kylie, Philippines 2004)

Reporting back to schools was also appreciated by colleagues who had been on previous trips. Hearing the stories enabled them to reconnect with their own experience and possibly to recapture the 'like-mindedness' of fellow-colleagues (see Section 4.3).

I really got a lot out of seeing photos of Imogen's trip to the Philippines, and that actually helped a lot. (Caz, Timor-Leste 2011)

Erin also appreciated an informal debrief with a previous immersion participant from her school.

I have had a talk with Denise about her experience and my experience, and we shared photos and she was very interested in comparing and seeing what her experience was like as compared to my experience. (Erin, Philippines 2014)

For some participants, the busyness of school life meant that the opportunity to report back slipped by.

It was put on the back burner, because that story can be told at any time. But time has now travelled to a year and a half, and we have not had that opportunity and it probably will not ever come. No one has said anything, but it is like an elephant in the room. I can almost feel it. (Kim, Japan 2013)

Maybe I needed to push it more, maybe I did not put my hand up and say, "I want to speak to the staff". I just thought they would put me in somewhere, and that did not happen. And I guess in the busyness of the school year, that sort of gets forgotten. Yes, things get lost. (Erin, Philippines 2014)

A sense of disappointment and sometimes frustration or inadequacy was conveyed by participants who did not have the opportunity to report back to their schools. The benefits of opportunities for critical reflection on the experience of immersion through reporting back was apparent in Geraldine's response.

I think if I have to do a presentation, and I am aware that I have to do it, and I have to do it in a couple of different ways to different audiences, then I am going to think about it a bit more, and reflect on the experience more carefully.

(Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

Opportunities for formal and informal debriefing and reporting back to schools or other forums in the short-term appear to be important as they provide participants with additional avenues for critical reflection on their experience (the second stage of Mezirow's [1978a, 1978b] Transformative Learning Theory).

After presenting the findings relating to navigating the re-entry phase and reassessing lifestyle choices in the whole of life, and reporting back to schools in the professional domain, the chapter now turns its attention to the post-immersion outcomes reported by participants in the medium-term timeframe.

5.4 Medium-term outcomes.

After navigating the re-entry phase, most participants reported looking for avenues to integrate their experience of immersion in more meaningful ways. The medium-term (between three and 18 months after an immersion experience) provided the most evidence of participant action (the fourth and final stage of TLT) as a result of immersion, particularly in the professional domain.

5.4.1 Whole of life outcomes.

The experience of immersion reportedly instilled in some participants a sense of increased confidence, leading to decisions in the whole of life such as volunteer placements abroad and more carefully considered donations to charitable organisations.

5.4.1.1 *Increased confidence and volunteering.*

In the medium-term, Leah's immersion to the Philippines motivated her to become involved in a range of initiatives in neighbouring Majority World countries.

The Philippines experience really inspired me and gave me the internal drive to want to have more of that experience. So, I went to Timor for a week later that year and in the following year for three months, and since then I have actively sought out other companies and ways, I could do work like that. So, I did a trip to Vietnam and Cambodia with a group of students for a month. I have also been involved for the last four years with the Australian Catholic University helping run a community sports program in Baucau. Some staff went over to run an after-school sports program with the idea of setting up a bit of structure to it, training a couple of times a week and then playing games on the weekend; using sport as a capacity building program and help those communities connect a little bit better. We spend three weeks there in the June or July university break, and the program has just been fantastic! (Leah, Philippines 2007)

Three participants also decided on volunteer programs in Africa, and attributed their confidence in making the decision to their experience of immersion.

I think I became confident after the Philippines experience to say, "I can put my life on hold". I definitely think it set me on the path. It gave me the confidence to back myself. It was about walking the talk, and the immersion gave me an opportunity to do that on a micro scale. Almost a year after the Philippines is when I started a conversation of, "There must be more to this", and that quest for 'the more' was solidified, and I started active pursuit of a volunteer placement program in Africa. The Philippines experience opened me up in that moment, in the eight days that we were there, and gave me the courage, I suppose, 12 months

down the track, to do it on a grander scale. The rest is history. I stayed [teaching in a school in Africa] for 16 months. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

The trip put things into perspective for me. I feel like I did grow, even though maybe other people cannot see it. I did get so much out of it; I think the experience maybe made me look at the world a little bit differently. I am putting myself out of my comfort zone to do a volunteer experience next year in Africa. And I never would have done that before! (Sally, Japan 2013)

The outcomes reported by these participants are ‘life-changing’ on a profound level and indicate the ongoing nature of the transformative process. The impact on confidence to make a difference in the world was considerable for some individuals. It would appear short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences make a substantial and meaningful contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff. Changes in other aspects of participants’ lives such as a more considered approach to donations to charitable organisations, were also evident in the interviews.

5.4.1.2 A more considered approach to charitable donations.

The interviews revealed that some participants made changes to their patterns of giving to charitable organisations after their immersion trip.

And so, very quietly now, I am very conscious of, if I am giving particularly financial support, that it goes somewhere that is really going to make a difference.

(Trish, Philippines 2006)

At a more micro level I suppose, it sounds twee, but you give to your parish after the experience, and I have committed to Catholic Mission as a withdrawal from

my wages. So that it is the stuff you do not flash around, but that is how it went.

(Michelle, Philippines 2004)

Trish and Michelle identified their immersion trips as being the catalyst for their increased and more considered approaches to altruism, and the need for a closer connection to the causes they support.

The outcomes described above are significant whole of life changes. It may be argued that participants who put themselves forward for immersion trips possess a certain predisposition and are therefore more attracted to this type of experience.

I would probably say that to put yourself forward to go on a trip like this, you are already wanting to go on that journey anyway. (Philippa, Timor-Leste 2011)

The findings would suggest, however, that the immersion has been the trigger for the subsequent action. While participants may have previously been attracted to such actions, the catalyst may have been missing. In many cases, it would also appear participants have been searching for something more in their lives, and the immersion experience has provided an avenue for them to further explore that desire.

As identified above, some examples of life changes in the medium-term were reported by participants to be involvement in volunteer programs and more considered approaches to charitable donations. Within this timeframe, almost all participants reported engaging in some form of action in the professional domain.

5.4.2 *Professional domain.*

In the medium-term participants reported initiating change in the professional domain in their sphere of influence within their school communities. The findings revealed participants were highly involved in action triggered by their immersion, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning, and the mission life of the school. These aspects are addressed in turn.

5.4.2.1 *Teaching and learning.*

Post-immersion, a discernible area in which participants were motivated to influence change was that of teaching and learning, both in classrooms and across the wider school community.

5.4.2.1.1 Initiatives in the classroom.

In the year following their immersion trip, the majority of participants explored ways to integrate their immersion experience into their approaches to pedagogy. Kathy, Sam and Philippa provide examples from a range of different teaching areas.

At that stage I was teaching Society and Culture, and so, I introduced a whole unit on the Philippines and social change and continuity. (Kathy, Philippines 2010)

For me to actually take that step out of my comfort zone and into [an immersion], and it sounds cheesy, but it definitely changed the way that I now view the world. And that is even coming through the teaching in some of my subjects. Like in Year 10 Geography we look at foreign aid, and so bringing the concept of my experience of going on this trip, to actually putting it into perspective, has definitely impacted on my own personal ethos. (Sam, Philippines 2007)

We taught music lessons in Timor and at the end, just the most beautiful thing, a group of students came up to us out of the blue and said, “We would like to teach you a song, too”. It floored me! And so, they sang this beautiful song to us and they explained in enough English for us to understand the meaning of this song and how important it was for them. When I came home, I taught it to our little chamber choir and I told them the story of how significant this song was for the Timorese. And I was so proud to teach them this song and that was probably one of the most beautiful moments of my life. (Philippa, Timor-Leste 2011)

Integrating aspects of their learning from the immersion trip into their professional lives became increasingly important to participants in the medium-term. Many sought out ways to enliven teaching and learning with case studies and examples relating to the host community.

5.4.2.1.2 Initiatives in the wider school community.

The greater potential for individuals in leadership positions to instigate wide-ranging change in the school community as a result of an immersion experience is evident in the actions of Anna and Alex. Anna is a faculty coordinator at her school, and after her immersion trip, a study of Kiribati is now integrated into every Geography program from Year Seven to Year 12.

It is actually integrated. We use the Kiribati lens to look at a curriculum right through Year Seven to Year 12. If I had not done the trip, I would not have integrated that as a case study and followed it through. We focus on Kiribati or use Kiribati as a case study to do units on climate change, global inequality, foreign aid, oceanography and eco-systems at risk. So, it is not just a tokenistic thing, it is fully integrated throughout the school. (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

Alex also holds a leadership position relating to curriculum development, and reported that the immersion experience triggered a clearer understanding of possibilities for integration of charism and pedagogy.

The immersion trip to the Philippines afforded an opportunity to reflect upon possibilities for the integration of charism and pedagogy in the wider school setting. So, not only did it expose me to [a Majority World] community, and make me a wiser person in terms of perceiving what those communities were like, but it also taught me a lot about charism. And I think that is the life-changing bit. That is what has changed my career. Because in two schools now, I have been able to work with the charism in the school and allow the charism to fit quite naturally. So, the very way that we do pedagogy; the very way that we talk about our teaching and learning principles, are now part of the charism. That was the "aha" thing, that I came back realising that charism and school life should be such a natural fit and not something that just gets rolled out a couple of times a year. So long-term, it was very clearly a professional learning experience for me. It is something that you just reflect on and discern and think about, and it develops over time. (Alex, Philippines 2007)

The initiatives described by Anna and Alex concern the potential for those in leadership positions to instigate wide-ranging and long-term change as a result of their immersion experience. Most participants reported that they began to look for ways to be involved in the life of their school that was different from the ways they had before. The findings would also appear to indicate that participants who had a wider sphere of influence in their school communities were able to involve themselves in initiating actions which had a greater impact. It would appear immersion trips are valuable formation opportunities for all staff members.

A deeper understanding of, and increased engagement with, the mission life of the school was also commonly reported by participants.

5.4.2.2 Deeper engagement with the mission life of the school.

A deeper understanding of, and engagement with the mission life of the school in the post-immersion phase was commonly reported by participants. Increased involvement in social justice initiatives, reflection days and student retreats were revealed to be examples of areas of increased interest and involvement by participants. A significant shift in attitude relating to the mission life of the school was articulated by Chris.

Before the trip, the work of mission in the school had no connection to me, it was just, in one ear and out the other. Social Justice Day and social justice activities and Reflection Days were quite painful for me before. They were annoyances because they kept me from what I perceived to be my job, as being a deliverer of content and skills in Science. Whereas when it came around this year, I thought, "I am a part of Social Justice Day". I am not the teacher complaining, "I am missing a Science lesson with my Year 12s." Now I have realised that curriculum sits side by side with my job of delivering a social justice message. It also gave me a new appreciation of teachers of Religion and the work of the Social Justice team. Yes, so I am a convert! (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011)

Comments such as one this provided by Chris underscore the substantial shift in attitude in the professional domain which many participants attributed to their experience of immersion. This is a significant aspect in the formation of Catholic school staff, and invites further discussion in Chapter Six.

Increased involvement in student retreats and reflection days was also a reported outcome of immersion as evidenced by Nina's and Molly's responses.

The immersion definitely also catapulted me into being more involved in the formation and mission side of the school. So, when [the Assistant Principal] said, "Do you want to co-lead a reflection day, or do you want to go and do a retreat?" or whatever else, I just felt more comfortable in that space. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

I have felt that I can offer more in Year 12 retreats because of my experience. I am much more confident on those now, than I was. (Molly, Western Australia, 2009)

Notably, Nina and Molly attributed their increased confidence in taking on new roles in mission to their immersion experience.

A deeper understanding of, and connection to, the ethos which informs the mission life of their school was also reported by some participants. Olivia is part of the Mission Team at her school and reported that Founders Day has been significantly enhanced by participants from different staff immersion trips presenting workshops for students.

Our mission is very explicit on those big event days. It has really enlivened Founders Day by having people, not just me, but a number of staff members who have been on those immersion experiences, running workshops about the ministries of the sisters. The day is immeasurably enriched by having teachers share first hand. It is their experience, and again, invariably they have all been really enthusiastic and passionate to lead those little workshops about the

Philippines or Timor-Leste or Kiribati and that is very, very powerful. More powerful than having any kind of expert coming in when you have got students hearing first hand from their teachers about their experience. (Olivia, Kiribati 2012)

Several participants echoed the importance of such involvement by expressing the value of being in a supportive school setting, and belonging to a network of schools which offer different ways for them to reconnect to the experience of immersion.

It is important when you come back, that there is a community that supports it. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

You now feel like you belong to this big organisation who has shared values, shared mission, shared language, that is really important. (Kathy, Philippines 2010).

Conversely, one participant who indicated minimal change after the immersion (see Rankings One and Two in Table 5.2) reported the difficulties associated with school structures that were not supportive of initiatives for change.

I think the environment is a bit stifling in terms of actually doing anything, because you are quite constrained in terms of the structures here. See, I originally wanted to have a fundraiser, for Kiribati, and we could run that in class, but just the structures in the school and the way they do things, sort of rained on my parade, and it is just like... it is just too hard sometimes. It was difficult to get approval from leadership, it was difficult to get a time, it was just an ongoing sort of thing. (Bernie, Kiribati 2012)

The aspect of being in an environment which values immersion as a formation opportunity and is supportive of actions initiated by participants after their return may be a factor which enhances the transformative process and will be explored further in Chapter Six.

Good Samaritan Education schools centre their partnership and fundraising activities on the ministries visited during staff immersion trips. After their personal experience of immersion, participants tend to complement the purpose of mission events by shifting the focus of fundraising, and layering an element of awareness raising and advocacy. The initiative outlined by Annabelle, for example, is focused on the Catholic Social Teaching principle of solidarity.

We went down to the harbour and the students filled up their water buckets, and they walked back to school with the water. I talk about the Philippines before they go, but the whole idea of that is raising awareness, and also empathising with people who have to walk kilometres to get water. I would like to do a little bit more work around that in my role as house coordinator. (Annabelle, Philippines 2006)

Outcomes in the professional domain extend beyond the classroom to wider school initiatives, particularly in curriculum and mission. These actions were planned and purposeful, and sought to educate and influence the attitudes of others, and to involve them in programs of action and advocacy.

Involvement in student immersion trips after their own experience of immersion was another significant area of engagement and action for participants. The majority of these trips were planned or facilitated in the medium-term time-frame.

5.4.2.3 *Involvement in student immersion trips.*

Since returning from their own immersion experience, a number of participants have been involved in leading short-term cross-cultural immersion trips for students. Some reported that they had returned to the host community to visit with family and friends, while others have initiated or become involved in student immersion programs to indigenous communities in Australia and to partner communities in Majority World countries. In total, 15 of the 53 participants (28%) have involved themselves in subsequent immersion experiences. Sam and Michelle recount their experiences:

I recently went on the Santa Teresa [Northern Territory] immersion trip, which is a student immersion trip to an indigenous community, and for the first time I was in more of a leader capacity. Going on the Philippines immersion trip, definitely made me realise how much I got out of it. I wanted to try and encourage students or to help students get the most out of that sort of experience in a different style of immersion trip as well. (Sam, Philippines 2007)

After her experience in the Philippines, Michelle introduced an indigenous immersion program for students at her school.

That was about asking "Where is the indigenous story in our relationship, in our experience?", and it was not there. And so that takes courage to be able to say, "There is something missing." I think that is a concrete example of where the change or the courage came to implement something new, and then that obviously has had effects outside of those who immediately experienced the immersion. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

The strategic engagement of students in short-term cross-cultural immersions is evident in the experiences of Sam and Michelle. Through the influence of staff members

who have experienced immersion as a formation opportunity for themselves, changes have been implemented, leading to the growth of school communities in knowledge and understanding of the mission life of the school.

Sarah is now a mission leader in her school, and recalled a powerful experience when facilitating a student immersion to Timor-Leste. During her own staff immersion trip, Sarah had become aware that the female students at the local high school were clearly disadvantaged. Due to the lack of access to sanitary items, the girls missed a week of school each month, which resulted in high rates of absenteeism and compromised educational outcomes.

One of the best things about this trip, was that prior to leaving we had made washable sanitary pads for the girls at the school. Seven or eight different classes had been making them. We had teacher nights, where teachers had stayed back and made them, people had donated all the fabrics, and so it was a real whole school effort. We took 50 packs and when we got there, we did not really know how it was going to be received. One day after school, all the senior girls came in, and the Principal explained in Tetum what we were going to do. The Timorese girls were so overwhelmed, some were crying. That..., that... it was like the best, for me personally. That was probably the most poignant moment of my life really, because it was just so powerful. They were just so grateful and happy. They were crying, our girls were crying...I guess that for them it was really empowering. It was also good when we reflected on it later, that it was in some ways more meaningful than donating money because it showed we were actually really thinking about them. (Sarah, Timor-Leste, 2011)

Another outcome of the student immersion trip organised by Sarah was the implementation of an exchange program for students from Timor-Leste to come to their school in Australia for a 10-week intensive English language program.

It came out of the student immersion trip where we asked [Sister Mary] what was the most valuable thing we could keep doing. We do a lot of fundraising and the girls said to her, "The school down the road from us brings students from overseas out to their school." And [Sister Mary] said, "Oh, maybe you could do that!" I think the profile of social justice has increased, and I guess my Timor trip was the catalyst for all those other things too, because if I had not been given [the Mission Leader role] then I would not have been able to do all those things. I guess I had a personal interest anyway, but then the trip really confirmed my suspicions that this was a good thing for a school to be doing! So yes, I guess it ripples! (Sarah, Timor-Leste 2011)

In accepting positions of increased responsibility, many participants like Sarah, Michelle, Sam and Annabelle used the experience and increased confidence gained from their immersion trip to influence other members of their school community.

Outcomes as a result of an immersion experience are not limited to members of the teaching staff. After an immersion trip, Pat, (who holds an administrative position), organised a maintenance team to go to Kiribati to work with the local community on the installation of solar panels.

I spoke at the Business Managers meeting and said we would like to suggest the idea of our group doing something. If we could organise to send maintenance people to do some work, that might be of some benefit. (Pat, Kiribati 2012)

The importance of involving all members of the school community in formation opportunities is apparent in Pat's initiative. It would appear immersions may be a catalyst for action for all staff members.

Outcomes in the whole of life and the professional domain were evident in initiatives instigated by participants in the medium-term. Responses to questions concerning these aspects were easily articulated as participants appeared to have carefully considered the issues, and for many, the experience was still fairly recent. An exploration of the actions engaged in by participants more than 18 months after their immersion provided insight into the longer-term nature of the experience.

5.5 Long-term outcomes.

Long-term outcomes (more than 18 months after the immersion) were able to be reflected upon by 41 of the 53 participants (73%), in the whole of life and the professional domain. Most individuals were clear and united in articulating the notion that after returning from their immersion trip, even though they were overtaken by the daily demands of work and life, the impact of their experience remains deep and long-term. The comments made by Anna, Karina and Brenda are typical, but by no means the only observations made with regard to this point.

The most profound thing is how long the change stays with you. (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

I think my sense of the experience and what I got out of it has remained really strong, I do not think it has dissipated at all. (Karina, Kiribati 2008)

For me, it is a transformational thing that takes a long time. So, I would say it sat with me. It is part of my process of development (Brenda, Western Australia 2009)

The long-term nature of the outcomes precipitated by an immersion experience is evident in changes in the whole of life and the professional domain. Outcomes relating to personal spirituality are presented at the end of the chapter.

5.5.1 Whole of life outcomes.

The majority of participants were unequivocal in reporting that the impact of their immersion is long-term, that it changes over time and that they are ‘different’ as a result of their experience. Olivia described her experience as being ‘*a thread that is ongoing*’ (Olivia, Kiribati 2012), and Gina’s reflection is typical of the responses of many participants.

There is just something really profound that happened to me internally (Gina, Philippines 2006).

After reflecting on her immersion experience, Caz’s comment indicated an understanding that for her, the transformative process is ongoing.

I think it probably took a really long time for me to acknowledge the change that had occurred. I think it actually continues to change you, no matter how long after you have been there. I think you do continue to change, but I think it is like any huge change that happens in your life – that it takes a while for you to actually make it part of who you are. (Caz, Timor-Leste 2011)

Gina expressed a similar view when reflecting on the long-term internal shift for her.

It is life-altering in a sense that at the most opportune and inopportune moments in the rest of your life, something will come back of that experience that then will help you to discern what is happening for you in the present. I imagine that that is going to be there for the rest of my life. (Gina, Philippines 2006)

Geraldine noted that for her, the transformation was an irreversible process.

It somehow leaves you with a bit of an impression that you cannot ever see the world in quite the same way that you saw it before. For most people, there is a moment where something happens. It might not have actually been noticed by anybody else, but for that person this is that moment where there is some shift, and I think the long-term impact of that is probably incalculable. I think if you have actually had that moment, if you are open to that moment, then that changes everything, because you cannot ever quite go back to what you were before. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

The following comments by Geraldine, Nina and Alex also illustrate the depth of the internal shift they experienced.

It is never gone. It is there all the time. As a counterpoint, if you like, or a little thing that just says every now and then to you, "Life is different for other people." I think that is a huge understanding to come to, and I think that has very long-term implications if you allow it to change who you are. If you are open to it, that can change the way that you look at things, and the way you look at people, and the way you engage with the world because of it. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

I think there are layers to it, and I think depending on where you are at in your life, and I guess with maturity and other life experiences, I have allowed different

bits of [the immersion experience] to catch up with me. So, I do not know if they were always there and they are being revealed to me differently as life goes on and as retrospection comes into it... but I am gaining new meaning. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

I started being able to articulate things and talk about things that I was not talking about before. I started being interested in things that I was not interested in before. (Alex, Philippines 2006)

The internal shift described by so many participants suggests that this was a commonly experienced phenomenon, and substantially changed their view of, and engagement with, their world. The immersion becomes a defining experience for many participants and nothing can ever be quite the same for them as it was before.

Participants also recognised and articulated changes in their attitudes and aspirations in the long-term.

5.5.1.1 Attitudes.

Changes in perspectives or viewpoints were recognised by some participants as resulting from their immersion experience. Awareness of adopting a broader worldview, and increased tolerance of other cultures were noted and attributed to the experience of immersion.

My outlook and my attitude; everything is different because of [the immersion]. I think the experience maybe made me look at the world a little bit differently, and continues to. (Sally, Japan 2013)

Dawn echoed Sally's comments in reporting a shift in her levels of bias towards other cultures.

It has encouraged me definitely to read more about the Japanese culture and speak with Japanese people more about their country, and perhaps with more understanding and not so much bias. (Dawn, Japan 2013)

Annabelle also reported a change in perspective, and evidenced an awareness of it being a long-term process.

I think it is a gradual shift over time. This changing perspective in attitude probably really did not overly hit me until much later. Having that time of reflection when being on maternity leave – it is funny when it hits you. (Annabelle, Philippines 2006)

Changed viewpoints and perspectives over time are attributed by participants to their immersion experience. Of interest to this investigation is that Sally's and Dawn's reflections on a more recent experience align with Annabelle's longer-term experience. It would also appear that Sally's and Dawn's immersion to Japan triggered a similar change in attitude to those participants who visited Majority World host communities. It would seem the destination is less significant than other factors such as an authentic encounter and a meaningful context in fostering transformative outcomes in individuals. Along with changes in attitude, the realisation of the development of different aspirations in the longer-term was also expressed by several individuals.

5.5.1.2 Aspirations.

Changes in aspirations (see Section 2.4.1.4) may be gauged by the exploration of ambitions, hopes and desires of participants following their immersion experience.

Aspirations described by participants included a desire for involvement in advocacy and volunteer placements.

5.5.1.2.1 Advocacy and volunteer placements.

The findings of this study revealed participants most commonly identified changed aspirations in terms of a desire for future involvement in advocacy and volunteer work.

I have always thought I would not mind doing a year of volunteering, and that is something that strengthened after I was [in Kiribati]. (Naomi, Kiribati 2012)

There is a little something in the back of my mind that maybe, if at some stage I ever retired, I could go and do a bit of volunteer work. It crosses my mind a bit more often now to go and do that. (Bernadette, Philippines 2006)

So, [after the immersion] I have to always remind myself to devote some time to others. I mean one of the other things I am interested in is helping women who are victims of domestic violence, and women's shelters and refuges and things. And I do always have that at the back of my mind that I would like to volunteer perhaps one night a fortnight, something that is sort of manageable with my busy life at the moment. But something that I could do to just keep up that side of things because I think it is so important for everyone, if everyone could just give a little bit then that makes such a difference. (Molly, Western Australia 2009)

Like Molly, some participants expressed aspirations with regard to volunteering in their local community, while others, as shown in Anna's comment, articulated a desire or a yearning to give back directly in some way, to the host community they visited.

I would love to go back at some stage. I feel like you have gone, you have taken in a way, from a cultural point of view, you have taken something, but you need to give something back. (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

Some participants also revealed a realisation that while they had been aware of an internal shift as a result of the immersion, circumstances precluded their involvement in activism and advocacy in the immediate aftermath of their trip. Gina's reflection underscores this view.

What it left me with in the short-term and more especially recently, is an aspiration that actually, I do have the capacity and skills to make a positive difference in a community. And it has taken me a very long time, and a lot of that is practical, raising kids and looking after parents, and all of that. So maybe, now there is a bit more space in my life, this is really starting to bubble up a lot more now. So, it is an aspiration, and a yearning that whatever the next chapter of my life will be, it will in some way involve some advocacy or activism. (Gina, Philippines 2006)

Comments such as those made by Bernadette and Gina indicate the long-term nature of their aspirations. There is also a realisation that due to life circumstances, authentic contributions can only be made when their lives are at a different stage. There is a certain wisdom in knowing that rather than making tokenistic gestures, they would prefer wait until a more appropriate time in their lives when their actions can be more planned, purposeful and useful.

It would appear the outcomes of immersion extend well beyond the short-term euphoria and the medium-term enthusiasm, and have a profound and ongoing impact on

the lives of participants. Of particular interest to this research, are the findings that some individuals have in fact fulfilled their post-immersion aspirations by involving themselves in volunteer programs abroad (see Section 5.4.1).

Long-term outcomes of short-term cross-cultural immersion for staff were also noted by participants in the professional domain.

5.5.2 Professional domain.

In the professional domain, some participants reflected that in the longer-term the experience of immersion changed them as teachers, and that they had developed more positive attitudes towards students.

5.5.2.1 Shift in professional perspectives.

I think the growth in me probably makes me a much better person and a much better teacher. (Gail, Philippines 2006)

I think it has made me a better teacher; it has made me more tolerant. Seeing the teachers work with the little ones in the Philippines and setting the bar high rather than low, just because they are impoverished. In my work with the indigenous kids, that is what I have been trying to do as well. So, I think that has definitely left its mark. (Helen, Philippines 2010)

You are a better teacher but it is very hard to say how. It is in the connectedness that you have with students no matter who they are. So, I would say it is in my performance as a teacher – nothing to do with Mathematics at all! (Wendy, Western Australia 2009)

New-found self-awareness is evident in the comments offered by Gail, Helen and Wendy. The interviews also revealed that for some participants there has been a long-term shift in their understanding of their role and the value of education.

I guess that professionally [the immersion] has shaped me into, not just a theoretical position that I have at school, but actually a life, a vocation, and the everyday sense of that. It enlivened for me the possibilities of what learning could be like. (Jan, Western Australia 2009)

I think it changed forever in me, things about my view of the value of education. I knew it was important but [in the Philippines] I could see by visiting the really wealthy school and seeing the poverty of little kids in the Kinder, how important it was for them to get that start. It profoundly struck me that education is the only way that society can change. (Nerida, Philippines 2010)

Participants were aware that they had changed as a result of their immersion experience and that it has had an ongoing impact in all aspects of their lives. For some there was a shift in professional perspectives leading to new insight into their role as an educator, and into the value of the teaching profession in influencing the lives of others.

5.5.2.2 *Ethos and charism.*

A number of respondents also reported a substantial shift in understanding of their school's foundational values, ethos and charism, opening the possibility for them to view their own role through a different lens. The following comments by Kathy and Nikki touch on new insights gained from their immersion experience which translate directly into their professional role.

You now feel like you belong to this big organisation which has shared values, shared mission, shared language, and that is really important. And so, you have more of a sense of belonging in that organisation, you have experienced something a little bit outside the classroom or outside the staffroom. And so, I think that is really valuable. (Kathy, Philippines 2010)

It made me embrace the organisation I worked for, which I did not really have a full understanding of then. I was on a one-year contract, and so I was very lucky to have the job and I did not really connect because I did not think I would be staying at the school for very long. The immersion sort of sealed the deal for me. Understanding who I was working for, and I was not just working for [the Principal] anymore, I was working for this greater thing. And I got that. I got it, I totally got it. It gave me the confidence to then want to further my career in that school, and stay in that school, and value my job, and want to be part of that community. (Nikki, Philippines 2006)

A shared understanding of a school's ethos and charism is foundational to the formation of Catholic school staff, and the contribution made by short-term cross-cultural immersion to this dimension of the professional domain warrants further discussion in Chapter Six.

Changed aspirations relating to involvement in the mission life of the school in the longer-term were also noted by participants.

5.5.2.3 *Mission.*

One expression of the mission life of the Catholic school is prioritisation of social justice initiatives. Changed aspirations in terms of involvement with the values, ethos and mission of the school were evident in participant responses in the long-term timeframe.

The experience [of immersion] kept steering me a lot in terms of that whole idea of the mission of the school, and wanting to stay, and working in mission. (Trish, Philippines 2006)

I think my aspirations have often been around the mission area anyway, which is probably leading me to the point of being in the role that I am in, but it has just given me drive to do it with heart. (Angie, Philippines 2014)

Since their immersion experience, several participants have taken on increased responsibilities and have been involved in driving social justice programs in their schools which involve members of the wider school community, sometimes extending back to the host community. Formation of staff in the values, traditions and ethos of a school appears to work towards building a supportive culture within the school community. Aspirations with respect to involvement in future immersion experiences also featured in participant responses.

5.5.2.3.1 *Involvement in future immersion trips.*

The desire to be involved in another immersion experience was expressed by almost all participants. When asked in their interview if they would like to be involved in another short-term cross-cultural immersion, the overwhelming majority of participants responded in the affirmative, with the following being typical responses.

In a heartbeat! I am there! Absolutely! (Philippa, Timor-Leste 2011)

As far as your hopes and desires for the future, you get a bit of a hunger. You want more of it. I think that probably you want it to keep going. You do not want to lose that feeling that you have had from the experience. (Michaela, Philippines 2014)

Many participants also expressed a desire to be involved in organising immersion opportunities for students and family members.

My aspiration is definitely to go back, and I would love to take a group of students over there to see what it is like and to try and promote my passion in them. (Cheryl, Philippines 2007).

I would love to one day take my children there, so they can develop that empathy. That is my big dream. I feel like, "I have seen this, I need my kids to see this now" (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011).

Some participants actively nurtured other staff members in their desire to on an immersion.

I hope to be able to continue to share my knowledge about this experience, and encourage others, if they are ever given an opportunity to do any of these immersions, to definitely take it. Everyone I have spoken to is just full of awe about the whole experience. And I think, that as a leader at the school, we hope to let these things continue and to give more and more people the opportunity to share in those experiences. (Bethany, Japan 2013)

I am a great believer now in encouraging people to experience immersion events or have students go on immersion events, for the very fact that it makes the stories real. And if they are able to make the story real and come back and relate that

reality to [people in the school] who did not get a chance to experience that, then that changes things for everyone. (Alex, Philippines 2007)

While some participants reported having already realised aspirations regarding involvement in further immersion trips (see Section 5.4.2.3), the comments above reveal that in the longer-term, the desire remains a strong focus for many others.

The interviews also brought to light that formation opportunities for staff provided by involvement in short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences may lead to a shift which has long-term outcomes for the individual and the wider school community. Notably, this aspect appears to be particularly important when there are a number of staff members from the same school community who have experienced an immersion trip. It would seem collective aspirations and social action (providing an example of a constructionist epistemology) can be the catalyst for a wider and deeper impact on school communities.

5.5.2.4 Collective influence on school communities.

Since 2004, over 180 individuals have participated in *GSE* short-term cross-cultural immersion trips to one of five host communities in which the Sisters of the Good Samaritan are in ministry. Over time, the cumulative effect is that some schools have had up to 20 staff members who have participated in the program. From a wider perspective, opportunities for building support for social justice and mission activities within the school community appear to be enhanced if there is broad base of staff members who have experienced an immersion. Two participants who are in senior leadership positions reflected on the advantages of having several staff members in their schools who have been on immersion trips.

That awareness, it is embedded in the teacher's psyche so that it comes out in all different ways in the curriculum. It is that idea of developing not just a civil society, but a civil and a just society and I do think it makes an enormous difference. And if you have got a critical mass it is a lot easier. (Brenda, Western Australia 2009)

When we fundraise, as we do for each of the [host community] partnerships, people who have been on the different immersions will get involved and provide some material, some resources and things like that, which has been good. It means that when we talk about these different things, there are enough people on staff who have been there to say "Oh yes, that is a really good thing, and let's do that." It is actually just building your base so the staff are open to the story. So, they understand what we are on about. So, when we talk about those things, there is never any resentment. There are never any people questioning it, and there is a high level of support. I actually think that it is really beneficial having staff going on these different immersions. It is actually real, and so there is an authenticity, and there is a credibility around the different partnerships. And so therefore, you do get people supporting it. No one says, "Oh, do we have to do this?" or "I am missing out on class time," because they know it is really valuable. (Evie, Philippines 2010)

It seems that when greater numbers of staff from within the school community have been involved in formation opportunities afforded by immersion trips, there may be higher levels of staff 'buy-in' and ongoing commitment, and subsequently, less resistance to the implementation of mission initiatives within the school. It would appear the effect of immersion continues well beyond the individual and the immediate. This aspect is

relevant to the ongoing formation of staff in Catholic schools and is addressed further in Chapter Six.

The findings of this research would suggest that outcomes of immersion for participants are evident in the longer-term in all aspects of life. It would seem the impact of the immersion changes over time, but never really dissipates. The focus shifts from the adjustment period of the re-entry phase in the short-term, through the high energy activity of the medium-term, to the more measured and reflective phase of the long-term. Changes occurring throughout life appear to allow different aspects of the immersion to surface, and to be influential at different times. Participants in this research attributed involvement in a short-term cross-cultural staff immersion trip to be the catalyst for change.

While participants spoke of an awareness of the impact of immersion on their spiritual lives, the timeframe for the change was less easily defined. Aspects of personal spirituality post-immersion are outlined in the following section.

5.6 Personal spirituality.

While many participants reported being moved by a profoundly spiritual experience during their immersion trip (see Section 4.2), for some, the impact of the spiritual dimension became more apparent to them after returning home. As participants generally did not identify a timeframe relating to awareness of changes in their spiritual life post-immersion, a representative sample of the responses gathered is presented in this section.

I had a strong sense of presence of God [on the trip], but a lot of questions about presence of the church. And coming back it has deepened my sense of the spiritual that is in people of all places and cultures. (Olivia, Kiribati 2012)

It was a deeply spiritual experience in connecting to people, not necessarily from a similar faith or the same faith, but having a connection to people and having that relational quality that I did not have before. And knowing your place and re-perceiving, re-placing yourself in the world after being exposed to these communities. (Alex, Philippines 2007)

Olivia's and Alex's reflections point to a deepening of their spirituality as a result of their immersion. The following reflection by Karina also gives a sense of a shift in her willingness to articulate aspects of her personal spirituality differently after her immersion experience.

Having had [the immersion] experience gave me an opportunity just to think through what it is that is important to me in that respect. And when I came back, we were having a spirituality day at school, and one of the things a couple of people did was to share a bit of their spiritual journey and where they are at and so on. And I did that, which would not have been something I would easily have done beforehand. Probably because, the experience was something that gave me the impetus to reflect on and to consider my spirituality. So that definitely enhanced my ability to do that kind of thing and talk more openly about my spirituality to other people. (Karina, Kiribati. 2008)

The ongoing nature of deepening one's spirituality as a result of an immersion experience is also evident in Nina's comment.

So, while there was so much that was unknown to me [on the immersion], that was enough to really push me, create a discomfort, and therefore caused me to go deeper and inward as well. And I think I have sort of allowed all of this to catch

up with me way after, way after. And that is the beauty of the experience. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

Nina's comment also aligns with the TLT stages of a disorienting dilemma (“*create a discomfort*”) and critical reflection (“*caused me to go deeper and inward as well*”).

In her reflections on her immersion experience, Michelle broadened the conversation to touch on the aspect of immersion being a contributor to formation of Catholic school staff.

It is knowledge of self that you get from [the immersion], and it is knowledge of relationships. And that knowledge of relationships is a great contributor to middle leaders and executive leadership formation. The knowledge of yourself is about life formation and about how do you keep control of your soul and your destiny, and the knowledge of the place is about being a global citizen. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

As discussed in Chapter Four, some participants did not find a sense of the spiritual during their immersion experience.

Even though there were religious elements and going to different churches and everything... like, fantastic. But not really, for me, no. (Cheryl, Philippines 2007)

Not that spiritual so much, for me, just... I suppose more an inspiration or an example of, this is what people put their adult life to. (Nerida, Philippines 2010)

Spiritual in the sense that there is a lot of hope in those places, but I would not say I am spiritually transformed. (Jess, Philippines 2014)

Not surprisingly, these participants did not elaborate on aspects of personal spirituality in the post immersion phase. Those who did provide a comment, such as Imogen, generally indicated an awareness of a spiritual dimension of immersion at the time, but that it did not have a lasting impact after returning home.

The Mass at the beginning in Manila, I felt... I mean, I have gone to church my whole life, but I do not go anywhere near Mass on a Sunday now, but that was beautiful. (Imogen, Philippines, 2010)

In general terms, participants who reported a spiritual dimension whilst on the immersion trip, referred to its impact in their lives at some stage in the post-immersion phase. It may be possible that these individuals were predisposed and open to a spiritual experience, and so, were more attuned to its meaning and significance for them as life events unfolded.

5.7 Conclusion.

The findings presented in this chapter indicate that post-immersion outcomes of short-term cross-cultural immersion:

1. are readily identified by participants;
2. are evident in the whole of life, the professional sphere and the personal spiritual journey;
3. are evident in the short, medium and long-term; and
4. change over time.

Specifically, the findings reveal short-term outcomes to be navigating the re-entry phase, re-evaluating lifestyle and reporting back to schools. In the medium-term, participants involved themselves in such activities as volunteer work and increased

altruism in the whole of life, and initiated change in their sphere of influence in the school community, predominantly in the areas of teaching and learning, and the mission life of the school. The medium-term was the timeframe during which most participants found they were highly motivated and highly engaged in action. In the longer-term, participants were more reflective, and their plans and actions resulting from the immersion experience were more measured. In most cases, actions initiated by participants included influencing others.

Deepening of personal spirituality was also evident in the lives of some participants post-immersion, although the timeframe is less easily defined. Whether or not an immersion experience contributes to a deeper connection of participants to a worshipping community in the long-term, has not been evidenced in this investigation.

In concert, Chapters Four and Five document the findings of the investigation into the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. The findings revealed the experiences of participants during the immersion phase, and their reflections on outcomes they experienced in the short, medium and long-term post-immersion. Figure 5.2 provides a summary of the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five which invite further discussion in Chapter Six, and explains the alignment of these findings with the research questions which emerged from the review of the scholarly literature.

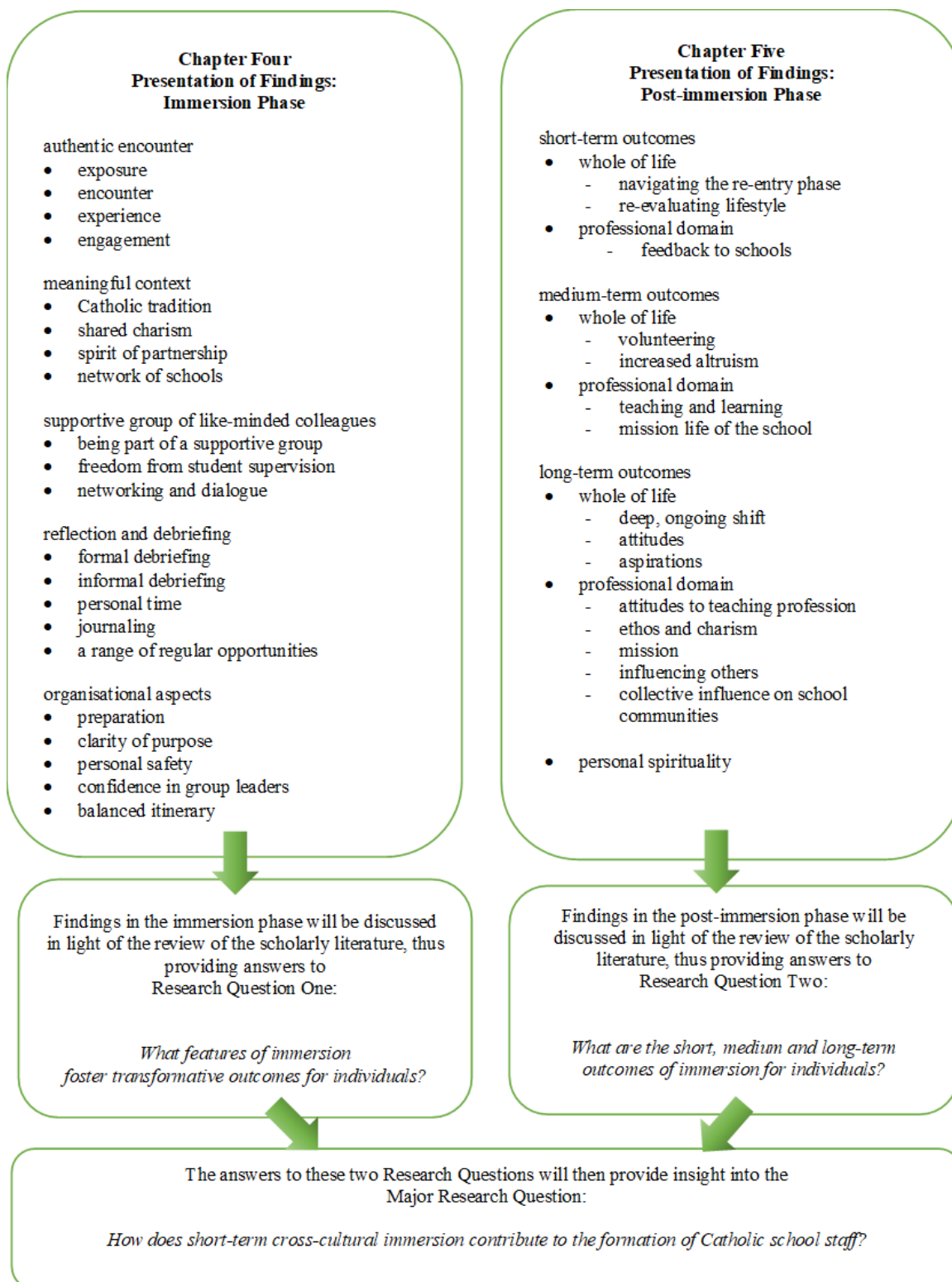


Figure 5.2. Summary of findings inviting further discussion.

In Chapter Six, the themes generated from the presentation of the findings in Chapters Four and Five will be discussed in light of the scholarly literature, theory and practice, thus providing answers to the research questions guiding the conduct of the investigation.

Chapter Six

6 Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five, and to critically reflect on these findings in view of the relevant literature, theory and practice. The investigation centres on exploring the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. The research traces the experiences of 53 participants both whilst on immersion, and in the post-immersion phase.

The findings which centre on the immersion phase are presented in Chapter Four. These findings indicate there are elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes for individuals, with consistent themes emerging from the data. The findings relating to the post-immersion phase are presented in Chapter Five and reveal a range of outcomes for participants in the whole of life, the professional domain and personal spirituality.

Chapter Six begins with a critical analysis of the emergent themes from the data relating to the immersion phase. These themes contribute to answering Research Question One: *What elements of immersion foster transformative outcomes for individuals?*

The discussion then turns its attention to the findings relating to participant experiences post-immersion. These themes centre on Research Question Two: *What are the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for individuals?*

In tandem, these foci for discussion then provide answers to the Major Research Question: *What is the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff?*

In analysing the findings of this research, an alignment became apparent between the self-reported experiences of participants, *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) and the four stages of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). It is therefore important to restate the elements of both at the outset of the discussion.

First, the contemporary approach to formation of Catholic school community members adopted for this investigation is:

Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9).

Second, as Transformative Learning Theory provides both a way of understanding adult learning and an apt lens through which to view the findings of this investigation, the 10 phases of the TLT model (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) are summarised in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Stages of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow 1978a, 1978b)

Key Stage	Phase of Transformative Learning
Experience	Phase One: a disorienting dilemma
Critical Reflection	Phase Two: a self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame Phase Three: a critical assessment of assumptions
Rational Discourse	Phase Four: recognition of one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change Phase Five: exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Action	Phase Six: planning a course of action Phase Seven: acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan Phase Eight: provision trying of new roles Phase Nine: building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships Phase 10: a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

The discussion therefore, comprises a critical analysis of the findings through these two distinct yet complementary lenses.

A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) focuses on the growth of individuals and communities. The findings pertaining to the immersion phase, therefore, relate to the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes for individuals, and the findings relating to the post-immersion phase are discussed in terms of the outcomes which evidence transformation of individuals and communities. Each of these dimensions is discussed in turn.

6.1 Elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes.

The findings of this research indicate there are elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes for individuals. These elements are:

1. an authentic encounter with the host community;
2. situating the immersion within a meaningful context;
3. providing opportunities for reflection and debriefing;
4. a supportive group of like-minded colleagues; and
5. safety and well-being.

A discussion of each of these elements is presented in the following section.

6.1.1 *Authentic encounter.*

An authentic encounter involves direct personal engagement with, and insight into the lives of people in the host community (Kearney, 2010). This encompasses participation in day to day activities and routines, cultural activities, religious ceremonies and the sharing of personal stories in mutual respect.

With regard to the importance of an authentic encounter, the findings of this research align closely with the literature. Factors found to contribute to transformative outcomes in travel and immersion are a destination that takes the participant as far from their known experiences as possible (Morgan, 2010; Ross, 2010), providing experiential learning opportunities focused on encountering ‘otherness’ (Daloz, 2000; Morgan, 2010) and intimate intercultural experiences (Ross, 2010; Temple, 1999). The significance of an authentic experience when exposed to another culture was also reported by Dunn et al. (2014), who noted that ‘hands-on’ experiences are a critical element of study abroad programs for preservice teachers.

The participants in this study were immersed in ‘otherness’ in cross-cultural communities that were in most cases, well beyond their known experiences. Involvement in the daily life of schools, community service programs, local celebrations and religious ceremonies provided opportunities for formal and informal intercultural experiences involving in-depth conversations.

While participants had engaged in preparation sessions before the trip, the jolt of the reality of life in a cross-cultural community was often as unexpected as it was unsettling. Intimate intercultural encounters appeared to be a catalyst for the ‘disorienting dilemma’ – a feature of the first TLT stage of ‘experience’ (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000a). While the disorientation can be distressing for participants, it is also recognised as being an important element of the immersion experience. Participants realised quickly that the stories, videos and information they had previously engaged with, belied the reality. Experiencing some level of discomfort and having preconceived notions challenged were seen to be necessary components of an authentic immersion. Participants such as Michelle and Jess believed they needed to see the situation for themselves – to be ‘woken up’ and shocked into new realisations that can be a trigger for a shift in attitudes, perspectives and viewpoints.

An immersion does take you out of your comfort zone and it is good to be shaken up. It is good to be awoken and reminded of your place in the universe and this world of privilege. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

You need to see it. It is those harsh realities. (Jess, Philippines 2014)

This aspect supports the work of Temple (1999) who found that all participants in his study were able to attribute perspective transformation to interaction with a person or event.

Witnessing the realities of life for people in the host community had a profound impact. As described by Geraldine, for many individuals, there was a defining moment that can be identified as being a 'turning point' which may be a catalyst for a change in outlook or perspective; a point at which previously held beliefs and views of the world are challenged.

I think if you have actually had that moment, if you are open to that moment, then that changes everything, because you cannot ever quite go back to what you were before. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

The 'disorienting dilemma' characterises the TLT first key theme of 'experience', and a suitable milieu for this event is provided by the authentic encounter of immersion. The catalyst for such experiences may be manifold and unpredictable. An event that triggers a 'disorienting dilemma' for one individual may pass unnoticed by another. Such events often occur as a result of personal interactions between participants and the people in the host community, highlighting the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism adopted for this investigation. Observing aspects of life in another culture such as poverty, minimal educational facilities, lack of basic health care and infrastructure, and the coexistence of the extremes of wealth and poverty, often contribute to participants experiencing feelings of anxiety or disturbance.

As evidenced in Chapter Four, participants provided many examples of feeling disturbed by their experiences of a disorienting dilemma.

Well, honestly, I felt like I was a spirit walking through this whole thing. I could not feel anything. I could not feel me. (Rosanna, Philippines 2014)

It was not the lack of shoes, or the lack of clothes. For me, it was the fact of not even having something to put your food in, not even having a bowl to take your bread roll home in. I just think, "Oh." (Jess, Philippines 2014)

There, on the dirt floor of this tiny little hot, hot, sauna like hot shanty, was a lady who had just given birth. She was just lying there exhausted, with all these other women around her. So that was just, "Wow!!" Again, it was another one of those moments. It was just like, "I cannot believe this!" (Leah, Philippines 2007)

It is important to note here that the disturbances and disequilibrium described by Rosanna, Jess and Leah, and experienced by many others, are a provocation for rethinking. While possessing an awareness of poverty and living conditions in many of the host communities, engagement with first-hand experiences of the realities of life for the local people can be both challenging and enlightening. Physical reactions to the sensory overload of the sights, the sounds, the smells and the heat take participants into a setting beyond their experience, and in many cases, beyond their understanding. The participants in Sam's group appeared to struggle with the inequity evident in the Philippines as the tension developed between their personal beliefs in human dignity and social justice, and their jarring observations of the stark disparity between wealth and poverty.

From the mall, you can still see out of the window to where the shanties are. I think that had an impact on everyone in the group to the point of tears; to the point where everyone was quite emotional. So just the contrast from where one

group of people lives to where the other group lives was probably one of the biggest impacts of that trip. (Sam, Philippines 2007)

The multi-faceted and multi-layered historical, political, cultural and socio-economic factors which underpin the complex issues that shape the lives of the people in the host community can be as bewildering as they are confronting. Nonetheless, most participants appeared to be aware of the importance of an authentic encounter, and as indicated in Chapter Five, are generally predisposed to such an experience.

I would probably say that to put yourself forward to go on a trip like this, you are already wanting to go on that journey anyway. (Philippa, Timor-Leste 2011)

Deep learning resides in an intensely emotional moment which stems from various unanticipated forms of disorientation and embracing an attentiveness to discomfort (Wright & Hodge, 2012). The authentic encounter experienced by participants on short-term cross-cultural immersion is a catalyst for a profound personal narrative through which to engage with the ongoing process of formation both on immersion and in the post-immersion phase.

Patterns emerged in the findings of this research in that authentic encounters were recognised as important regardless of where the host community was located, when the immersion took place, or the age, gender or sending school of participants. It would seem the depth of the engagement with the people in the host community is the important factor here. By providing such opportunities, it would appear the participants are more likely to be transformed by the experience.

Authentic encounter is a pivotal aspect of short-term cross cultural immersion for participants and engages them deeply in the ‘lived experiences’ dimension of *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). Respect for the personal journeys of participants and engaging them in encounters which promote individual and communal growth (Brisbane Catholic Education, n.d.; Gowdie, 2011, 2017) through deep learning (Senge et al., 2005) are at the heart of formation programs for Catholic school staff. The interviews revealed an important alignment between the ‘lived experience’ (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) of a ‘disorienting dilemma’ (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000a) through an authentic encounter with the host community in the transformation of individuals through immersion.

A second element found to foster transformation of individuals is that the immersion is situated in a meaningful context.

6.1.2 A meaningful context.

While the structure of immersion trips is different for each organising entity, the findings of this research would indicate that clarity of purpose and context provides a framework for participants which allows them to make meaning of their individual and shared experiences. Immersions comprise three distinct phases, each critical to the transformative process:

1. pre-immersion – preparation and briefing;
2. the immersion experience; and
3. post-immersion – re-entry and debriefing.

The importance of participation in each phase cannot be overstated. As revealed by Kylie, the preparation phase is critical in providing participants with an understanding of the purpose and context of the immersion they are about to undertake.

It is important that there is great clarity, that real sense of purpose, and being very transparent about that from the beginning. (Kylie, Philippines 2004)

Ella's comment underscores the importance of this aspect.

The fact that we all came from the same perspective was really helpful. I think it would have been difficult if you had people in the group with different ideas about what our role and what our purpose was there. (Ella, Timor-Leste 2011)

Setting the context for an immersion during the preparation session is recommended by Howell (2009), and later by Johnson (2014) who proposed that it is possible to increase the likelihood of long-term change by educating participants about “the historical and structural factors that explain why members of the host community may live in poverty” (Johnson, 2014, p. 21). The inclusion of contextual factors and perspectives in the preparation session which enable participants to draw upon personal experiences which are meaningful and relevant to their lives, their profession and their spirituality provides points of connection and familiarity during the confrontation and disorientation of the authentic encounter. The preparation session is also integral in providing the historical, geographical, political, cultural and religious context for the immersion experience. An understanding of these contextual features in the lives of the people of the host community also provides a point of connection enabling participants to make meaning of the experience in the midst of disequilibrium.

Contexts found to be meaningful for participants in this investigation were an educational context, a Catholic context involving prayer and liturgy and a shared charism, and the context of partnership. Each of these contexts is presented in turn.

6.1.2.1 An educational context.

As all the participants in this investigation were school staff members, opportunities to visit schools and educational facilities provided a familiar context for the experience.

I think visiting the school was really important, because obviously, we work in schools and I think everyone can get a real benefit out of seeing schools in other communities. (Ariane, Kiribati, 2012)

I really felt the education part was very worthwhile. (Caz, Timor-Leste 2011)

Chris also believed the educational context was an important dimension of the immersion trip.

Getting us into the classroom, is definitely one of the important elements of the immersion, because we are teachers and I think seeing students was where we connected. Whilst it was very difficult environment, we had empathy for those teachers as well when I saw the facilities that Science was being taught in. And to be honest, the poor quality of the teaching and the resources. And I can hear [sister] complaining about that particular teacher, and how he does not always show up. That definitely brought things home for me. I think that was a very important part of it. (Chris, Timor-Leste 2011)

The connection with students was an important aspect for participants and provided an important counterpoint amidst the disorientation. While the stark contrast

between the educational facilities, resources and professional standards in Timor-Leste and Chris's own sending school was very apparent, interaction with the students provided the all-important connection to the familiar. Chris's reflection also provides an example of the epistemological approach of social constructionism used in this investigation.

A second contextual feature noted by participants is that of the Catholic perspective.

6.1.2.2 A Catholic context.

Formation in the Catholic tradition is first and foremost 'Christ-centred' (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). Setting an immersion experience for Catholic school staff within the meaningful context of the Catholic tradition therefore, is at the very heart of formation. The findings of this research indicate the importance of a meaningful context in providing participants with the opportunity for deep engagement with the experience of immersion. Within the framework of Catholicism, two meaningful contextual features were revealed to be:

1. the context of prayer and liturgy; and
2. the context of a shared charism

6.1.2.2.1 The context of prayer and liturgy

Participating in Catholic prayer and ritual in a different cultural setting and witnessing the faith of the local people, and its importance in their lives in the midst of adversity, can be a powerful experience. The celebration of family and community evident during religious ceremonies, and intergenerational involvement in all aspects of liturgy is outside the experience of most immersion participants. Many were profoundly affected by attending Mass in a different culture and considered the experience to be a

highpoint of their trip. Examples provided by participants in Chapter Four revealed the moving experience of participation in prayer and liturgy in another cultural setting.

When we went to the Mass up in the mountains... I do not know why, but that just totally... I was in tears. Just the whole thing, that moved me more than anything... and there was some sort of realisation of the reason I was supposed to have been there... (Heather, Philippines 2014)

At one point, [Sister Hana] then led the Rosary. It was one of the probably top three moments of my spiritual life, I would have to say. It was one of the most moving things I have ever experienced, and it just took me to another level. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

While the hymns and prayers are in the language of the host community, the ritual provides a sense of familiarity and certainty. Participants were moved by the enthusiasm and fervour of the congregation, and by watching rituals such as children presenting agricultural produce from family gardens during the Offertory Procession at Mass; and later seeing that same produce prepared by the women for the participants' morning tea. Widespread disillusionment with the Catholic Church exists in the current Australian climate (see Section 2.1.2), and witnessing family and community participation in religious ceremonies in another culture, somehow seems to reinforce what has been lost at home. A "deeper or renewed participation in the Eucharist and a faith community" (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 13) are features of the contemporary approach to formation adopted for this investigation.

6.1.2.2.2 The context of a shared charism.

In the case of this investigation, the Catholic context is nuanced by a particular expression of the tradition – that of the Good Samaritan Benedictine charism. The Gospel message of seeking to be neighbour and the imperative to ‘go and do likewise’ in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-17) recounted by Jesus, provide a ‘Christ-centred’ (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) context for immersion as a formation opportunity for staff. The significance for participants of setting the immersion experience within the context of a shared charism is evident in Geraldine’s response.

I think the unifying thing for us is beautiful. We only go to this country to visit these people in this place because they share that same spirit that we do. And I think that is a wonderful and really quite a lovely connection to have. That they welcome us into their community because we have the same foundation story that they do. I think it is a lovely thing. We would not do that if that connection was not there. So, I think that is a great thing. (Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

As the work of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan is no longer primarily in education, opportunities for staff members to connect to the work and ministry of the sisters in a twenty-first century context are very limited. For some participants, the immersion trip was a first encounter with religious sisters and their mission. As the participants all work in schools with a shared Good Samaritan Benedictine heritage, the context is a meaningful one. Comments made by Angie and Jess typify the responses:

The sisters are just amazing. I think walking into the Community Centre, walking into the Kinder school and seeing how they live out that parable, in really, really practical ways, it just makes the story come alive. They are the Good Samaritan and Jesus in those places. The way that they give such dignity to these people and

they do not discriminate. They give dignity and hope to anyone who is in need. I just saw Jesus in these people. (Angie, Philippines 2014)

“Go and do likewise”. They just do it. They see a need, they have gone and done it. And they are continually doing it. It is not static. It is such a dynamic process that they have got. Even the acquisition of the Community Centre. There is always something new starting, whether it be visiting prisons or the shanties or things within the Kinder School. They are living out that Gospel through and through, 100%!! (Jess, Philippines 2014)

Recognising artworks, and religious symbols, quotes and prayers, and observing the expression of the charism in a different cultural setting deepened participants' understanding of the tradition and provided points of connection to the colleagues they travelled with, and to their personal and professional lives. The realisation of a wider context for their professional life is an important factor for many participants as explained by Ariane in Chapter Four.

Going on a trip like this, you see what is going on in the greater scheme of things with the sisters and the school, and you feel more a part of a big community with the sisters. It is knowing what the work of the sisters is, that it is much wider than just schools. It is wider than just being a sister, but actually out there in communities serving. And so, trying to share that with the rest of the school when you come back, that connectedness between the schools and with the sisters, what the whole mission is about. (Ariane, Kiribati 2012)

In this research, setting the immersion within the context of Catholicism and a particular charism also provided an alignment with the “explicitly Christological,

scripturally rich and ecclesially grounded” aspects of *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 14). As noted by Angie, Jess and Ariane, the Parable of the Good Samaritan ‘came alive’ for participants through witnessing the ministry of the sisters.

First-hand experience of the work of the sisters and engaging with colleagues from the *GSE* network of schools provided a meaningful context for participants. On the immersion trips, Catholicism and a particular expression of that tradition, appeared to offer a bridge between participants’ own past experiences and how they might integrate new understandings into their personal, professional and spiritual lives.

A third meaningful context for participants in this research was revealed to be the context of partnership.

6.1.2.3 The context of partnership.

Situating the immersion experience within a context of partnership with the host community was also revealed to be an important contextual feature for participants. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan themselves have been involved in ministries in the host communities for up to 60 years, and the opportunity for staff in schools to form personal relationships with the both sisters and those in the local community has strengthened considerably the partnerships between the schools and the host communities. The understanding of being part of a wider partnership was very meaningful for most participants.

In the immersion itself, the partnerships are so important. That it is not just the little tourist bus coming through. And in fact, in the diversity there was so much beauty and learning. I think the partnerships with the people who live that life,

whether it is those working in ministry with those people, and as well as the local people themselves. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

This finding is in line with the work of Howell (2009) who proposed building a partnership approach to short-term cross cultural immersion and cultivating “specific relationships over the long-term” (Howell, 2009, p. 211). The key intentions of enabling ‘a culture of dialogue’ and ‘a deeper call into missionary discipleship’ found in *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) are also apparent in the context of partnership for immersion. The findings of this research revealed that participants appreciated being involved in the ongoing development and strengthening of partnerships between their school and the host community, and that it provided an additional point of connection in both the immersion and post-immersion phases.

6.1.2.4 The importance of a meaningful context for immersion.

Formation for mission of Catholic school members is described as being “respectful, experiential and relevant, building on participants’ personal story and everyday reality” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 14). In exploring both individual experience and community influence in formation, Gowdie (2011, 2017) found programs offered to staff need to be personally meaningful. The idea of an informational or doctrinally centred design to formation as an authentic or sustainable contemporary approach was fundamentally challenged by Gowdie’s research. The experiential nature of immersion provides opportunities for staff to critically reflect upon, and make meaning from their personal experiences, leading to the potential for transformative outcomes. As such, short-term cross-cultural immersions are closely aligned with Gowdie’s contemporary approach to formation.

Similarly, in a report prepared for the Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, Hughes (2008) argues that the starting point for developing programs aimed at spiritual growth should be rooted in holistic concern for others, especially the disadvantaged and vulnerable. Designing immersion programs which intentionally situate participants in a cross-cultural setting in a Majority World community leads them to direct encounters with disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Engaging with the heart of the Gospel message through holistic concern for others in a meaningful context, opens the possibility for “vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9).

Whilst the expression of Catholicism in the host community may be different, it is nonetheless the same tradition, and provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on its place in their own lives. While all participants work in a Catholic school setting, many are not affiliated with a worshipping community (see Section 2.1.2), and a number are not of the Catholic faith. Therefore, a Catholic immersion experience can have a role to play, at the very least, in assisting Catholic school staff members to consider the impact of the Catholic tradition in their lives. It may also assist those who are not Catholic to understand more deeply the universality of the Christian tradition.

A common understanding of context provided participants with points of connection to life in the host community. While the authentic encounter took participants away from familiar experiences, the counterbalance of a meaningful context provided an anchor point for them in the midst of disorientation and confusion, allowing some familiarity and reassurance. Confronted by difference in their new surroundings, Catholicism and a particular charism offered threads of constancy which most participants embraced wholeheartedly.

Unlike Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b, 1991, 1997, 2000) more narrowly defined parameters of a 'disorienting dilemma', which is said to occur when an experience does not fit with an individual's pre-existing meaning structure, it appears being able to access an 'anchor point' during the TLT key theme of 'experience' may be a factor which assists in the transformative process. It would seem that if a participant becomes too disorientated, they tend to feel unsafe and confused (see Trish, Section 4.1.1), triggering an emotive reaction which may overwhelm rational consideration. An anchor point on the other hand, provides familiarity in the disequilibrium. Finely balancing these opposite yet complementary elements of immersion provides unique challenges and opportunities for organising entities, but when achieved, would appear to offer a deeper, more resilient transformation.

Reflection and debriefing on the experience are further elements of immersion found to contribute substantially to transformative outcomes for participants.

6.1.3 Reflection and debriefing.

Reflection and debriefing are recognised as integral components of transformation of individuals in the scholarly literature (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Morgan, 2010; Pritchard et al., 2011; Taylor, 2007), in theory (Brookfield, 1998; Ettlign, 2006; Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b; O'Sullivan, 2012) and in practice (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). Formation of Catholic school staff is fundamentally a "reflective process that focuses on growth of individuals and communities" (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9). The reflective dimension of immersion allows individuals to deepen the process of formation by making meaning of their experience.

Reflection and debriefing may be formal or informal and take place individually or collectively. Ideally, on a short-term cross-cultural immersion, a range of opportunities would be provided. In this research, dedicated time set aside in the itinerary for reflection and debriefing was revealed as being crucial for participants (see Kylie, Section 4.4.1).

The experiential nature of immersions and the adult sample used in this research underscore the need for critical reflection in making meaning from the experience (Kolb, 1976, 1981, 1984). The role of critical reflection is also central to Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). After the disorienting dilemma encountered in the first stage of 'experience', TLT proposes that individuals move into the second stage of 'critical reflection' which triggers a reframing of beliefs and subsequent actions (Brookfield, 1998; Ettlign, 2006; Mezirow, 2000a).

The notion of fostering transformative outcomes of immersion through reflection on the experience has also been recognised in other scholarly literature (Morgan, 2010; Ross, 2010; Taylor, 2007). As explained by Nina, purposeful provision of time and space on an immersion trip opens the possibility for participants to reflect upon, and to understand the impact of the immersion trip on their lives (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Fanning, 2009; Stone, 2014), and might be facilitated through discourse with others who have shared the experience (Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

Whether it is journaling or whether it is conversation, or whether it is whatever type of prayer or reflection, that is where you go deeper. So, processes for that, I think, are very important. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

Along with the need for guided reflection as proposed by Fanning (2009), also evident in the findings and the literature (Morgan, 2010) is the need expressed by some participants for quiet, personal space in order to make meaning from their experiences.

I wanted more quiet time after some of those experiences. I was not always down there at dinner. I just needed that space; some people need that. (Rosanna, Philippines 2010)

Participants articulated the benefits of frequent reflection and debriefing sessions, and outlined in particular, the need to process ‘disorienting dilemmas’, as they may occur at different times for different individuals throughout the immersion. Viewing the data gathered in this research through the lens of the TLT key theme of ‘critical reflection’ reveals that reflection and debriefing are important steps in the process of participants engaging in immersion as a transformative learning experience.

Participants in this study also appeared to appreciate being offered a range of opportunities for debriefing and reflection. Many reported gaining a great deal from group discussions and indicated that hearing the reflections of others assisted them in processing their own experiences (social constructionism). Simply listening to the responses of others was helpful for some participants in validating their own thoughts and feelings. Other members of the group, on the other hand, did not feel comfortable contributing to discussions and preferred quiet reflection and journaling.

A creative path to debriefing was chosen by some, in the form of sketching, photography or poetry. Others found different ways of prayer such as *lectio divina* (see Glossary) to be a powerful expression of their experiences and to assist in the reflective process. As individuals experience immersion differently, and are at various stages of the

‘journey’ at different times, it is important that opportunities for a range of different styles of reflection and debriefing are offered and modelled at regular intervals, demonstrating the epistemologies of both constructivism and constructionism.

With respect to the importance of reflection and debriefing as elements of immersion which foster transformation of individuals, this research confirms the findings of the extant literature (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Brookfield, 1998; Ettlign, 2006; Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b; O’Sullivan, 2012; Pritchard et al., 2011) and mirrors the principle of formation being a ‘reflective process’ (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). Facilitating reflection and debriefing within a supportive group of like-minded colleagues is also revealed to be of importance to participants.

6.1.4 A supportive group of like-minded colleagues.

An immersion, particularly in the early stages of a trip, or after a disorienting dilemma, can be a source of intense disturbance for individuals in the group, which can leave them feeling helpless, vulnerable and emotional. Being able to debrief with a group of like-minded colleagues who share a common understanding of the immersion, and who might provide ongoing support throughout the time away is of great importance to participants (Lee, 1997; Lyon, 2002; Morgan, 2010).

Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) holds that the possibility for transformative learning occurs when an individual’s experience is at odds with their pre-existing meaning structures. After ‘critical reflection’ on the experience of the ‘disorienting dilemma’, the individual is then able to engage in ‘rational discourse’, the third of TLT’s key stages (see Table 6.1). This third stage involves exploring with

others the newly discovered ‘misfit’ between pre-existing presuppositions and frames of meaning, and the new environment (an example of social constructionism).

Providing opportunities for participants to engage in formal and informal discussions with others in the group, allows them to explore this ‘misfit’ in a safe and supportive space. It is through this process that experiences are reflected upon, assumptions and beliefs are questioned and meaning structures transformed (Taylor, 1998). In Chapter Four, Rosanna and Gina provided examples of understanding the importance of a shared experience and that others have negotiated a similar change (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b).

You talk to other people who have experienced it and you feel like you have that shared connection. (Rosanna, Philippines 2014)

If you experience this stuff together, it is profound at varying levels. (Gina, Philippines 2006)

Sharing the experience of immersion with a supportive group of like-minded colleagues contributes to transformative outcomes for participants. The interviews also revealed participants valued being with colleagues, not having the responsibility of student supervision, and appreciated the establishment of a structure on immersion that is conducive to meaningful dialogue. Engaging in the various phases of the TLT key stages of ‘experience’, ‘critical reflection’ and ‘rational discourse’ opened the possibility for participants to then move into some form of ‘action’ as a response. The ‘action’ phase is critical to this research as it uncovers specific self-reported changes made by participants as a result of their immersion. This aspect relates to the post-immersion phase findings presented in Chapter Five and is the focus of the second part of this chapter.

As well as the elements of an authentic encounter, a meaningful context and being able to reflect and debrief with supportive like-minded colleagues, this research demonstrates that in order to facilitate transformative outcomes for individuals, aspects relating to safety and well-being, are of high importance to participants.

6.1.5 Safety and well-being.

The interviews revealed that for some participants to be able to fully engage in the immersion experience, personal safety and security are of high importance. This finding lends support to the work of Dunn, Dotson, Cross, Kesner and Lundahl (2014), who found the presence of organisational features and attention to detail in planning immersion experiences help to avoid the barriers to transformational learning reported when programs are less structured.

Clarity of purpose, briefing and debriefing sessions, feeling safe, having confidence in the coordinators' ability to lead the trip, and a balanced itinerary which includes a range of cultural activities, were highly valued by participants in this investigation. For some, the immersion trip was their first encounter with another culture, and as described by Angie, feeling secure and confident in an unfamiliar setting alleviated some anxiety and allowed them to freely engage in the experience.

We stayed in a place where we felt safe and comfortable, so that we actually had energy to be able to pour into absorbing this experience. I think that was really important... I thought that made it possible to actually process things a bit better.

(Angie, Philippines 2014)

Having some sense of stability in the first disorienting phase of TLT, (as was found with the 'anchor point' in Section 6.1.2) also appears to be a factor which contributes to

a positive experience of immersion, to formation of participants, and ultimately, to the transformative process. While some level of discomfort is required for the disorienting dilemma to occur, an overwhelming experience may trigger an emotive need for personal security found in a point of connection. The significance attached to feeling physically and emotionally safe in a confronting and unfamiliar cross-cultural environment by the participants in this research has important implications for organising entities in terms of assessment and management of risk factors relating to immersion trips.

6.1.6 Summary of the discussion relating to the immersion phase.

In providing answers to Research Question One (*What features of immersion foster transformative outcomes for individuals?*), the findings of this research indicated the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes for participants to be:

1. an authentic encounter with the host community;
2. a meaningful context;
3. regular provision of a range of opportunities for reflection and debriefing;
4. sharing the experience with a supportive group of like-minded colleagues; and
5. safety and well-being.

In line with the scholarly literature, (see Figure 2.4), a synthesis of these findings has revealed that organisational structures are central to all elements of immersion fostering transformative outcomes. Situating an immersion within a meaningful context, providing opportunities for an authentic encounter, the regular provision of a range of opportunities for reflection and debriefing, building a community culture of support within a like-minded group of colleagues and managing the safety and well-being of participants are all features of immersion trips which are the responsibility of the organising entity.

The presence of these five elements opens the possibility for transformative outcomes for participants. On an immersion experience, construction of meaning is initially triggered within the individual (constructivism) through the experience of a disorienting dilemma. Subsequent transformation occurs in the company of others (constructionism) through engagement with the processes of critical reflection and rational discourse (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b).

If organising entities seek to foster transformative outcomes in participants through immersion, then it is incumbent upon them to ensure the provision of such opportunities in the design and facilitation of the trip. Responsibility for the inclusion of these elements in an immersion experience rests entirely with the organising entity. A summary of the organisational responsibilities relating to the provision of short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences which foster transformative outcomes for participants, thereby contributing to the formation of Catholic school staff, is presented in Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.1. Responsibilities of organising entities in fostering transformative outcomes.

Formation of Catholic school staff aims for growth of individuals and communities (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). As demonstrated in Figure 6.1, the findings relating to the elements of short-term cross-cultural immersion which foster transformative outcomes have wide-ranging implications for organising entities and as such, are addressed further in Chapter Seven.

In seeking to answer Research Question Two (*What are the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for individuals?*), the findings relating to the post-immersion phase presented in Chapter Five are discussed in the following section.

6.2 Short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion.

The discussion of the findings in the post-immersion phase, structured within the timeframes of short, medium and long-term (see Section 5.1), relates to changes noted in the whole of life, the professional domain and personal spirituality. The findings are considered in light of the relevant literature, theory and practice. In particular, the discussion draws upon aspects of *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) (see Table 6.1). The contemporary approach to formation adopted for this investigation focuses on the growth of individuals and communities (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017), and the findings of this research provide substantive evidence that short-term cross-cultural immersion is a catalyst for transformative outcomes which involve:

1. the individual;
2. the individual and others; and
3. the individual in action aimed at influencing others.

As such, the discussion focuses on transformative outcomes for individuals and others in the school community triggered by the immersion experience, thus highlighting the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff.

The findings of this research suggest transformative outcomes for individuals are evident in the short, medium and long-term post-immersion in the whole of life, in the professional domain and in personal spirituality. As participants generally did not limit their discussion of the individual spiritual journey to a particular timeframe, a discussion of the responses relating to personal spirituality is presented at the end of the chapter.

6.2.1 Short-term outcomes for individuals.

In the short-term (within three months of returning from the immersion trip), the findings revealed that after engaging in critical reflection – the second stage of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b), outcomes for individuals in the whole of life were navigating the re-entry phase and re-evaluating lifestyle. In the professional domain, outcomes centred on reporting back to schools. These findings are discussed in turn.

6.2.1.1 Outcomes in the whole of life.

The ‘disorienting dilemma’ – the initial phase of TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) is not confined to the period of time spent on an immersion trip. Re-entry to an individual’s own culture post-immersion is a critical time, often resulting in further disorientation (Kiely, 2011; Lyon, 2002). Characteristics of the re-entry period may manifest themselves in various ways (Kiely, 2011), and the occurrence of a disorienting dilemma after returning home is referred to by Lyon (2002) as a ‘re-entry trigger’.

This period of disorientation is a significant factor, particularly in the case of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips. Participants have barely come to terms with the encounter of life in another culture, with all its complexities, when they return to the reality and stark contrast of their own. This period of adjustment can be very unsettling for participants and may be even more difficult to navigate than the initial disorientation experienced in the host community (Kiely, 2011). A range of feelings such as exhilaration, exhaustion, disturbance and frustration were commonly reported in this investigation and many individuals expressed a desire to return to the host community.

I think when you first come back you are pretty fired up; you have been to the mountaintop! (Olivia, Kiribati 2012)

I came back in a state of lethargy. So physically it was really tiring to get up. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

I think you go from having all that time away and the excitement, and then after you have been home for a while, you drop down into a bit of “Oh, my God, reality. I wish I could go back there”. (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

This research aligns with the work of Kiely (2011), who found that whilst navigating the re-entry period, participants typically engage in a re-evaluation of their priorities and lifestyle.

6.2.1.1.1 Reassessment of lifestyle.

An alignment of this research with the literature is also evident in that after having been exposed to an environment which is geographically and culturally different from their own, participants engaged in critical reflection (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b; Morgan,

2010; Ross, 2010). As indicated by Annabelle and Nikki, a re-evaluation of lifestyle and priorities was a commonly reported outcome by participants in this study.

I had this strange urge to de-clutter my life. I just felt like I needed to take a step back and work out what is really important in life. (Annabelle, Philippines 2006)

[The immersion] gave me the impetus to change my life. And from that personal perspective of just clearing things up, saying “You have been with people who have nothing, you are doing things that do not make you happy, go back and clean your life up”. And that is pretty much what I did. And I think it took me out of being too self-aware, too selfish maybe. (Nikki, Philippines 2006)

The comments made by Annabelle and Nikki exemplified TLT’s Phase Two: ‘self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame’, and ‘a critical assessment of assumptions’ (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b), pointing to a profound personal realisation triggered by their immersion. For many participants, the immersion is their first encounter with a Majority World community, and the first shocking realisation of the immense wealth and privilege of a Western lifestyle.

Outcomes for individuals were also noted in the short-term timeframe in relation to the professional sphere.

6.2.1.2 Outcomes in the professional domain.

While the disparity in socio-economic and living conditions between Australia and the host communities visited may be evident on an intellectual level, the reality of the first-hand experience can be devastating for some individuals. Many participants described the need to talk about their experiences after returning home.

When you come back, the first thing you want to do is just talk about it. (Sam, Philippines 2007)

Formal and informal opportunities for debriefing in their sending school provided important avenues for participants to be able to engage in ‘rational discourse’, the third stage of TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). Formal reporting back generally involved facilitating presentations to the leadership team, staff meetings, student year groups or house groups, and/or to whole school assemblies. Many participants also articulated the value of reporting back in terms of awareness raising and strengthening links between their school and the host community. The critical reflection required in the preparation of a presentation for a school community would also seem to assist participants in the transformative process.

In line with the work of Lyon (2002), debriefing and feedback through informal conversations with supportive staff members, students, family and friends were also found to be of importance to participants. Continuing to debrief with others who have a shared experience of immersion (Ross, 2010) is critical in the immediate stages after returning home.

Another motivation some participants indicated for reporting back to schools is a sense of responsibility to tell the stories of the people in the host communities.

It shows a sign of respect for the country you have been to. (Caz, Timor-Leste 2011)

If you are going to go and walk in host communities like that, you have a moral imperative to make a difference somehow when you come back. (Kylie, Philippines 2004)

While most participants reported giving feedback presentations to their schools, some indicated that due to the busyness of school life and crowded agendas for staff meetings and assemblies, the opportunity was lost. In many cases, this seems to have left them feeling disappointed and somewhat ineffectual.

Maybe I needed to push it more, maybe I did not put my hand up and say, "I want to speak to the staff." I just thought they would put me in somewhere, and that did not happen. And I guess in the busyness of the school year, that sort of gets forgotten. Yes, things get lost. (Erin, Philippines 2014)

As critical reflection on the experience is required in the preparation of a presentation, and all styles of debriefing would appear to contribute to the transformative process, clarity in schools around where responsibility lies for organising the report back may assist participants in this process. While no participants mentioned reporting back directly at system level, or to school boards or parent groups, these may be other possible avenues for consideration.

Re-entry is a significant time for participants. ‘Critical reflection’ on the immersion through ongoing debriefing sessions and initiating conversations leading to ‘rational discourse’ with those who have shared the experience appear to be important steps in assisting individuals to make meaning from their ‘experience’ (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). It would seem organising entities and school and system leadership teams may have a substantive role to play in supporting participants through the process of critical

reflection post-immersion by facilitating a range of opportunities for debriefing and feedback. Clarity around role responsibilities in this regard would also appear to be of importance.

6.2.2 Medium-term outcomes for individuals.

The medium-term is defined as being between three and 18 months of returning from the immersion trip (see Section 5.1). After additional time for critical reflection (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 2000a), there appeared to be increased awareness in most participants that the impact of their immersion does not dissipate, and there was a heightened appreciation of the possibility of being an advocate for meaningful change. Whether initially feeling euphoric, disillusioned, anxious or overwhelmed, participant responses pointed to a need to engage in some form of action. It was simply not enough to be thinking differently, participants needed to act differently.

You feel pretty passionate, like you want to change the world when you come back from a trip like that. (Imogen, Philippines 2010)

This sense of needing to take action reflects TLT's (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) fifth phase – 'exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions'. What the particular course of action might involve was not always immediately apparent to participants, however, it was evident that in most cases, the plan needed to influence others in some way.

6.2.2.1 Outcomes in the whole of life.

The findings of this research revealed the medium-term to be the timeframe during which participants were most highly engaged in 'planning a course of action' – the fourth stage of TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). In most cases the immersion experience

stimulated a desire in participants to do something more with their lives, and individuals were highly motivated to initiate some form of action during this period. Generally, participants had engaged in further critical reflection and rational discourse, and the need to respond in some practical way emerged. While her subsequent action is representative of five participants, the sentiments expressed by Michelle are typical of many individuals.

Almost a year after the Philippines is when I started a conversation of, “There must be more to this”, and that quest for ‘the more’ was solidified, and I started active pursuit of a volunteer placement program in Africa. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

Michelle’s use of language in her references to ‘starting a conversation’ (rational discourse) and ‘starting an active pursuit’ (action) are clear indicators that her experiences are in perfect alignment with the third and fourth key stages of TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). The active search for ‘more to life’ after a disorienting dilemma as described by Michelle is also evident in the literature (Clark, 1993). The ‘integrating circumstance’ defined by Clark (1993) is a series of events that offer the individual an opportunity to make meaning from an experience, and may be seen as providing a ‘missing piece’ in a person’s life. Michelle’s comment also reflects a “growth in vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” – one of the guiding principles of *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 13).

In the medium-term, changes were also noted by participants in the whole of life with respect to their attitudes, and increased confidence.

6.2.2.1.1 Attitudinal changes.

With respect to the whole of life, changes in attitude after participation in immersion are noted in the literature (Gouldthorpe et al., 2012; Plante et al., 2009) and supported by this research. A broader mindset regarding people in the host country is one attitudinal shift noted by Dawn.

It has encouraged me definitely to read more about the Japanese culture and speak with Japanese people more about their country, and perhaps with more understanding and not so much bias. (Dawn, Japan 2013)

Sally also noticed a change in her attitude and perspectives after her immersion.

My outlook and my attitude; everything is different because of it. I think the experience maybe made me look at the world a little bit differently, and continues to. (Sally, Japan 2013)

The comments by Dawn and Sally are noteworthy in that their immersion experiences are more recent and that they are two of only four participants representative of an immersion trip to Japan. While the immersion to Japan certainly fits the criteria of being a cross-cultural encounter, some of the more confronting aspects of immersions to Majority World host communities are not present in this experience. Nonetheless, both responses indicate a critical assessment of assumptions (TLT's Phase Three) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). Furthermore, Sally is one of the five participants to do a volunteer placement overseas – the catalyst for which she attributed to her immersion experience.

Importantly for this research, the findings relating to the inclusion of participants who visited Japan and indigenous communities in Western Australia, would appear to indicate that factors other than the destination are important in promoting transformative

outcomes for participants. It would seem that elements such as an authentic encounter, a meaningful context, a supportive group of like-minded colleagues and opportunities for debriefing and reflection are more significant contributors to transformation than the destination of cross-cultural host community visited.

The strengthening of self-confidence through transformative experiences (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Lyon, 2002) is another aspect of the literature supported by this investigation.

6.2.2.1.2 Increased confidence.

Increased self-confidence and self-identity as a result of an immersion experience have been noted in the literature (Curry-Stevens, 2007), and were acknowledged by participants as the catalyst for various forms of action after their immersion experience.

I think I became confident after the Philippines experience to say, "I can put my life on hold". I definitely think it set me on the path. It gave me the confidence to back myself. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

I think the experience maybe made me look at the world a little bit differently. I am putting myself out of my comfort zone to do a volunteer experience next year in Africa. And I never would have done that before! (Sally, Japan 2013)

The comments made by Michelle and Sally also point towards TLT's Phase Nine – building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). Increased knowledge of self and the courage and confidence to act upon critical reflection and rational discourse would appear to promote significant outcomes in the whole of life for participants.

While the profoundly life-changing experience of volunteering overseas (TLT Phase 10) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b), is an outcome for only a few participants, others describe examples of thinking more carefully about integrating changes to their patterns of donating to charities.

And so, very quietly now, I am very conscious of, if I am giving particularly financial support, that it goes somewhere that is really going to make a difference.

(Trish, Philippines 2006)

You give to your parish after the experience, and I have committed to Catholic Mission as a withdrawal from my wages. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

Volunteering abroad and changed altruistic behaviour are significant outcomes that participants attributed directly to their immersion experience. It may be argued that individuals who put themselves forward for immersion trips are more attracted to this type of activity and possess a certain predisposition for the experience (Boyd, 1989, 1991; Boyd & Myers, 1988). This aspect was also articulated by Philippa in Chapter Four.

I would probably say that to put yourself forward to go on a trip like this, you are already wanting to go on that journey anyway. (Philippa, Timor-Leste 2011)

While such actions may have previously appealed to participants, the catalyst for the change was likely to be missing. In many cases, it would also seem participants had been searching for something more in their lives (Clark, 1993), and the immersion experience provided an avenue for them to further explore that desire in a very practical way. The significant actions reported by these participants are indeed 'life-changing' and indicate a deep and profound level of ongoing transformation.

The shifts in attitude and increased confidence leading to volunteer placements and increased altruism are also indicative of growth in individuals in their “capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9) – thereby providing further evidence of the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff.

6.2.2.2 *Outcomes in the professional domain.*

Shifts in attitude are also revealed in the professional domain in the medium-term. The findings indicated that teaching staff in particular, reported a heightened awareness of the possibility for meaningful change in the professional domain. Some conveyed a deeper understanding of, and connection to their school community and to mission and justice initiatives.

Now I am trying to think that there are always two sides to a story, and that comes across in my teaching, and especially, in my pastoral role with care and well-being. The importance of belonging and ensuring that everyone does belong to a community. I think that is important. (Jamie, Kiribati 2012)

It gave me the confidence to then want to further my career in that school, and stay in that school, and value my job, and want to be part of that community. (Nikki, Philippines 2006)

I do things differently in my area of influence in the school. In the pastoral aspects of the school, yes, very much so; in social justice aspects, yes. Before the trip the work of mission in the school had no connection to me... Whereas when it came around this year, I thought, "I am a part of Social Justice Day"... Now I have

realised that curriculum sits side by side with my job of delivering a social justice message (Chris, Timor-Leste, 2011)

The shift in attitude described by Jamie, Nikki and Chris underscores the powerful potential of immersion in the formation of staff. This shift was echoed by many other participants who also found ways to involve themselves in the mission life of their school. Increased involvement in student retreats and reflection days was also reported to have been triggered by an immersion experience.

The immersion definitely also catapulted me into being more involved in the formation and mission side of the school. I just felt more naturally in that space. (Nina, Philippines 2004).

I have felt that I can offer more in Year 12 retreats because of my experience. I am much more confident on those now, than I was. (Molly, Western Australia 2009)

The close alignment of these actions with TLT Phase Eight, ‘provision trying of new roles’ (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b), is evident in the examples provided by Nina and Molly. Their comments also point to the strengthening of self-confidence evident in the whole of life outcomes.

It would appear that greater knowledge and understanding of the school’s founding charism, values and ethos through personal engagement with the ministries of the sisters whilst on immersion, may have been the catalyst for increased confidence and involvement in the mission life of the school. It is also possible that the search for the ‘missing piece’ of their lives (Clark, 1993) leads participants to actions relating to mission

and service. The reflections shared by participants in relation to increased involvement in the mission life of the school suggest a “development in the willingness, confidence and capacities of participants to serve the evangelising mission of Catholic school education” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 13). Increased commitment to the school community and to social justice initiatives are also key indicators of growth in individuals from their lived experiences (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017), and indeed, highly desirable outcomes of staff formation programs.

Co-dependent with staff becoming more aligned with their school communities after immersion and making substantial contributions in areas of school life they had not previously been involved in, is the role of the school community itself in nurturing and supporting these contributions.

6.2.2.2.1 Supportive school community.

A common pattern emerging from the findings of this research was that of the value of being in a supportive school setting and belonging to a network of schools which provides regular opportunities for participants to reconnect, and to reignite their experience in different ways.

It is important when you come back, that there is a community that supports it.

(Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

You now feel like you belong to this big organisation who has shared values, shared mission, shared language, that is really important. (Kathy, Philippines 2010).

The importance of supportive relationships whilst on immersion is evident in the literature (Lee, 1997; Temple, 1999; Woloshyn & Grierson, 2015), and validated by this research through the element of ‘a supportive group of like-minded colleagues’ (see Section 6.1.4). Individuals undergoing a disorienting dilemma require the support of others to negotiate the experience (Lee, 1997), and need different types of supportive relationships whilst in a cross-cultural setting (Lyon, 2002). As a point of reconnection after returning home, and in line with the work of Gravett (2004) the participants in this research clearly identified the significance of a supportive school community in the transformative process.

An important finding of this study is that a school environment which actively facilitates post-immersion reflection and debriefing, encourages integration of the immersion experience into all aspects of school life and promotes staff engagement with mission, may be a significant factor in supporting participants in the transformative process. Connection and commitment of individuals to the school and its mission are strengthened as a result of this approach (see Nikki, Section 5.5.2.2).

The literature has also provided definitive evidence relating to the importance of a supportive school community in the post-immersion phase. Johnson’s (2014) findings indicated that the possibility for long-term change increases if participants are involved in action and advocacy after returning home, and Gravett (2004) and Ross (2010) concluded that participants required explicit guidance on how to act on new understandings in practice. These findings, and the findings of this investigation, therefore have significant implications for schools, systems and organising entities, with regard to their responsibilities to participants both pre- and post-immersion, and this aspect is further addressed in Chapter Seven.

Deepening a shared understanding of the values, ethos and mission the school through an invitational approach is at the heart of formation for Catholic school staff (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) and the findings of this research demonstrate that short-term cross-cultural immersion makes a substantial contribution to this process.

6.2.2.2.2 Influencing others.

In their semi-structured interviews, participants in this research indicated being aspirational about using their experience of immersion to influence others. Their changed perspectives of the world, of themselves and of education triggered a desire to engage in ‘action’ (the 10th phase of TLT) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) that involved others. The desire of participants to involve themselves in action after an immersion experience was reported by Tisdell (2012) and in the case of this research, actions included influencing colleagues, students, the wider school community, and in some cases extending to the host community and to the global community, as in the case of overseas volunteer placements.

Both Baumgartner (2012) and Taylor (2007) criticised Mezirow’s (1978a, 1978b) failure to deal with context, relationships and affect, in his model of Transformative Learning Theory (see Section 2.3). The findings of this research would appear to recognise the significance of all three of these aspects in the transformation of individuals through immersion.

The scholarly literature refers to aspirations as being the aims or goals of participants to develop and learn in terms of professional knowledge and experience (Rockwell & Bennett, 2004). In the professional domain, the literature reveals changed

aspirations after immersion to include developing study abroad programs, integrating global activities into courses and adopting culturally sensitive textbooks (Gouldthorpe et al., 2012). Aspirations reported in this research related to integration of knowledge gained from the immersion experience into course content, and further involvement in immersion trips.

In the academic year following their trip, participant actions centred on deepening student engagement with subject content through authentic integration of case studies and examples drawn from the immersion experience. In the medium-term, participants tended to initiate changes in their sphere of influence within the existing structures present in their school communities, particularly in the area of enhancing strategies for teaching and learning.

It definitely changed the way that I now view the world. And that is even coming through the teaching in some of my subjects. Like in Year 10 Geography we look at foreign aid, and so bringing the concept of my experience of going on this trip, to actually putting it into perspective, has definitely impacted on my own personal ethos (Sam, Philippines 2007).

It would seem the professional domain has benefitted from Sam's changed perspectives in the whole of life as a result of the immersion experience. Anna's initiative provides an example of both realising her post-immersion aspiration as a faculty leader and influencing staff and students at her school.

We use the Kiribati lens to look at a curriculum right through Year Seven to 12. If I had not done the trip, I would not have integrated that as a case study and followed it through. We focus on Kiribati or use Kiribati as a case study to do units on climate change, global inequality, foreign aid, oceanography and eco-

systems at risk. So, it is not just a tokenistic thing, it is fully integrated throughout the school. (Anna, Kiribati 2008)

In a similar way, Alex used the experience of immersion to integrate values, ethos and tradition into all aspects of school life.

The immersion trip to the Philippines afforded an opportunity to reflect upon possibilities for the integration of charisma and pedagogy in the wider school setting. So, the very way that we do pedagogy; the very way that we talk about our teaching and learning principles, are now part of the charisma. (Alex, Philippines 2007).

Through these actions Sam, Anna and Alex demonstrate ‘a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective’ – TLT Phase 10 (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b).

The most commonly reported aspiration articulated by participants in this investigation was to be involved in another immersion experience. Many expressed a desire to return to the host community, while others aspired to facilitate a similar experience for family or students.

My aspiration is definitely to go back, and I would love to take a group of students over there to see what it is like and to try and promote my passion in them. (Cheryl, Philippines 2007).

As indicated in Chapter Five, self-reported actions demonstrating increased confidence in the professional domain undertaken by participants included implementing changes in pedagogy, and initiating a range of opportunities for members of their school

communities to become involved in immersion trips, social justice and mission initiatives. In the time since their immersion five of the 53 participants (nearly 10%) have fulfilled aspirations to participate in further immersion experiences by volunteering overseas in Majority World communities and 15 (almost 30%) have been involved in subsequent immersion experiences.

It would seem the experience of immersion builds confidence and aspirations in participants, and engenders in them a desire to personally engage in the process again, and to influence others to do the same. The findings indicated that many of these participants sought out ways to integrate what they learnt from their immersion trip to enhance the life of their school, demonstrating TLT's Phase Five, 'exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions' (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b).

One expression of the mission life of the Catholic school is its involvement in social justice initiatives (National Catholic Education Commission, 2016). Since their immersion experience, a number of participants such as Sarah have taken on increased responsibilities and have been involved in driving social justice programs in their schools which involve members of the wider school community, sometimes extending back to the host community.

I think the profile of social justice has increased, and I guess my Timor trip was the catalyst for all those other things too, because if I had not been given that role then I would not have been able to do all those things. I guess I had a personal interest anyway, but then the trip really confirmed my suspicions that this was a good thing for a school to be doing! So yes, I guess it ripples! (Sarah, Timor-Leste 2011)

These actions were planned and purposeful, and sought to educate and influence the attitudes of those with whom participants worked, and to involve colleagues and students in programs of action and advocacy. It would seem immersion trips are valuable formation opportunities for staff members and the outcomes extend beyond the individual and the immediate.

6.2.2.3 The pivotal nature of the medium-term timeframe.

The findings of this research indicate the medium-term (between three and 18 months after an immersion) to be a pivotal timeframe for participants. It is during this timeframe that most participants engaged in some form of action that involved influencing others in their school community. In this study, instances of transformative outcomes were evident during this timeframe in the whole of life, through engaging in volunteer programs and changed patterns of donating to charities. In the professional domain, shifts in attitude were apparent, leading to increased involvement in the mission life of the school, and in the realisation of aspirations to influence others through integration of aspects of the immersion experience into curriculum and charism, and through involvement in other immersion trips.

In the medium-term, participants have negotiated the re-entry phase and have returned to life and work commitments, yet would seem to remain highly motivated by their immersion experience to become architects of change. After returning home, most participants expressed the desire to ‘give back’ in some way and this aspiration was realised through various avenues. Individual capacity for action would seem to be dictated by personal life and work circumstances and usually takes place within an individual’s sphere of influence.

The findings of this research revealed the medium-term to be the timeframe during which participants were most likely to engage in action. It is a time of high energy and high enthusiasm. In the school setting, a supportive environment which nurtures an individual's plan for action is shown to be an enabling factor in the transformative process.

As this research involves participants who have been on immersion trips as long as 10 years previously, the findings relating to longer term outcomes provide further insight into the ongoing nature of the experience.

6.2.3 Long-term outcomes for individuals.

For the purposes of this research, long-term refers to more than 18 months after participants have returned from the immersion trip. Outcomes in this timeframe were evident in the findings in the whole of life and the professional domain.

6.2.3.1 Outcomes in the whole of life.

While the incidence of engagement with activity and action triggered by their immersion would seem to be more measured with the passing of time, the findings revealed that for most participants, the outcomes of the experience were deep and long-term.

I think my sense of the experience and what I got out of it has remained really strong, I do not think it has dissipated at all. (Karina, Kiribati 2008)

For me, it is a transformational thing that takes a long time. So, I would say it sat with me. It is part of my process of development (Brenda, Western Australia 2009)

The findings indicated that for many participants, there was a sense that the outcomes of the immersion were deeply embedded and that different realisations emerged over time. This aspect was particularly evident in the responses of participants where a number of years had passed since their immersion.

I think there are layers to it, and I think depending on where you are at in your life, and I guess with maturity and other life experiences, I have allowed different bits of it to catch up with me. So, I do not know if they were always there and they are being revealed to me differently as life goes on and as retrospection comes into it... but I am gaining new meaning. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

It is life-altering in a sense that at the most opportune and inopportune moments in the rest of your life, something will come back of that experience that then will help you to discern what is happening for you in the present. I imagine that that is going to be there for the rest of my life. (Gina, Philippines 2006)

The reflections articulated by Nina (10 years after her immersion), and Gina (eight years after her immersion) provided an insight into the long-term nature of the outcomes of immersion for participants. Both indicated a realisation that the immersion was life-altering for them, that they still reflect on its impact, and that aspects of the experience continue to inform decisions and direction in their lives.

As expressed by Geraldine, and in line with the findings of O'Sullivan (2012), the findings also indicated that most participants were very aware that they had been transformed by the experience of immersion, that the change is ongoing and that their view of the world continues to be different as a result. Participants who reported this kind

of response over time reflect the final (10th) phase of TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) – ‘a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective’.

It somehow leaves you with a bit of an impression that you cannot ever see the world in quite the same way that you saw it before. For most people, there is a moment where something happens. It might not have actually been noticed by anybody else, but for that person this is that moment where there is some shift, and I think the long-term impact of that is probably incalculable. I think if you have actually had that moment, if you are open to that moment, then that changes everything, because you cannot ever quite go back to what you were before.
(Geraldine, Philippines 2007)

Another aspect brought to light in the findings of this investigation was that in the longer-term, participants have had more time to engage in critical reflection and rational discourse, and to consider an appropriate timeframe in which to act upon their aspirations. A few participants such as Gina expressed a desire for involvement in volunteer work at a later stage in their lives.

It has taken me a very long time, and a lot of that is practical, raising kids and looking after parents, and all of that. So maybe, now there is a bit more space in my life, this is really starting to bubble up a lot more now. So, it is an aspiration, and a yearning that whatever the next chapter of my life will be, it will in some way involve some advocacy or activism. (Gina, Philippines 2006)

Rather than acting on impulse or in a tokenistic way, Gina has taken a more considered approach and realises she would be able to make a more substantial contribution to volunteer work at a different stage in her life. The aspiration is present and points to the search for something more in life (Clark, 1993), which has become

evident to Gina in the longer-term. Gina's response is in line with Nina's earlier comment about 'layers' over time and provides a deeper understanding of Kitchenham's (2008) finding that TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) in some instances, is far more than linear. In this research, some participants were found to be somewhat constrained by life's circumstances and could, to some degree engage with the cognitive aspects of later phases before being able to 'action' them. For these participants, the cognitive and the physical needed to remain separate until more appropriate life circumstances could be facilitated.

Interestingly, evidence of Ver Beek's (2008) analogy of the sapling (being bent for a short time after the immersion experience, but returning quickly to its former state – see Section 2.4.2.5) was not apparent in the findings of this research. Perhaps this may be accounted for by the fact that all participants in this study were adults, and the longer-term time frame involved may have enabled them to action some of their long-held aspirations.

6.2.3.2 *Outcomes in the professional domain.*

When talking about long-term outcomes in the professional domain, some participants reported changes in beliefs and perspectives about the value of education and about themselves as teachers as a result of their immersion experience.

I guess that it professionally has shaped me into, not just a theoretical position that I have at school, but actually a life, a vocation, and the everyday sense of that. It enlivened for me the possibilities of what learning could be like. (Jan, Western Australia 2009).

I think it changed forever in me, things about my view of the value of education. I knew it was important but [in the Philippines] I could see by visiting the really

wealthy school and seeing the poverty of little kids in the Kinder, how important it was for them to get that start. It profoundly struck me that education is the only way that society can change. (Nerida, Philippines 2010)

It would seem the immersion experience triggered deep reflection about the place of education in the lives of some teachers. Jan and Nerida are both very experienced educators, yet having the opportunity to observe and participate in teaching and learning in a different cultural setting provided an insight into their profession not previously considered. Other participants believed the experience resulted in them becoming better teachers.

I think the growth in me probably makes me a much better person and a much better teacher. (Gail, Philippines 2006)

I think it has made me a better teacher; it has made me more tolerant. Seeing the teachers work with the little ones in the Philippines and setting the bar high rather than low, just because they are impoverished. In my work with the indigenous kids, that is what I have been trying to do as well. So, I think that has definitely left its mark. (Helen, Philippines 2010).

The critical reflection engaged in by these participants aligns with TLT's Phase Three, 'a critical assessment of assumptions' (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). Participants expressed an awareness of their changed perspectives, and the ongoing impact of their experience in the professional domain. These reflections also indicate "a growth in vocational motivation" – one of the guiding principles of *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*. (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). It

would appear the benefits of immersion trips extend well beyond cross-cultural and global competencies, and extend to influencing the very heart of teachers' beliefs about education and about themselves as teachers.

The findings of this research indicate clearly that the transformative process after an immersion experience is profound, deep and ongoing. After negotiating the re-entry phase in the short-term and the high energy, high activity period of the medium-term, participants reported the long-term timeframe to be a more reflective phase during which they gained a clearer perspective about the meaning of the experience in their lives. The experience never leaves them, and quite a few individuals reported using the immersion as a point of reference for decisions later in life.

Another notable finding of this research in the long-term, is that when greater numbers of individuals involve themselves in action which influences others in the post-immersion phase, this in turn influences the wider school community.

6.2.3.3 Outcomes for school communities.

This investigation brings to light that formation opportunities for staff provided by involvement in short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences trigger a desire in participants to engage in actions which influence others. Through influencing others, long-term outcomes for the wider school community as well as the individual are observed. Notably, this aspect appears to be particularly evident when there are a number of staff members from the same school community who have engaged in immersion trips over time.

In some *Good Samaritan Education (GSE)* schools up to 20 individuals have been involved in staff immersion trips. Brenda and Evie are both in leadership positions in their schools, and both have been on a staff immersion trip. They have had personal experience of immersion trips, have selected participants to be involved in the trips and have noted the benefits of having several members of staff in their schools who have experienced an immersion.

When we fundraise, as we do for each of the partnerships, people who have been on the different immersions will get involved and provide some material, some resources and things like that, which has been good. It means that when we talk about the sisters' ministries, there are enough people on staff who have been there to say "Oh yes, that is a really good thing, and let's do that." It is actually just building your base so the staff are open to the story. So, they understand what we are on about. So, when we talk about those things, there is never any resentment. There are never any people questioning it, and there is a high level of support. I actually think that it is really beneficial having staff going on these different immersions. It is actually real, and so there is an authenticity, and there is a credibility around the different partnerships. And so therefore, you do get people supporting it. No one says, "Oh, do we have to do this?" or "I'm missing out on class time," because they know it is really valuable. (Evie, Philippines 2010)

It is that idea of developing not just a civil society, but a civil and a just society and I do think it makes an enormous difference. And if you have got a critical mass it is a lot easier. (Brenda, Western Australia 2009)

Alex also holds a senior leadership position and concurs with the view that immersions have an influence beyond those who participate.

I am a great believer now in encouraging people to experience immersions... for the very fact that it makes the stories real. And if they are able to make the story real and come back and relate that reality to people who did not get a chance to experience that, then that changes things for everyone. (Alex, Philippines 2007)

The findings of this research indicate that when greater numbers in a school are involved in immersion trips, there are higher levels of staff 'buy-in' and subsequently, less resistance to the implementation of mission initiatives within the school community. It would seem the effect of immersion continues well beyond the individual and leads to growth of the school community (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). This finding is in line with the work of Gowdie (2011) who found formation programs have the potential to influence the wider community culture, and Taylor (2007), who noted peripheral consequences such as the impact of participant transformation on the organisation.

This aspect may well inform design elements of short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff, and in particular, the role of schools, systems and organising entities in the professional lives of staff post-immersion. The findings of this research would seem to go beyond the 10th TLT phase of 'a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective' (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) in that the action is not limited to the individual, it needs to involve and influence others, leading to changes in the wider community.

Formation of staff in the values, traditions and ethos of a school works towards building a supportive culture within the school community (Gowdie, 2011, 2017; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). The confidence strengthening in

individuals which is revealed to be one outcome of immersion, and the desire of participants to engage in some form of action which influences others after their experience, seems to have a synergistic effect which encourages involvement of the wider school community in mission and justice initiatives.

In Chapter Four, participants provided insight into the spiritual dimension whilst on immersion. In the post-immersion phase, however, the timeframe for change was less defined. As such, the discussion relating to personal spirituality is presented in the following section.

6.2.4 Personal spirituality.

As this investigation seeks to explore the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff, individual experiences of personal spirituality in the post-immersion phase are of importance. While some participants readily provided responses regarding whether or not they were moved by spiritual experiences whilst on immersion, the longer-term impact on personal spirituality was less clear and the timeframe less defined. Nonetheless some participants provided responses relating to personal spirituality in the post-immersion phase, and a synopsis of their reflections follows.

Michelle's reflection on her immersion experience 10 years earlier indicated the long-term nature of the outcomes of immersion for her, and highlights the importance of the formative dimension of the experience and a "growth in spiritual awareness" (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 12).

It is knowledge of self that you get from it, and it is knowledge of relationships.

The knowledge of yourself is about life formation and about how do you keep

control of your soul and your destiny, and the knowledge of the place is about being a global citizen. (Michelle, Philippines 2004)

Catholic schools provide opportunities for staff members to access formation in the tradition and the ethos of the school in a variety of ways. The Staff Immersion Program is one such avenue and the growth in vocational motivation in individuals through their lived experiences (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) is evident in Trish's comment.

In my last job, I was responsible for staff formation. I saw immersions as a really good formation opportunity for staff, because we would do a lot of preparation with them, and there was a reflection journal which was done daily, and it had very strong themes of spirituality in it. And they would come back from that, and I would find them really open to something else. (Trish, Philippines 2006)

The findings of this research offer insight into the Staff Immersion Program as a way for staff members to engage in a personal and shared religious experience, and to reflect upon their own personal spirituality, in a different cultural context. As spirituality is an individual experience, and there are different trigger points for connecting to personal beliefs, ideas and principles, predictably, the findings exposed a range of responses from participants in relation to this area.

Some participants found immersion to be a powerful experience for them as Catholics while those who were not Catholic found it to be spiritual in a different sense. Others responded to seeing the prayer life of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, and the faith of the local communities, and felt a deep spiritual connection to the people and communities they visited. Some, who did not consider the spiritual dimension to be

significant per se, found that they were stirred by inspiration and hope, while others reported no discernible spiritual aspect in the experience.

The reflections of Olivia and Nina provide insight into their spiritual experiences post-immersion.

I had a strong sense of presence of God [on the trip], but a lot of questions about presence of the church. And coming back it has deepened my sense of the spiritual that is in people of all places and cultures (Olivia, Kiribati 2012).

So, while there was so much that was unknown to me, that was enough to really push me, create a discomfort, and therefore caused me to go deeper and inward as well. What was familiar were these moments of grace, of meeting people, and what stood out was that contrast of haves, have-nots, and yet this beacon of faith, I guess, that the people had. And I think I have sort of allowed all of this to catch up with me way after, way after. And that is the beauty of it all. (Nina, Philippines 2004)

The findings indicated that many participants were profoundly moved by spiritual experiences whilst on their immersion trip, and that they have continued to explore dimensions of personal spirituality triggered by the experience after returning home as revealed by Olivia and Nina. Conversely, for others, the immersion was not a spiritual experience, and for some, was more one of recognising the work and mission of the sisters on behalf of others, and a sense of inspiration and hope in the host communities.

Even though there were religious elements and going to different churches and everything... like, fantastic. But not really, for me, no. (Cheryl, Philippines 2007)

Not that spiritual so much, for me, just... I suppose more an inspiration or an example of, this is what people put their adult life to. The nuns do not have to really be there, that is how they are. So, maybe to just understand something about calling, whatever that is, and maybe to reflect on, "Okay so in my life what am I going to respond to? What am I going to do?" But in terms of something more spiritual, not really. More that it was a practical expression of what these people are doing with their lives, and that's wonderful. (Nerida, Philippines 2010)

Spiritual in the sense that there is a lot of hope in those places, but I would not say I am spiritually transformed. I am Catholic. The culture is Catholic. There is obviously spirituality, and religion plays a big part in their lives and in many ways, they are happier than us. I do not think it has changed my spirituality so much, other than just knowing that there is hope out there. (Jess, Philippines 2014)

Setting the immersion within the meaningful context of the Catholic tradition promotes opportunities for engagement with deeper levels of “spiritual awareness and theological understanding” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9) whilst on immersion. Although participants reported being moved by participation in religious ritual and prayer during an immersion, one aspect that remains unexplored is whether this translates to increased involvement in a worshipping community after returning home. From a range of responses in Chapter Four, this would not appear to be the case.

The Mass at the beginning in Manila, I felt... I mean, I have gone to church my whole life, but I do not go anywhere near Mass on a Sunday now, but that was beautiful. (Imogen, Philippines, 2010)

It is possible the widespread disillusionment with the Catholic Church referred to previously may persist despite the presence transformative outcomes for participants. Including a specific question on this aspect in the interview schedule may well have revealed additional useful data for the investigation.

6.2.5 Summary of the discussion relating to the post-immersion phase.

In providing answers to Research Question Two (*What are the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for individuals?*), the findings of this research indicate that short-term cross-cultural immersion triggers outcomes for:

1. the individual;
2. the individual and others; and
3. the individual in influencing others.

in the:

1. short-term;
2. medium-term; and
3. long-term timeframes;

and have a wide-ranging influence in:

1. the whole of life;
2. the professional domain; and
3. the personal spiritual journey.

In the short-term participants typically engaged in navigating the re-entry phase and reporting back to schools. The medium-term was revealed to be a time of high activity during which individuals tended to involve themselves in initiating changes in their sphere of influence within the school community. Some developed greater confidence in their professional roles and realised post-immersion aspirations such as changes in

pedagogy and the mission life of the school, and involvement in further immersion trips. Examples of actions such as volunteering overseas and changed patterns of charitable donations were also apparent in the whole of life in the medium-term.

In the longer-term, participants evidenced changed perspectives on the vocation of teaching and their own role as educators. The longer-term was also revealed to be the timeframe during which participants were able to view the impact of the immersion in their lives with greater clarity and perspective. The wider impact on school communities when greater numbers of staff have been involved in immersion trips was also more evident in the long-term. Higher levels of staff 'buy-in' and less resistance to social justice and mission initiatives were reported outcomes for some school communities. The data in this study reveal the influence of immersion extends well beyond the individual to the wider school community, as actions undertaken by participants were primarily aimed at involving and influencing others.

The interviews revealed participant engagement with their experience of immersion does not dissipate over time. The high energy activity evident in the medium-term becomes more measured in the long-term, and participants tend to be more circumspect when making decisions about the type of action they engage in, and the time period in which they would be able to make the most effective contribution to volunteer projects. Participants also indicated an awareness of the deep and ongoing nature of the transformation triggered by the immersion.

As the participants in this research were involved in immersion trips spanning 10 years, many reported the realisation of post-immersion aspirations in the whole of life and the professional domain such as volunteering abroad and integrating knowledge

gained from their immersion into changes to pedagogy and mission. Changed perspectives and behaviours were reported by participants, aligning with a desire to engage in action which influenced others in the wider school community. Participants typically reflected upon their experience of immersion both individually and in discourse with others, and determined a course of 'action' (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) which in the case of this research, needed to involve influencing others in some way.

After summarising the findings of the research in the immersion and post-immersion phases, the discussion now turns its attention to explaining specifically how these findings answer the research questions generated in the review of the literature, to guide the conduct of the investigation.

6.3 Addressing the research questions.

In addressing the research questions, the alignment between the findings of the study and the lenses of *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) are clarified.

The findings of this research suggest that the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff can be understood through the experiences of participants whilst on immersion and in the post-immersion phase. Within each phase, themes emerged from the constant comparative analysis of the data. In the final stage of analysis, a synthesis of the data generated the areas for discussion.

The research concludes that there are elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes for participants and that outcomes are evident in the short,

medium and long-term post-immersion. The findings therefore provide a focused response to the research questions identified in the Literature Review.

These questions are:

1. *What features of immersion foster transformative outcomes for individuals?*
2. *What are the short, medium and long-term outcomes of immersion for individuals?*

6.3.1 Addressing research question one.

The first research question sought to provide an understanding of the experiences of participants on short-term cross-cultural immersion trips, and to identify the specific elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes. In viewing the elements identified by participants through the dual lenses of TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) and *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017), the alignment between the two appears in sharp focus. This research concludes that the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes in individuals are:

1. an authentic encounter with the host community;
2. situating the immersion within a meaningful context;
3. experiencing the immersion with a supportive like-minded group of colleagues;
4. provision of opportunities for reflection and debriefing; and
5. safety and well-being.

An important conclusion of this research is that factors other than the destination of the immersion, or the age, gender, state, diocese, religious affiliation or sending school of participants influence the transformative process. An authentic encounter in a

meaningful context which incorporates opportunities for reflection and debriefing within a supportive group of like-minded colleagues, where safety and well-being have been attended to, are pivotal factors in fostering the transformative process for individuals.

The purpose of formation is transformation (Brisbane Catholic Education, n.d.) through the growth of individuals and communities (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). In uncovering the elements of immersion which foster transformative outcomes, the conclusions of the research have significant implications for schools and organising entities in the design and facilitation of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff.

6.3.2 Addressing research question two.

The second research question focused on uncovering the outcomes of immersion for participants. The research concludes that short-term cross-cultural immersion triggers outcomes for the individual, the individual and others, and for the individual in action which seeks to influence others; in the short, medium and long-term timeframes; which has wide-ranging influence in the whole of life, the professional domain and personal spirituality.

Points emerging from the discussion in relation to the second research question are:

1. the importance of continuing to engage in reflection and debriefing in the post-immersion phase;
2. the role of schools and organising entities in providing an environment and culture which supports the transformative process for individuals;
3. the pivotal nature of the medium-term timeframe; and

4. the influence of individuals post-immersion on the wider school community.

These aspects are further rationalised in Chapter Seven.

6.3.3 Addressing the major research question.

The discussion of the findings of this research in light of the relevant theory, literature and practice has revealed an alignment between the key areas of formation of Catholic school staff, short-term cross-cultural immersion and transformation of individuals as outlined in Chapter Two. Viewing the findings through the lenses of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) and *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017), indicates that short-term cross-cultural immersion trips make a substantial contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff – thus answering the Major Research Question: *What is the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff?*

Each of these aspects is addressed in turn.

6.3.3.1 Transformative Learning Theory

The experiences of participants in this research revealed a close alignment with Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). The TLT model serves a dual purpose in providing a way of understanding adult learning, and as an appropriate lens through which to view the findings of the research.

While the various phases of TLT were evident in the responses of participants, and have been identified in the discussion, the linear approach of Mezirow's (1978a,

1978b) model was not as apparent in the findings of this research. The findings are consistent with the stages of TLT, and with Kitchenham's (2008) assertion that they do not need to be experienced in sequence or in their entirety. The findings diverge from Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) conventional linear model of TLT however, and a development of the model reflecting the experiences of participants in this study is offered.

The findings of this research would suggest the effect of the transformative process is not confined to the individual. Meaning is constructed both individually and collectively, and each affect the other. Engagement of the individual with the collective is evident in the stages of critical reflection and rational discourse, and the desire to influence others through action. The *experience* of the disorienting dilemma is intensely personal and unique to each participant. This stage involves the individual. The stage of *critical reflection* involves both personal reflection and debriefing with others (the individual and/or the collective). During the stage of *rational discourse*, the research reveals engagement in dialogue with family, friends and colleagues (collective). The *action* stage of the model indicates an additional aspect of TLT (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) in that the action planned and undertaken by individuals needs to influence others (the individual and the collective).

The action described by participants in the professional domain usually involves initiating changes in their sphere of influence within the school community (influencing the collective). It is possible that the desire to influence others is related to the participants being professional educators. Whether the same drive to influence others after an immersion experience is common to other professions is not addressed in this research. The need to influence others may also be linked to the increased capacity of participants

for critical reflection and rational discourse linked to age and higher cognitive function (Merriam, 2004).

6.3.3.1.1 Development of Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) Model of Transformative Learning Theory.

The development of the model of TLT (Mezirow 1978a, 1978b) emerging from the findings of this investigation, and the increasing levels of engagement of participants with the collective as they move through the four stages, is presented in Figure 6.2.

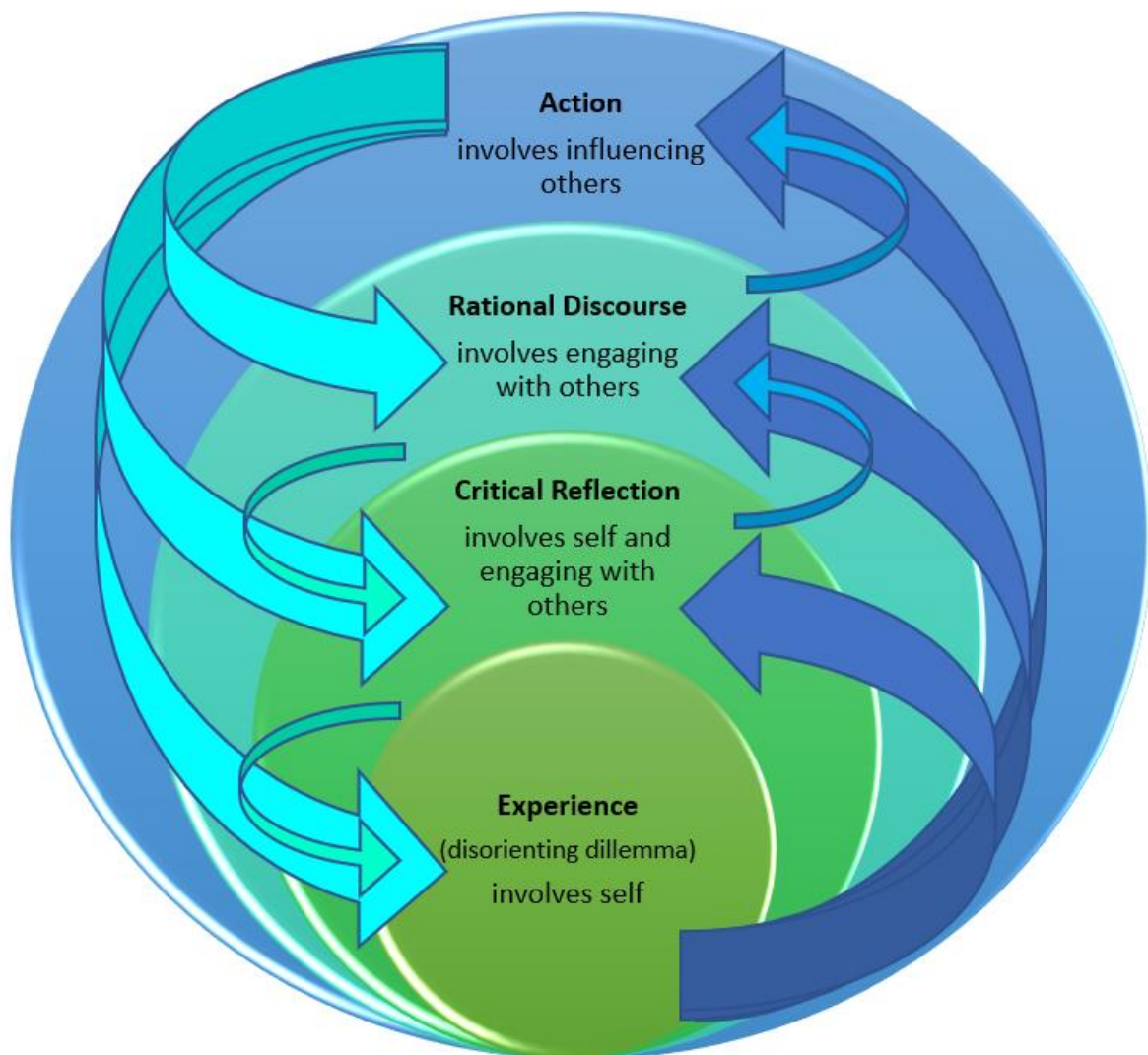


Figure 6.2. Development of Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) Model of Transformative Learning Theory.

The bi-directional model of TLT emanating from the findings of this research suggests a developmental paradigm, which involves moving outwards from oneself in the ‘experience’ stage, to engaging with others during ‘critical reflection’ and rational discourse’, and eventually to ‘action’ which influences others. The model demonstrates that the disequilibrium caused by a disorienting dilemma to be an individual only episode in the ‘experience’ stage. The broadening effect on the collective is represented through the blue arrows connecting to the outer circles of ‘critical reflection’, ‘rational discourse’ and ‘action’, as the individual engages with others through the various stages of transformation. In line with Kitchenham’s (2008) work, the diagram incorporates the potential for movement between the all stages of the model, with the green arrows indicating the possibility for foldback to previous stages throughout participants’ lives.

An understanding of the engagement of participants with self and others, particularly in the pivotal medium-term timeframe, has implications for individuals and school communities as participants seek to understand their experience of immersion. There are indicators also for informing policy and practice as schools and organising entities strive to design immersion experiences which foster transformative outcomes for individuals, and ultimately for school communities – thereby contributing to the formation of Catholic school staff.

The alignment between the findings of this research and *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* in answering the Major Research Question becomes apparent in the following section.

6.3.3.2 *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education.*

An alignment between participant experiences of immersion and *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) (NCEC) is evident in the research. This alignment offers the clearest indicators in providing answers to the Major Research Question: *How does short-term cross-cultural immersion contribute to the formation of Catholic school staff?*

The contemporary approach to formation of Catholic school community members adopted for this research is that it is:

Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world. (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9)

Each of the dimensions of the NCEC approach to formation as evidenced in the findings of this research, is addressed in turn.

6.3.3.2.1 Christ-centred.

Formation in the Catholic tradition is first and foremost Christ-centred. Setting an immersion experience for Catholic school staff within the meaningful context of the Catholic tradition (Research Question One) is at the very heart of formation. In the case of this investigation, the context is nuanced by a particular expression of the Catholic tradition – the Good Samaritan Benedictine charism. The Gospel values of seeking to be neighbour and the imperative to ‘go and do likewise’ found in the Parable of the Good Samaritan recounted by Jesus (Luke 10:25-37), provide a Christ-centred context for

immersion as a formation opportunity. While many participants embraced the context and reported profound spiritual experiences triggered by the immersion, others who did not consider the spiritual dimension to be meaningful as such, recognised the significance of the humanitarian endeavours in the host communities and found that they were stirred by inspiration and hope.

6.3.3.2.2 Intentional and ongoing.

Intentional formation opportunities aimed at the growth of individuals and communities (Brisbane Catholic Education, n.d.; Gowdie, 2011, 2017; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) are typified by the immersion process. The design elements which appear to foster transformative outcomes are identified in the findings of this research (Research Question One). The ‘ongoing’ dimension of immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff may be viewed in two ways.

First, the findings of the research demonstrate the importance of immersion experiences being set within a meaningful context – such as that of the Catholic tradition, a shared charism, involvement in prayer and liturgy, (Research Question One) and providing points of connection for participants during the immersion experience. Similarly, after returning home, the research concludes participants are more likely to reconnect within the meaningful context in the professional domain, involve themselves more deeply in the mission life of the school and adapt curriculum to reflect issues present in the host community.

Second, the deep and ongoing nature of the immersion experience as a formation opportunity is noted in the long-term findings of this study. Participants reported an awareness of the deep and ongoing nature of the transformation they had experienced and

that it continued to inform decisions made in different aspects of their life up to 10 years after their trip (Research Question Two).

6.3.3.2.3 A reflective process.

Formation is fundamentally a reflective process which aims for growth of individuals and communities. The reflection and debriefing identified as being an element of immersion which fosters transformative outcomes (Research Question One) also aligns with the ‘critical reflection’ phase of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). The reflective dimension of immersion allows individuals to deepen the process of formation by making meaning of their experience, thus leading to engagement in action – and as revealed in this research, action which influences others. The provision of regular opportunities for reflection and debriefing during which a range of styles is offered and modelled, was found to be significant for the participants involved in this research.

6.3.3.2.4 Focuses on the growth of individuals and communities.

The findings of this investigation indicate growth of individuals in relation to the whole of life, the professional domain and personal spirituality (Research Question Two). The transformative dimension of immersions is evident in changed perspectives, behaviours, attitudes, aspirations and actions in the short, medium and long-term. There is also substantive evidence post-immersion to indicate the desire of participants to influence others.

These individuals actively look for ways to inspire, encourage and guide others – in classes, in faculties, in mission and across the whole school community. The impact of these actions is increased considerably when a number of individuals in the school have been exposed to an immersion opportunity. In this case, a cultural shift becomes apparent

across staff-members in a more positive approach to the mission life of the school, and less resistance to time allocated to mission activities.

6.3.3.2.5 Lived experiences.

Central to formation are the lived experiences of participants. Respect for the individual journey of the human person is the overarching principle of formation for mission. Formation for mission in Catholic education is “respectful, experiential and relevant, building on participants’ personal story and everyday reality” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 14). The authentic encounter (Research Question One) experienced by participants on short-term cross-cultural immersion provides a profound personal narrative through which to engage with the ongoing process of formation both during the immersion and in the post-immersion phase.

6.3.3.2.6 Spiritual awareness and theological understanding.

The findings of this research indicate that for many participants, although not all, the immersion experience is a catalyst for a profound spiritual experience (Research Question One). Setting the immersion within the meaningful and relevant context of the Catholic tradition promotes opportunities for engagement with deeper levels of spiritual awareness and theological understanding. For some, the effect of the immersion on spiritual awareness and theological understanding is not evident. This particular group of participants did appear to deepen their understanding and knowledge of the shared Good Samaritan charism, yet did not report changes in their personal spiritual life. Whether the experience of immersion is a catalyst for reconnection to a worshipping community in the post-immersion phase remains unknown.

6.3.3.2.7 Vocational motivation.

Vocational motivation is evident in the findings of this research in various ways. Many participants reported a newfound and deeper understanding of the role and value of education, the vocation of teaching and of themselves as teachers as a result of their immersion experience (Research Question Two). Post-immersion, in the medium-term in particular, participants demonstrated high enthusiasm and high energy in integrating the experience of immersion into various aspects of the professional domain such as pedagogy and mission.

6.3.3.2.8 Capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world.

In the Catholic tradition, the incarnation of the Gospel message is found in outreach and service to others. Setting the immersion in a meaningful context (Research Question One) which includes engagement with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching would seem to promote opportunities for awareness, action and advocacy. The findings of this research indicate that capacity building, due to the experience of immersion, translates to increased capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world in this way. For many, increased confidence is the main capability that has been enhanced, and for others there has been an active pursuit of knowledge.

Many participants indicated a shift in attitude, and increased involvement and commitment to the mission life of their school. Engagement with volunteer programs overseas, changed patterns of donating to charity, increased involvement in social justice days, student retreats and reflection days, participation in other immersion trips and involvement in building an ongoing partnership with the host community (Research Question Two) are all reported outcomes of immersion in relation to increased capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world.

6.3.4 Conclusion.

The discussion of the findings of this research has revealed a seamless alignment with *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) which indicates that short-term cross-cultural immersion trips make a substantial contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff. It has also demonstrated close alignment with, and contributed to the development of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow 1978a, 1978b).

Additionally, the research has revealed that with teachers, and school leaders, whose very role in a school requires influencing others, there is an additional aspect to TLT that further develops the transformation – that of re-positioning oneself to ensure that new perspectives influence and affect the understanding of others. Transformative Learning Theory finds new expression in the post-immersion phase through the deeper engagement of participants with a range of contexts in their school community.

In providing answers to the research questions, this investigation concludes that significant aspects of the study can be distilled to include:

1. the value of immersion in the formation of Catholic school staff;
2. the design and facilitation of short-term cross-cultural immersion;
3. the pivotal nature of the medium-term timeframe; and
4. points of connection for participants.

These aspects have significant implications for individuals, organising entities and school communities. In Chapter Seven these implications are outlined in further detail, with recommendations for future policy and practice.

In Chapter Six a discussion of the findings of the research into the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff has been presented. Answers to the research questions have been provided, and the links between these answers, Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) and *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) – the contemporary understanding of formation adopted for the investigation, have been explained. In Chapter Seven, the conclusions of the study and recommendations for future research are offered.

Chapter Seven

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide conclusions and recommendations emanating from the findings of the research into the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. The chapter begins by outlining contributions to new knowledge and to theory. The originality of the investigation and its limitations are then described. From the conclusions of the study, recommendations for practice and future research are offered, followed by a final conclusion to the thesis.

7.1 Contributions to new knowledge.

There are several conclusions generated from this research that contribute to new knowledge.

7.1.1 *Value of immersion in formation of Catholic school staff.*

This thesis concludes that short-term cross-cultural immersion trips make a significant contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff. The experiences have a profound and ongoing impact on the lives of participants, causing them to “*re-perceive and re-place [themselves] in the world*” (Alex, Philippines 2007). The experiential nature of the trips engages participants personally in the stories of their tradition, their school and the host communities, thereby enhancing the possibility for transformation. Outcomes reported by individuals in the whole of life, the professional sphere and personal spirituality, centre on personal transformation, leading to a desire to influence the lives of others, thus providing a deeply authentic staff formation opportunity like no other currently on offer.

This research also provides compelling evidence for the place of short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff as demonstrated by the well-defined links to the key features of *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017). This contemporary view of formation recognises the diversity of staff populations within and across Catholic schools, and underscores the need for re-imagining possibilities for flexible delivery of formation programs as exemplified by short-term cross-cultural immersions.

As participants are transformed by their personal experience of immersion, they feel compelled to engage in action which influences others. This research also concludes that when a number of members of staff from the same school have been involved in immersion trips, the collective capacity for shifting the culture of the school community increases, particularly in relation to mission. How institutions are changed by transformed participants was also a peripheral finding noted by Taylor (2007). Enhanced understanding of, and commitment to, the values and ethos of the school and increased levels of staff engagement in activities relating to the mission life of the school, are outcomes of immersion which have a significant impact on the wider school community, and are at the very heart of Catholic education.

7.1.2 Design and facilitation of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips.

The second conclusion concerns new knowledge relating to the design and facilitation of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips. This research concludes that organisational factors such as an authentic encounter with the host community, situating the immersion within a meaningful context, experiencing the immersion with a supportive group of like-minded colleagues, provision of opportunities for reflection and debriefing,

and attending to the safety and well-being of participants, are more critical in fostering transformative outcomes than other factors such as the age, gender and sending school of the participant, or the location of the host community.

The findings relating to organisational aspects are of significant import. In some styles of immersion, for example, participants do not engage with the people in the host community. The findings of this research, however, conclude that the experience of the authentic personal encounter, is integral to triggering a disorienting dilemma – the first stage of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). The counterbalance here is the physical and emotional safety of participants, which are crucial factors in the potency of the transformative process. If the level of disequilibrium experienced by an individual is too overwhelming, and therefore not viable, the individual withdraws. Conversely, if the level of discomfort is insufficient, then no disorientation occurs, precluding the likelihood of the transformative process. This conclusion has wide-ranging implications for organising entities in the design, facilitation and risk management of all short-term cross-cultural immersion trips.

This investigation also concludes that immersion is a three-phase process (pre-immersion, the immersion experience and post-immersion) and that organising entities have significant responsibilities in all three phases.

Preparation in the pre-immersion phase is essential to participant understanding of, and engagement with the process. Providing clarity of purpose for the immersion and connections to the background, tradition and unifying features of the group, as well as contextualising the host community in terms of its historical, political, social, cultural and

religious setting, offer points of connection (or anchor points) for participants in the midst of uncertainty and disequilibrium whilst on immersion.

In the immersion phase itself, this research concludes the essential elements to be an authentic encounter with the host community, a meaningful context, a supportive group of like-minded colleagues, the provision of opportunities for reflection and debriefing and the safety and well-being of participants. Organisation of all of these aspects is the sole responsibility of the organising entity.

Similarly, in the post-immersion phase, schools and organising entities have further responsibilities to participants. These include assisting participants to navigate the re-entry phase, the provision of opportunities for ongoing reflection and debriefing, and to guide participants towards appropriate initiatives for action – thus enhancing the potential for transformation.

7.1.3 Pivotal nature of the medium-term timeframe.

The pivotal nature of the medium-term (between three and 18 months after an immersion experience) is a third conclusion of this longitudinal investigation. After negotiating the re-entry phase and considering plans for action based on their experience, critical reflection and rational discourse, the medium-term is a period of high energy and high enthusiasm for participants. It is during this time that individuals come to a realisation of the ongoing impact of the immersion experience in their lives, and their increased capacity and motivation for action and advocacy.

Plans for strengthening partnerships with the host community evolve into awareness raising and fund raising, and personal transformation becomes a catalyst for

influencing the lives of others, particularly in the professional sphere. As the re-entry phase is often a period of further disorientation and readjustment for participants, it would seem that the increased clarity gained from critical reflection and rational discourse in the short-term, make the medium-term timeframe more conducive to sustained and significant plans for action.

As the transformative process is enhanced through reflection, debriefing and reporting back, schools and organising entities have a particular responsibility to participants in providing a range of appropriate avenues to facilitate these processes. Schools and organising entities may also benefit from actively engaging participants in dialogue regarding the potential for involvement in action relating to the mission life of the school, particularly after the re-entry phase has been negotiated.

Through the experience of immersion, participants often come to the realisation that their personal values are in fact closely aligned with the ethos of their school community, and the internalisation of this realisation appears to come to fruition in the medium-term. It is incumbent upon schools and organising entities to ensure support for participants during this period, and to channel the individual's energy and enthusiasm into actions which are:

1. developed in dialogue with the host community;
2. aimed at strengthening partnerships between the school community and the host community;
3. undertaken collectively rather than individually; and
4. focused on enhancing the mission life of the school.

Advice and direction for participants in relation to these factors is crucial. The need for institutional support and guidance post-immersion is evident in the work of Gravett (2004). Consideration of the potential for damage to fragile host communities through uninformed, albeit well-intentioned activists is imperative. As impulsive, emotive reactions are more likely in the exuberance of the short-term timeframe, channelling (or even curbing) energy and enthusiasm derived from participants' 'new dawnings' may be the key to supporting and promoting the Catholic Social Teaching dimension of subsidiarity, and developing the desirable long-term attributes of:

1. attitudes that stem from informed rather than privileged perspectives;
2. dispositions which preference dialogue over assumptions; and
3. partnerships with host-communities that are equal and mutually beneficial, rather than those which are unilateral and/or encourage an unhealthy dependency.

7.1.4 Points of connection for participants.

A fourth conclusion concerns points of connection for participants whilst on the immersion. Being able to access some aspects of familiarity within the period of disorientation assists participants to make sense of their new surroundings, to engage with the experience and to enable the transformative process. Visiting educational facilities provides a sense of certainty and security for staff members, while the Catholic context offers a close link to the tradition of their school. A deeper understanding and insight into the social justice imperative of the mission life of their school is also enabled through visits to a range of community and welfare agencies. Information provided at the preparation sessions relating to the complex historical, cultural, social and religious dimensions of the host community also support an understanding of the new environment. Feeling physically safe in their surroundings and emotionally supported by their group contribute to participants being able to navigate the dissonance between pre-existing

meaning structures and the new reality – ‘accommodation’ in the terminology of Piaget (1967).

Identification of ‘anchor points’ is an important contribution to new knowledge. While some degree of disturbance is necessary for disorientation to occur, it would seem that if participants are completely overwhelmed by the experience of encounter, their capacity to move through the stages of transformation is compromised.

Points of connection are similarly important in the post-immersion phase. Schools and organising entities who provide opportunities for participants to strengthen partnerships by connecting back to the host community, and encourage ongoing involvement in mission related activities, enhance the potential for transformative outcomes. In the key medium-term timeframe in particular, invitations to participants to engage in school and community based social justice programs and support of individuals’ proposals for initiatives in their sphere of influence, propel them to engage in actions which influence others – thereby contributing to the mission life of the school.

7.2 Contribution to theory.

The analysis and synthesis of the data gathered for this investigation reveal a close alignment with the model of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) developed by Mezirow (1978a, 1978b). Using the TLT model as a lens through which to view the data and to frame the discussion, provide insight into the short-term cross-cultural experiences of participants in both the immersion and post-immersion phases.

Mezirow’s TLT model (1978a, 1978b) concerns individual transformation that results in social impact in the fourth stage of ‘action’. The findings of this research suggest

something more. First, collective as well as individual construction of meaning occurred throughout the stages of the transformative process, and second, the impact of the individual on the collective through influencing others was evident both in both the immersion and post-immersion phases.

The collective construction of knowledge in the socio-cultural tradition evidenced in the findings of this research is embedded in the epistemology of constructionism selected for the investigation. Similarly aligned is the epistemological approach of constructivism, demonstrated through the findings relating to the individual construction of knowledge (in this case, with others) throughout the immersion experience. Symbolic interactionism's underlying principles of the centrality of meaning, subjectivity, and the social construction of reality are also explicit in the experiences of the participants in this research.

This investigation revealed the development of the model of TLT (see Figure 6.2) to be bi-directional between the individual and the collective, rather than Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) more linear approach. Folding back to earlier stages was evident, and in line with the work of Kitchenham (2008), participants did not necessarily move between the phases of transformation in sequence or their entirety.

7.3 Originality of the research.

This investigation is original and significant in several key areas. The study is the first in Australia to address the contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion to the formation of Catholic school staff. Formation of staff has received very little attention in the literature, particularly in the Australian context, and immersion as a formation opportunity has not previously been researched.

Most studies relating to the immersion phenomenon have focused on a single immersion trip, on a single occasion, for one group of people, and in the immediate post-immersion phase. This research has reported on 10 immersion trips, to five different host communities, over a 10-year period, accessing longitudinal change in participants and uncovering new insights and knowledge. While previous studies have focused primarily on the experiences of adolescents and undergraduate students, this investigation focused on a relatively large sample of adult participants who have a greater capacity for critical reflection.

The introduction to this thesis acknowledged the imperative for formation in the current Australian Catholic landscape, and the increasing global popularity of immersion trips. The study has aligned Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b) with the process of adult formation through the experience of immersion, and the data have been viewed through the dual lenses of TLT and a contemporary approach to formation as articulated in *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Schools* (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017).

The research is significant as it has identified three stages in the post-immersion phase – the short-term re-entry period, the high activity of the medium-term and the more reflective long-term phase. The identification of the pivotal medium-term phase in particular, and its potential as the timeframe for focused action, contributes to new knowledge. The research has also uncovered the desire of participants to engage in action which influences others in the post-immersion phase.

This investigation offers a blueprint for the design and facilitation of immersion trips and has identified the elements of immersion which contribute to the transformation

of individuals. The application of these findings may support the development of immersion programs across various faith-based and secular agencies and organising entities.

The research also concludes that the wider school community benefits from the post-immersion actions of participants in two ways. First, individuals feel compelled to engage in action which influences others, and second, the collective capacity of greater numbers of staff to influence the school community through their actions is apparent in this research. An awareness of these aspects provides schools with knowledge relating to the optimum timeframe during which to engage participants in actions which are most beneficial to the individual, to the school and to the host community.

This investigation is also original in its contribution to theory through the development of Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) model of Transformative Learning Theory. Based on the findings of this research, a bi-directional model which recognises the impact on the collective of a shared experience, and the impact of the individual on the collective throughout the stages of the transformative process, is offered.

7.4 Limitations.

While important implications can be drawn from the findings of this investigation, there are limitations to the research. First, the study was limited to Catholic secondary schools governed by the Public Juridic Person, *Good Samaritan Education*, and as such, there are close links between the schools. The schools share a common ethos and tradition, prioritise opportunities for staff formation and are very supportive of the Staff Immersion Program. Although the study may be replicated by other school systems and

faith-based or secular organising entities, the particular culture of participating schools needs to be considered when reviewing the findings.

A second limitation is that at the time of the study, the researcher was the coordinator of the *GSE* Staff Immersion Program, had been on seven of the trips under investigation and had a short-term professional relationship with the participants. The researcher, aware of the possible bias and influence this may have had on the research findings (Gillham, 2005), made every effort to achieve a balance between professional rapport with participants and enabling the collection of rich, thick data while maintaining the integrity of the investigation (see Section 3.9).

Researcher bias was also reduced through the use of the semi-structured interview as the method of data collection (M. D. Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Moreover, invitations to take part in the study were issued by a research assistant, thus providing participants an opportunity to decline without feeling as though they were being unhelpful. Researcher bias was also reduced through the review of data and coding activities as reported in the methodology (see Sections 3.5-3.9). The specialised experience of the researcher in staff formation and conducting immersion trips, along with the professional relationship with the participants, uniquely positioned the researcher to make sense of the comments made by participants.

7.5 Recommendations.

Based on the conclusions of this research the following recommendations are offered.

7.5.1 Conclusion one: value of immersion in formation of Catholic school staff.

The first conclusion of this research validates short-term cross-cultural immersion as a significant formation opportunity for Catholic school staff. It is therefore recommended that:

1. short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences be developed and contextualised within the overarching tradition, ethos, mission and charism of the individual school, system or organising entity;
2. short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences be included in goal setting and accreditation plans for staff formation and mission;
3. short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences be included in developmental pathways for school leadership programs;
4. short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences be included in school professional learning and mission budgets; and
5. schools and systems encourage staff undertaking post-graduate studies to consider units in immersion and cross-cultural studies.

7.5.2 Conclusion two: design and facilitation of immersion trips.

The second conclusion identifies the elements of immersion which enhance the potential for transformative outcomes. It is therefore recommended that:

1. the elements of immersion identified as fostering transformative outcomes be utilised in the design and facilitation of short-term cross-cultural immersion experiences;
2. as short-term cross-cultural immersion is a three-phase process (preparation, immersion and debriefing), participation in all three phases be mandatory;
3. the physical and emotional well-being of participants, and the management of the associated inherent risk in all three phases of immersion are prioritised;
4. schools and systems appoint a coordinator to oversee the well-being and management of staff pre- and post-immersion;
5. a Code of Practice relating to the design and facilitation of short-term cross-cultural immersion be developed for use in Australian Catholic schools and systems; and
6. schools engage in dialogue at system level to collaboratively plan and share perspectives regarding policy and practice in the area of immersion.

7.5.3 Conclusion three: pivotal nature of the medium-term timeframe.

This research has concluded that the medium-term timeframe (between three and 18 months after an immersion) to be pivotal for participants in terms of engaging in ‘action’ – the fourth stage of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow 1978a. 1978b). It is therefore recommended that:

1. in order to assist the transformative process, schools and organising entities encourage and support participants by providing opportunities for ongoing reflection and debriefing, and for reporting back on their experience in a range of ways;
2. schools and systems invite and encourage immersion participants to become involved in activities which support the mission life of the school, such as social

justice initiatives, retreats, reflection days and immersion trips for staff and students;

3. schools and systems encourage participants to become involved in strengthening partnerships with the host community through dialogue, action and advocacy; and
4. schools and systems offer guidance in the implementation of initiatives for change, ensuring collective action in dialogue with the host community and the school community.

7.5.4 Conclusion four: points of connection.

The fourth conclusion of the research concerns the importance of anchor points, or points of connection, during times of disorientation whilst on immersion. It is therefore recommended that:

1. clarity of purpose and a clear context for the immersion be provided for participants;
2. comprehensive preparation sessions be mandatory – providing participants with contextual information which provides familiarity whilst on immersion; and
3. itineraries include visits to schools, education facilities, community-based agencies and projects, and involvement in the religious celebrations and practices of the host community.

7.5.5 Recommendations for further research.

As investigations into short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for Catholic school staff are limited, future research into the following areas is recommended.

1. The focus of this research is the staff immersion trip. The only participants were members of staff in Catholic schools. The experiences of teachers who organise

and lead immersion trips for students may provide further insight into the transformative dimension of immersion for staff.

2. The desire of participants to influence others after their immersion experience is evident in the data gathered for this research. An investigation focused on individuals in other professions may reveal whether or not this phenomenon is limited to the field of education. A further study exploring the types of influences evident in other professional fields after an immersion trip, and the extent to which these influences have been actioned would also be worthy of investigation.
3. The incidence of involvement in pilgrimages aimed at connecting participants more deeply to the Catholic tradition, and to the heritage, mission and identity of their school or system has also increased in popularity in recent years. An investigation into participant experiences of pilgrimage may provide further insight into its contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff.
4. Investigations into short-term cross-cultural immersion trips have primarily focused on the experiences of those visiting. Research into the experiences of those in host communities may reveal a wealth of previously untapped information relating to the experience of the encounter for the local people.
5. This research has contributed to the body of knowledge through the development of the model of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). Further research to determine whether this model is applicable in other contexts would provide additional insight into this development.

7.6 Conclusion.

While gaining in popularity, short-term cross-cultural immersion as a formation opportunity for staff is still an emerging phenomenon in Australian Catholic schools. In the current Australian Catholic landscape, the need for staff formation is apparent, and this research has revealed the significant contribution made to this process by short-term cross-cultural immersion trips.

In acknowledging the current Catholic landscape, in which connection of staff to a worshipping community is limited, the provision of opportunities for personal engagement in action and advocacy offers distinctive access to another dimension of Catholic life, culture and tradition. The aims of Australian Catholic schools include encouraging students to develop an international perspective of their own country and to discover how their country can identify and respond justly to its international obligations (National Catholic Education Commission, 2016). This is particularly significant in relation to ensuring a focus on the Catholic Social Teaching dimensions of the dignity of the human person, and engaging in action and advocacy to uphold and promote the common good.

Catholic schools strive to prioritise initiatives involving active engagement in community service and issues of social justice informed by Catholic Social Teaching (CST). One of the guiding principles of the recently launched *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education* is that formation involves development of “capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9). If these aims are to be met with authenticity and integrity, it is critical that Catholic school staff be provided with engaging, experiential and developmental opportunities for formation which include a cross-cultural dimension.

Along with contemplative and reflective practices, the embodiment of the Gospel message in the Catholic tradition is found in outreach and service to others. This transformational vision at the heart of the Gospel links to the social justice imperative of the Catholic school educator (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 n. 19; Rolheiser, 1998). Immersion experiences are underpinned by the principles of CST, and promote opportunities for action and advocacy which resonate strongly with staff, students and parents (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Pastoral Projects Office, 2007).

Schools and systems which articulate their expression of Catholicism through a particular charism have come to recognise the importance of engaging staff in the tradition, and have renewed their emphasis on formation programs to facilitate this approach (Hilton, 1998; McMahon, 2007; Shafran, 1994). Many Public Juridic Persons (PJPs) and Religious Institutes (RIs) now include the option of immersion and pilgrimage opportunities in formation offerings for staff. PJPs and RIs seek to share their charism by connecting participants to the history, traditions, spirituality, and contemporary expressions of their mission and ministry – which include working with the poor and marginalised (Edmund Rice Education Australia, 2017; Good Samaritan Education, 2017; Kildare Ministries, 2017b; Sisters of Mercy, 2017).

The starting point for developing programs aimed at spiritual growth should be rooted in holistic concern for others, especially the disadvantaged and vulnerable (Hughes, 2008). Designing immersion programs which intentionally situate participants in a cross-cultural setting in a Majority World community leads them to direct encounters with marginalised people. Engaging with the Gospel message through holistic concern

for others in a meaningful context, opens the possibility for “vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world” (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9).

This research concludes that short-term cross-cultural immersion makes a significant contribution to the formation of Catholic school staff. It is shown to be a transformative experience, having an impact on the whole of life, the professional domain and personal spirituality in the short, medium and long-term timeframes. Staff members who participate in immersion trips experience a strong desire to influence others, in particular, colleagues, students, families and friends. The aims of formation (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017) are well met by short-term cross-cultural immersion, and the growth of individuals and communities triggered by the experience is revealed to be profound, ongoing, life-changing and life-giving.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Principal Information Letter*

PRINCIPAL INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: The contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips to the personal and professional formation of Catholic school staff.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Roger Vallance

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Monica Dutton

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Principal,

Staff members from your school are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The research project investigates the experiences of staff members who have participated in short-term cross-cultural immersion trips facilitated by *Good Samaritan Education*. The project aims to uncover the contribution of immersion experiences to the personal and professional formation of staff members in Catholic schools.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Monica Dutton and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Roger Vallance.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. Staff members will be able to read, comment upon and request changes, if they wish, to the research article that will be published from the data of this project. Should they feel distressed by participating in the project, they will be reminded that they are free to discontinue their participation at any time and will be provided with information regarding counselling agencies as required.

What will staff members be asked to do?

- they will be asked to participate in one interview. This interview will be digitally audio recorded the conversation will be transcribed into text files.
- they will be asked questions about their experience of *Good Samaritan Education* cross-cultural staff immersion trips.
- they will be asked to bring an artefact from their immersion trip which holds significance for them. They will be asked about its significance and their permission to photograph this artefact will be sought.
- The interview will be conducted at a mutually convenient time. The interview will be conducted at your school or a convenient place chosen by the staff members.

How much time will the project take?

This interview will take no longer than one hour. It is not anticipated that there would be a second or follow up interview. A transcript of the interview will be sent to the staff members for verification. Should clarification be required, it is anticipated we could do this via email or phone.

What are the benefits of the research project?

The findings will assist school leadership teams to understand the contribution of immersion programs to staff formation and therefore allocate funding accordingly. The research will also assist those planning immersion experiences to identify important components of the experience.

Can staff members withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Staff members are not under any obligation to participate. If they agree to participate, they can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. It will be made clear to staff members that non-participation or withdrawal from this project will not affect their ongoing role, employment or opportunities at your school, nor with GSE.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The findings of the study will be presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education at ACU. The data, i.e. recordings of the interview, will be secured on my personal password protected computer. All names will be changed, and responsibilities will be disguised in order to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

A draft of the intended paper will be made available to participants. They may comment on this draft, request changes and be asked to validate the findings presented in this paper.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

I will be most pleased to answer any question you have. Contact details have been provided.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2013 330N). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Chair, HREC
 c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
 Australian Catholic University
 Melbourne Campus
 Locked Bag 4115
 FITZROY, VIC, 3065
 Ph: 03 9953 3150
 Fax: 03 9953 3315
 Email: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. Participants will be informed of the outcome.

Yours sincerely,

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: The contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips to the personal and professional formation of Catholic school staff.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Roger Vallance

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Monica Dutton

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Education

Dear Participant,

Monica Dutton is currently undertaking research into the impact of short-term cross-cultural staff immersion trips. This is a student project for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of a Doctor of Education degree. As you have participated in a *Good Samaritan Education* staff Immersion trip, you are invited to participate in the investigation.

What is the project about?

The research project investigates the experiences of staff members who have participated in short-term cross-cultural immersion trips facilitated by *Good Samaritan Education*. The project aims to uncover the contribution of immersion experiences to the personal and professional formation of staff members in Catholic schools.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Monica Dutton and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Roger Vallance.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. You will be able to read, comment upon and request changes, if you wish, to the research article that will be published from the data of this project. Should you feel distressed by participating in the project, you will be reminded that you are free to discontinue your participation at any time and will be provided with information regarding counselling agencies as required.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will be asked to participate in one interview. This interview will be digitally audio recorded the conversation will be transcribed into text files.
- You will be asked questions about your experience of *Good Samaritan Education* cross-cultural staff immersion trips.
- You will be asked to bring an artefact from your immersion trip which holds significance for you. You will be asked about its significance and your permission to photograph this artefact will be sought.
- The interview will be conducted at a mutually convenient time. The interview will be conducted at your school or a convenient place of your choosing.

How much time will the project take?

This interview will take no longer than one hour. It is not anticipated that there would be a second or follow up interview. A transcript of the interview will be sent to you for verification. Should clarification be required, it is anticipated we could do this via email or phone.

What are the benefits of the research project?

The findings will assist school leadership teams to understand the contribution of immersion programs to staff formation and therefore allocate funding accordingly. The research will also assist those planning immersion experiences to identify important components of the experience.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. Non-participation or withdrawal from this project will not affect your ongoing role, employment or opportunities at your school, nor with GSE.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The findings of the study will be presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education at ACU. The data, i.e. recordings of the interview, will be secured on my personal password protected computer. All names will be changed, and responsibilities will be disguised in order to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

A draft of the intended paper will be made available to you. You may comment on this draft, request changes and you will be asked to validate the findings presented in this paper.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

I will be most pleased to answer any question you have. Contact details have been provided.

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2013 330N). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Chair, HREC
 c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
 Australian Catholic University
 Melbourne Campus
 Locked Bag 4115
 FITZROY, VIC, 3065
 Ph: 03 9953 3150
 Fax: 03 9953 3315
 Email: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you would like to participate in the study, please return the signed *Consent Form for Participants* to Monica by 16th May 2014.

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: **The contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips to the personal and professional formation of Catholic school staff.**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **Dr Roger Vallance** fms

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 interview regarding my experience of short-term cross-cultural staff immersion trips. I understand this interview will be conducted at my school at a mutually convenient time for the duration of one hour. I understand the interview will be recorded using an audio recording device. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without any adverse consequence. 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:

SIGNATUREDATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

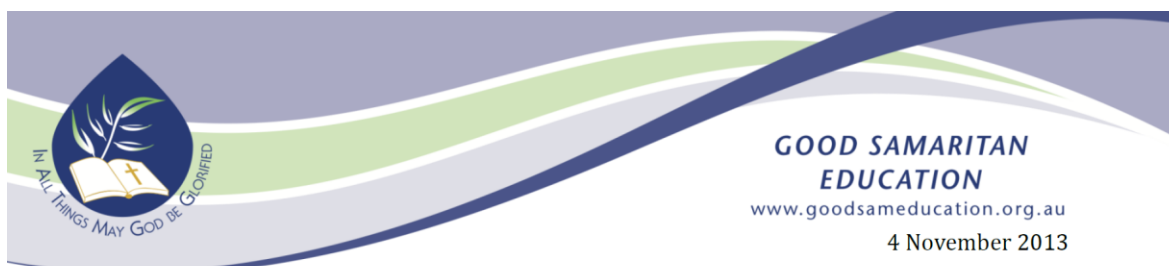


SIGNATURE OF HDR STUDENT:DATE:.....

Appendix D: *Semi-structured Interview Schedule*

Questions	Prompts
<p>How many years teaching/working experience did you have before your immersion trip?</p> <p>How many of those years were in a Good Samaritan school?</p> <p>To set the scene - tell me about your immersion experience</p> <p>Did you expect the trip would have an impact on you?</p> <p>Did the trip live up to your expectations?</p> <p>What lives in you today of that experience?</p> <p>Tell me the story of the photo/artefact you have brought with you.</p>	<p>When/where was it? What did you do? Why did you want to go?</p> <p>In what areas of your life did you expect an impact?</p> <p>Exceed them? In what way?</p> <p>How did the experience touch you? How did you feel about it?</p> <p>Why is it important/significant for you?</p>
<p>What did the trip cost you?</p> <p>What were the benefits?</p>	<p>Financially? Physically? Emotionally? Cognitively? Short-term? Long term?</p> <p>Short-term? Long term?</p>
<p>After the trip what changed for you?</p>	<p>Personally?/Professionally? in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – increased awareness, understanding and problem-solving abilities • Attitudes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – change in perspectives or viewpoints • Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – development of a new skill or an improvement in ability or performance • Aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – aims or goals in terms of ambitions, hopes and desires <p>Can you provide examples?</p> <p>Which of these would you say has changed the most for you?</p>

How would others describe the change in you?	On a scale of 0-5 how much would you say you have changed personally/professionally? Can you provide examples?
What factors in your school setting helped/hindered you to make changes after your immersion experience?	In reporting back to different groups in the school? In your professional practice? In providing opportunities for advocacy/partnership/fundraising?
What would you consider to be the most significant elements of an immersion experience?	
Was there a turning point for you?	Why was it important/significant?
Looking at the trip through a few different lenses...	How would you describe your immersion as a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional learning experience? - spiritual experience? - formation experience? - way of connecting to the Good Samaritan Sisters/story? - way of connecting to the mission life of your school?
Can you identify stages in the process of change?	How did you feel about the experience when you returned? How do you feel about it now?
Is the experience transferable to different Catholic/Congregational schools or charisms?	How does this happen? Can you provide examples?
What would you say to another staff member thinking of going on an immersion trip?	What would your advice be for them?
If you had the opportunity to do it again, would you?	Why?/Why not?

Appendix E: *Supporting Letter From GSE Executive Director*

Dear Monica,

This letter is in response to your recent email. I am aware of your current study program and I am pleased to see that you are ready to present your Defense Proposal to fulfill the requirements for Confirmation of Candidature for the Doctor of Education program at the Australian Catholic University.

Immersion programs are an integral part of the work of the *Good Samaritan Education (GSE)* Mission Team. The involvement of staff from our ten schools in these immersion programs over the past ten years has raised awareness within our schools of the current mission of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, strengthened partnerships with their ministries within Australia and overseas, and provided a unique opportunity for the personal, professional and spiritual development of over 100 members of our governance and staff.

Your research into the impact of immersion experiences on participants will be of great benefit to *GSE*. The trips have a high profile within our schools and are extremely well supported by the *GSE* Governing Council, our college principals and members of staff.

As the *GSE* Governing Council is responsible for ensuring that the charism of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan is nurtured within our schools, an exploration of the impact of immersion trips on staff participants will be informative and assist in our future planning. The findings of your research will contribute to the development of our Formation for Mission Framework and our ongoing commitment to providing high quality opportunities for professional learning and spiritual development for staff in our schools. It will help us to identify the types of immersion trips which are most beneficial to staff and thereby assist us to allocate resources where they will be most effective.

I wholly endorse your research and look forward to hearing progress of the project as the findings begin to emerge.

Sincerely,

Kay Herse
Executive Officer
Good Samaritan Education

Tel: (61 7) 3311 5412
Fax: (61 7) 3311 5312
Mob: 0400 241 048

All correspondence to: Executive Officer
21 Goskar Avenue Alderley Q 4051
Registered Office: 1A Harris Rd, Five Dock NSW 2046

Email: executiveofficer@goodsameducation.org.au
Web: www.goodsameducation.org.au

ARBN 156 484 043

Incorporated in NSW. The liability of members is limited.

Appendix F: *ACU Human Research Ethics Committee Clearance*

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: Dr Roger Vallance Student Researcher: Monica Dutton Ethics Register Number: 2013 330N Project Title: The contribution of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips to the personal and professional formation of Catholic school staff.

Risk Level: Low Risk 3

Date Approved: 25/02/2014

Ethics Clearance End Date: 14/11/2014

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research subject to the following conditions:

1. provision of letters from participating schools to the HREC for information.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 14/11/2014. In order to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to ACU HREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to ACU HREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

Researchers who fail to submit an appropriate progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records,

compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2. Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.
3. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/research/support_for_researchers/human_ethics/forms

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/research/support_for_researchers/human_ethics/forms

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol e.g.: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Kylie Pashley
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Dr Nadia Crittenden

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Australian Catholic University

Appendix G *Frequency of Participant Responses*

Name	Host Community	Year	Number of Quotes
Alex	Philippines	2007	9
Angie	Philippines	2014	7
Anna	Kiribati	2008	5
Annabelle	Philippines	2006	4
Ariane	Kiribati	2012	2
Bernadette	Philippines	2006	3
Bernie	Kiribati	2012	1
Bethany	Japan	2013	1
Brenda	Western Australia	2009	3
Caz	Timor-Leste	2011	5
Cheryl	Philippines	2007	4
Chris	Timor-Leste	2011	5
Connie	Timor-Leste	2011	2
Dawn	Japan	2013	2
Deb	Philippines	2014	2
Ella	Timor-Leste	2011	4
Erin	Philippines	2014	2
Evie	Philippines	2010	2
Gail	Philippines	2006	2
Geraldine	Philippines	2007	8
Gina	Philippines	2006	7
Heather	Philippines	2014	2
Helen	Philippines	2010	3
Imogen	Philippines	2010	8
Jan	Western Australia	2009	2
Jess	Philippines	2014	7
Joan	Kiribati	2008	1
Karina	Kiribati	2008	5
Kathy	Philippines	2010	4
Jamie	Kiribati	2012	1
Kim	Japan	2013	1
Kylie	Philippines	2004	5
Leah	Philippines	2007	4
Margaret	Philippines	2004	1
Michaela	Philippines	2014	4
Michelle	Philippines	2004	7
Molly	Western Australia	2009	4
Naomi	Kiribati	2012	1
Nerida	Philippines	2010	6
Nikki	Philippines	2006	5
Nina	Philippines	2004	11
Olivia	Kiribati	2012	8
Pat	Kiribati	2012	2
Philippa	Timor-Leste	2011	5
Rosanna	Philippines	2014	5
Ruth	Western Australia	2009	2
Sally	Japan	2013	4
Sam	Philippines	2007	8
Sarah	Timor-Leste	2011	3
Trish	Philippines	2006	5
Wendy	Western Australia	2009	1

Appendix H: *Researcher Journal Excerpt: Liminality 25.07.2015*

An email to the supervision team 25.07.2015:

I have taken some leave in an attempt to have some dedicated time to progress the thesis. I have a week now, a week in August and a couple of weeks in October. I am aiming to complete the coding and look at identifying emerging themes.

I have also been thinking through a number of ways to structure the write up of the findings chapter. Some structures seem to work for parts of the process, but not others. I am now considering the following approach and would be grateful for any feedback.

I am thinking of using the construct of liminality as the framework for organising the data in the findings chapter. While the concept is generally used in relation to rites of passage, a number of definitions and examples from other research papers would indicate a broader scope for its use.

Contemporary definitions include “being on the threshold – or at the beginning of a process”. It has also been referred to as “midpoint of transition... between two positions” or “betwixt and between”. As so many participants have self-reported changes after an immersion experience (personal, professional, outlook, attitudes, values etc) – I think a liminal perspective could be an interesting way to structure the findings (and possibly the subsequent discussion?). This approach would also give a sense of chronology in “telling the story”.

Metaphors for liminality have also been used in a number of recent research papers. The street, the beach, consulting rooms, hospital corridors and the American front porch have all be used as examples of “the space between”. The concept has also been used in education – students are said to occupy a liminal space during the process of mastery of a threshold concept.

Preliminary reading would suggest the foundational work of van Gennep and Turner would be important here. Turner (1974) has also investigated pilgrimage using a liminal perspective as the basis for his work, and others have commented on this approach in the 1990s and 2000s.

Liminality of place refers to places which people pass through – but do not live in. The three stages that characterize liminality are: separation, marginalization, and reaggregation (Illowz 1997 p143). It is said that major transformations occur in liminal spaces – as access to knowledge and understanding of both sides is possible. This may well be informative/interesting for this investigation.

In terms of the immersion experience:

Pre-liminal Phase – Before the immersion

Separation- the space that marks the end of a phase

Liminal Phase – During the immersion

Marginalisation - the space between two phases

Post liminal Phase – After the immersion

Reaggregation - the space of reintegration of the person into new ways of being

In putting together the table below as a possible structure for the Findings Chapter, I have referred back to the research question and sub-questions, and Cresswell re layering of themes.

If you could let me know whether you think this might be a suitable approach – it would be much appreciated.

Many thanks, Monica

How do Catholic school staff members perceive the effect of short-term cross-cultural immersion trips on their personal and professional formation?

Research Sub-questions	Codes Emerging from the Data (Interviews)	Themes Emerging From the Data (Interviews)	Liminal Perspective
What is the context for GSE short-term cross-cultural staff immersion trips?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant understanding of context • Reasons for going <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Personal predisposition – Previous experience of immersion – Reputation of GSE immersions – Previous connection to school/GS tradition – Sent/selected by school – feeling valued – Knowing someone who had been before • Concerns/anxieties/awareness about going <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leaving family – Personal capacity – physical, emotional, social – Poverty tourism/voyeurism /intrusion – Physical distance from personal life experience • Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Process – Briefing session 	Participant predisposition	Pre-liminal Phase <i>Separation: leaving the known space</i>
What experiences of immersion trips do adult participants identify as personally and professionally significant?	Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional learning/dialogue • Personal development • Personal/professional formation • Spiritual awareness • Connection to GS story • Connection to mission • Significant event/memory 	Significant participant experience of immersion	Liminal Phase <i>Marginalisation: the space between two phases</i>
What dimensions of immersion trips do adult participants perceive to be central to the experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement/Relationship/Partnership with host community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – schools/students – local people – the work/ministry of the SGS • Learning about the local Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dialogue/interaction with local people – Experience of museums/arts/crafts/music/dancing • Authentic experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Immersion vs tourism – Being useful – Seeing the “reality” – Awareness of “turning points” 	Engagement with Host Community	

Appendix I: *Researcher Journal Excerpt: Liminality 21.10.2015*

An email to the supervision team 21.10.2015:

Have been thinking further about the structure of the findings chapter. I have been thinking that the emphasis needs to be more on the transformative aspect of the experience – rather than the stages of an immersion – as it is now. I think I have been focusing on using as much of the data as possible – rather than answering the original question.

I therefore wondered whether it might be possible to look at the process of participant change/transformation in terms of Mezirow's work on adult learning – still within the structure of liminality. I thought this might also be a more "scholarly" approach rather than my suggested stages of exposure, engagement etc - Or do you think this is making it all too complicated? Or possibly it might be better to leave the liminality altogether and just go with the transformative learning?

"One of the most important aspects of transformational learning is what Mezirow called critical reflection: the ability to reflect upon what has been learned to fit the new information into one's worldview. To lead the process, Mezirow suggested the following seven-stage sequence (Mezirow, 1994).

- 1. A disorientating dilemma.*
- 2. Self-examination of affect (guilt, shame, etc.).*
- 3. Critical assessment of assumptions.*
- 4. Exploration of new roles.*
- 5. Planning a course of action.*

6. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementation.

7. Trying out new roles.”

Have also found a couple of very recent articles (2015) aligning transformative learning with change in teacher practice. Could also get back to critical incident analysis

In general terms – this could be a possible approach:

Pre liminal Phase

This would be a very short section setting the context for the trips and outlining/acknowledging the separation of the participant from their own culture and moving into the next.

Would address sub RQ1 - What is the context for GSE short-term cross-cultural staff immersion trips?

Liminal Phase

This section would then explore the data through the lens of the following aspects of Mezirow's stages

- A disorienting dilemma
 - participant descriptions of their immersion experience – with a focus on the disorientation aspect
 - clear recounts of events/what they saw and felt
 - possibly a vignette

- A self-examination of affect

- exploration of feelings in response to what they experienced
 - guilt, anger and frustration were very common responses
- A critical assessment of assumptions
 - what meanings do they attach to their experiences (symbolic interactionism)
 - how do they interpret what is happening?
 - what do they intend to do as a result of their experience?

Would address sub RQ2 - What experiences on immersion trips do adult participants identify as personally and professionally significant?

and sub RQ3 - What dimensions of immersion trips do adult participants perceive to be central to the experience?

I think these stages fit quite well within the liminal structure –

And the liminal phase certainly is not limited to the time the person is away on the immersion trip. I think this might have been open to misinterpretation in the structure of first version. It is definitely not so neat as to fit into boxes of pre-liminal (before immersion), liminal (on immersion) and post-liminal (after immersion). I believe the liminal phase lasts well after people have returned home – possibly even years for some.

Mezirow's "critical reflection" would be important here. Also, short term/long term impact. Perhaps it is only when participants have had the opportunity to critically reflect that they are able to move from the "betwixt and between" of the liminal phase

– and into the post liminal phase where they begin to explore options for new roles etc as described by Mezirow.

Post liminal Phase

- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
 - participants consider how they have changed personally and professionally and how things are different for them as a result of their experience
 - consider here differences in short term/long term impact

- Planning a course of action
 - participants consider specific action they have implemented or been involved in since their immersion
 - how did it come about, what was the impetus? etc
 - possibly look here at the role the school/leadership play in enabling/blocking opportunities for change

- Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementation
 - could look at knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations (KASA) in detail here
 - how did changes in KASA as a result of their immersion impact on them personally/professionally?

- Provision trying of new roles
 - exploration of new professional roles/projects participants have taken on since their immersion

- consider also changes to personal life
- consider how participants report personal/professional changes over time

Would address sub RQ4 - What are the short, medium and long-term impacts of immersion trips on adult participants in terms of self-reported personal and professional formation?

As always – your thoughts appreciated,

I feel I have a better sense of tying together and summarising the participant responses after the last feedback

Many thanks, Monica

Appendix J: *Researcher Journal Excerpt: Documentation 16.08.2018*

Researcher reflection 16.08.2018:

The main problem relating to the study at the moment is the methods of data collection. Initially, in the Design of the Research, three methods of data collection were envisaged – the semi-structured interview, documentary evidence and researcher journaling. These three methods were chosen to ensure validity of the investigation through triangulation of methods of data gathering and to support the selection of the case-study methodology. While data were collected in the form of documentary evidence and researcher journaling, it is apparent that their relevance in answering the research questions is limited. While samples of post-immersion reports were collected from school newsletters and yearbooks, due to cataloguing and archiving systems, the process of locating the material became too time-consuming and too onerous a task for administrative staff in the schools.

Also, as the reports were largely pictorial in nature and travelogue in style, the data did not make a substantial contribution to answering the research questions. Similarly, very few participants took up the invitation to bring an artefact to the semi-structured interview, preferring to reflect upon and recount their experiences throughout the course of the discussion. While I have photographs of the ones who did bring an artefact, the associated narrative is not overly helpful. Post-immersion feedback sheets completed by participants from earlier trips were also not particularly useful. The evaluation questions had been constructed many years earlier and mainly addressed organisational issues relating to the trip rather than the focus of this

research. Similarly, the journal provides a summary of the research journey, and serves as an audit trail for validity, but does not lend support in answering the research questions.

While three data collection methods were considered at the beginning of the investigation, only the semi-structured interviews provided credible, trustworthy and consistent data concerning the focus of the investigation. Breadth and depth of the data gathered from the interviews provided a unique insight and depth of understanding into the construct of immersion, and proved to be the most useful in answering the research questions. This was facilitated through choosing to interview 53 participants who were representative of nine schools and had been involved in one of 10 immersion trips to one of five host communities over a 10-year period.